



## TO THE MEMBERS OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is with joy in my heart that I wish to send you my best wishes on such an important occasion for the entire Franciscan Family, whose prayerful presence and filial closeness I have felt since the beginning of the Petrine Ministry. The eighth centenary of the confirmation of the Rule of the Friars Minor by Pope Honorius III which took place at the Lateran on November 29, 1223, is an auspicious occasion not only because it commemorates an historical event, but above all because it revives in you the same spirit that inspired Francis of Assisi to strip himself of everything, and give rise to a unique and fascinating form of life since it is rooted in the Gospel and lived *sine glossa*. May this jubilee be for each of you a time of inner rebirth, of a renewed missionary mandate for the Church which calls you to go out to meet the world where many brothers and sisters are waiting to be consoled, loved and cared for.

Therefore, moved by these sentiments, I am here to deliver you some exhortations that arise precisely from the words of the Poverello of Assisi, who advises his friars to “[...] observe poverty and humility and the holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ [...]” (*Regola bollata* XII:4).

## *Observing the Holy Gospel*

The *Regola bollata* in fact begins and ends with an explicit reference to the Gospel. The opening expression is an illuminating synthesis of the entire Rule: “The Rule and life of the friars minor is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of one’s own and in chastity” (*Regola bollata* I:1).

For St. Francis, the Gospel was at the center of his existence; and the Church has approved its purpose, returning it to him and to all of you Franciscans as a text that no longer expresses only the spiritual intuition of a Founder, but a form of life. It is a message of joy that I have often wished to point out because it “fills the heart and the entire life of those who encounter Jesus.” (*Evangelii gaudium*, No. 1).

It is therefore urgent to return to the foundation of a Christian and baptismal commitment, capable of being inspired, in every choice, by the Word of the Lord: Christ is the focal point of your spirituality! Men and women who truly learn “rule and life” in His school!

## *Obedience to the Church*

Beloved, to live the teachings of the Master it is necessary to remain in the Church. Francis manifests this in a decisive manner because to the introductory sentence which describes the desire to follow the evangelical counsels, he immediately adds suggestive words, singular in content and language: “Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to our Lord Pope Honorius and his successors canonically elected and to the Roman Church. Let the other brothers be bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors. (*Regola bollata* I:2-3)

In that bond of “obedience and reverence” to the Pope and to the Church of Rome, he acknowledges an essential element for faithfulness to the call and for receiving Christ in the Eucharist; This is why he declares without hesitation his indispensable belonging to the Church. So then, live the spirit of the Rule by listening to and dialoging with one another, as the synodal path suggests doing. Support the Church with a firm hold, repair it by your example and by your testimony, even when it seems to cost more!

## *Going Out into the World*

Finally, I want to take up an insight always found in the *Regola bollata* about going out into the world. Speaking in first person, the Seraphic Father articulates thusly: “I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or dispute or judge others when they go about in the world; but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle and humble, speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming. [...] Into whatever house they enter, let them first say: Peace be to this house [...]” (*Regola bollata* III:10-13)

Going around the world for you Franciscan friars and sisters really means realizing your itinerant vocation in the manner of fraternity and a peaceful life, without quarrels or disputes either between you or with others, giving proof of “minority”, with meekness and docility, announcing the peace of the Lord and entrusting yourselves to providence: it is a special plan for evangelization, possible for everyone.

From this perspective, it is good to rediscover the beauty of the characteristic Franciscan evangelization which is borne from a fraternity to promote fraternity; in fact, it is a life that speaks, love given in service is the greatest vehicle for proclamation. Find strength, therefore, in that peculiar vocation, proper to “minors” and “the poor,” such as you are by your desire and your sense of belonging.

It is given to you by Francis in his Rule and I am convinced that it is in tune with the invitation I address to the Christian Community to be a “Church that goes out”: “In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.” (*Evangelii gaudium*, No. 23).

And therefore I say to you: do not hesitate to go about the world in “fraternity” and in “minority” sharing the blessedness of poverty, becoming an eloquent sign of evangelism and showing to our age – marked so unfortunately by wars and conflict, by all kinds of egoism and rationale for exploitation of the environment and of the poor – that the Gospel is indeed the good news for man to find the best direction for constructing a new humanity together with the courage to set out towards Jesus, who “though he was rich, became poor for us, so that we might become rich through his poverty” (Cf. 2 Cor 8:9)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, I entrust to you the mission of recognizing the right paths you must follow in order to correspond boldly and faithfully to the charism you have received. As you prepare to recall the fundamental stages in the history of this vast Franciscan Family, I invoke the intercession of the Virgin Mary and Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi and I willingly send my Blessing, asking that you please continue to pray for me.

Rome, from St. John Lateran. November 9, 2023.

Anniversary of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica Cathedral of Rome

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Francesco", is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.