



Summer Reading Guide Plan

St Francis of Assisi: A Biography by Omer Englebert

May 31 - June 6	Chapter 1: "Francis's World"
June 7 - June 13	Ch. 2: "Conversion" and Ch. 3: "The Restorer of Churches"
June 14 - June 20	Ch. 4: "First Recruits"
June 21 - June 27	Ch. 5: "Before Pope Innocent III"
June 28 - July 4	Ch. 6: "Rivo Torto"
July 5 - July 11	Ch. 7: "The Life of the First Friars"
July 12 - July 18	Ch. 8: "St. Clare and the Order of the Poor Ladies"
July 19 - July 25	Ch. 9: "Growth in the Order" and Ch. 10: "The Meeting With St. Dominic"
July 26 - August 1	Ch. 11: "The Indulgence of the Portiuncula" and Ch. 12: "Missions in Christian Lands"
August 2 - August 8	Ch. 13: "Missions in Pagan Lands" and Ch. 14: "Crisis in the Order"
August 9 - August 15	Ch. 15: "The Third Order"
August 16 - August 22	Ch. 16: "The First Franciscan School" and Ch. 17: "The Final Rule"
August 23 - August 29	Ch. 18: "Christmas at Greccio" and Ch. 19: "The Stigmata"
August 30 - September 5	Ch. 20: "The Canticle of Brother Sun" and Ch. 21: "The Testament and Death"

☐ *Happy summer reading!!* ☐



Summer Reading Guide

St Francis of Assisi: A Biography by Omer Englebert

Week 1

Chapter One: "Francis's World"

Questions for Reflection:

1. On page 11 (beginning with, "His father, however,..."), the author describes Francis's father and says he was an "ordinary Christian."
 - a. What does the author mean by "ordinary Christian"?
 - b. In what ways does this idea of an "ordinary Christian" apply and/or not apply to you?
 - c. In the areas where your Christianity is "ordinary," what might you do to help it become more "extraordinary"?
2. At the very bottom of page 16 (beginning with "But if Francis loved,...") and continuing on page 17 (ending at "...some great nobleman."), the author describes St. Francis's personality, deportment, and speech.

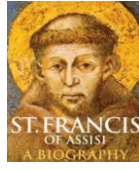
In what ways is Francis's "nobility of soul" an embodiment of Christian virtues? (For examples of living Christian virtues, see Galatians 5:22-23¹, Colossians 3:12-15², and 1 Corinthians 13:4-8³.)

3. Further down page 17, the author says, "He had faith in his star, and he dreamed of becoming famous." In fact, Francis did become famous, having an enormous impact in his own lifetime and, since his death, becoming one of the most known and beloved saints worldwide.
 - a. Do you think the scripture from Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." might be said to apply to Francis? Did God have a plan for Francis from the start?
 - b. Might that scripture apply to each of us, including you? In other words, do you think God gives each person some role to play in His plans? If so, how do we live our lives according to His plan?
 - c. What innate personality and personal traits has God given you? How are you using them in His service?

¹ [T]he fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.

² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another...

³ Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, is not pompous, is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.



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Week 2

Chapter Two: "Conversion"

Chapter Three: "The Restorer of Churches"

Questions for Reflection:

1. During Francis's conversion and his efforts to find his path, God spoke to him in two dreams (pp. 25 and 26) and then from the lips of a crucifix (p. 35).

Has God ever spoken to you in an unusual or dramatic way? Do you think there was a reason He did so in that instance? In what ways does God usually speak to you?

2. Francis was gradually beginning to understand the path on which God was calling him.

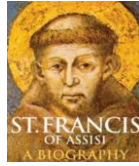
Whatever our state in life, we are all called to holiness. How does the Church guide and support us in finding and walking the path to holiness? What does walking your path to holiness look like?

3. After Francis had laid all he had at his father's feet and was received under the protection of the Church (p. 39), he set off to begin his service as "Christ's Knight". His first experiences in his new life (p. 40) were quite harsh, such as might have left most of us discouraged and wondering whether we had made a mistake. Francis, however, seems to have been undaunted.

What do you think kept Francis from becoming discouraged or giving up? What has helped you face difficulties in your life without giving up? How has your faith supported you through challenging experiences? Does your faith give you a different outlook on difficult experiences than you might have without your faith?

4. Once Francis returned to San Damiano, he began going through the streets begging for stones, singing God's praises, and speaking of the happiness that comes from belonging to God. The author tells us that, "[I]f many still held the new hermit to be a madman and persisted in insulting him, many already were beginning to understand him" (p. 42).

What did some people begin to "understand" about Francis? What do you think enabled some people to see past the "madman" image? Where might you need to learn to see people or circumstances more clearly, with the eyes of God?



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Week 3

Chapter Four: “First Recruits”

Questions for Reflection:

1. In this chapter, we see Francis seeking and receiving guidance from scripture. Upon hearing a Gospel passage at mass and asking the priest to explain it, Francis “felt that God had taken away the last veil and finally illumined his path” (p. 46). Later, when his first follower wanted to join him, Francis consulted the scriptures about how they should proceed (p. 49). Here we have two, of many, examples showing how Francis revered the scriptures and applied their lessons to his life.

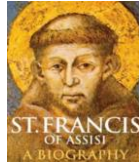
In what ways do you encounter scripture (at mass, private reading, group Bible studies, Catholic podcasts,...)? How do you prepare your mind and heart to listen to or read scripture? What things might you do to try to get more out of God’s Holy Word?

Do you pray with the scriptures? If so, how do you go about it? How does it help you in living your Christian faith?

[Here](#) are some resources to help you grow in reading, understanding, and praying with scripture. In addition, our Pastorate offers a four-week course, called *Habits of Holiness*, where participants learn and practice a method of praying with scripture. If you are interested, watch the Bulletin for information on the next *Habits of Holiness* class (either this fall or the following spring).

2. To “form [his followers] in the spiritual life,” Francis encouraged and corrected them, taught them to pray, exercised them in humility and penance, and “continually placed before them the person of our Lord” (p. 54).

How do you use those formation tools to develop in your own faith life? Where do you receive encouragement and correction? How are you growing in your prayer life? Do you take advantage of [Eucharistic Adoration](#) offered Sunday through Friday in the Stone Chapel? How often do you examine your conscience? How often do you receive the Sacrament of Confession? Do you have pictures of Jesus (a crucifix or some other depiction of Jesus) where you will see them throughout your day? Do you frequently take a moment to gaze on our Lord with love or to speak to Him from your heart? Which of these formation tools would you like to begin putting to more use? How might you do that?



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Week 4

Chapter 5: “Before Pope Innocent III”

Questions for Reflection:

1. Francis told Pope Innocent III that, just as a son might resemble his father, Francis and his followers “strive to reproduce the features of [Christ]” (p. 75).

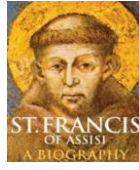
As Christians, our lives and our way of being in the world should bear a resemblance to Jesus’ life and His way of being in the world.

Can you think of people you know who bear a particularly strong resemblance to Christ? Describe how that looks. Now think of your life. In what ways does your life bear a “family resemblance” to Jesus? Are there areas where the resemblance is lacking or blurred? What might happen if you invited the Holy Spirit to come into those areas of your life and bring healing and change?

2. Throughout this chapter, we find evidence that the Church in Francis’s day was struggling with scandalous behavior by the clergy (p. 62); an assortment of malcontents and utopians who were “more insufferable than the ones over whom they set themselves as censors” (p. 66); and a variety of heresies, the most notorious of which was Catharism, also known as Albigensianism (pp. 66-68). In addition, “Never had one seen so many self-styled ‘prophets’ and ‘reformers’ as at this period” (p. 62).

In what ways does the Church today resemble - or not resemble - the Church of Francis’s time?

In the 13th century, God used both St. Francis and St. Dominic to help heal His ailing Church and shepherd His people. Do you see evidence of God’s work in His Church today? If so, what does it look like? Who are some of the people God is using today to heal and shepherd His Church and His people?



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Week 5

Chapter 6: “Rivo Torto”

1. The author states that “life was hard at Rivo Torto” (p. 85). That hard life included sheltering in a “hovel” during winter (p. 79), under “cramped” conditions (p. 79), with insufficient food (p. 85), and doing manual labor, which often consisted of caring for lepers (p. 91). We then read, “Should we be surprised to learn that happiness reigned among the denizens of Rivo Torto? ... [T]hese poor men ‘lived perfectly happy, and none of them would have dreamed of complaining.’” (p. 93).

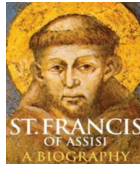
The author seems to consider his question to be rhetorical, but, nevertheless, let us ponder it. *Should* we be surprised that happiness reigned at Rivo Torto? Could *you* have been “perfectly happy” and not have dreamed of complaining under such circumstances? What would it require *internally* for a person to be perfectly happy living as they did at Rivo Torto?

2. The author explains that “Francis was poor from love. He made himself poor because his beloved Christ had been poor” (p. 80). Francis lived the virtue of poverty (pp. 80-85) and the three virtues that follow in the path of poverty: humility, patience (also referred to as obedience), and simplicity (pp. 87-91).

Consider the following scripture: “Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.” (Phil. 2:5-8)

How does Francis’s way of living out poverty, humility, patience/obedience, and simplicity imitate Jesus? How does it flow from Francis’s love of Christ?

Now consider the scripture: “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours” (Luke 6:20). Most of us are not called to live poverty in the way they did at Rivo Torto, but all of us are called to follow Jesus’ teachings in our own lives. How might you strive to live out Jesus’ call to poverty in your life? What would that look like? What would it require internally for you to make those changes in your life out of love for Jesus?



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Week 6

Chapter 7: "The Life of the First Friars"

1. Consider the story of Br. Angelo and the three robbers, beginning at the last paragraph on page 103 with, "We have seen that..." and concluding at the top of page 105 with, "...in which they died the death of saints."

Francis commanded that the robbers be served with both actions *and* words. In which order were the two modes of service to be used?

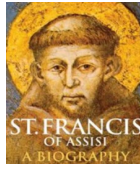
Would the good result that occurred have happened if only one mode of service had been employed?

Which mode do you find easier to use? How can you make the effort to bolster your use of your weaker mode of service?

2. Consider the words of Br. Bernard on his deathbed (in the middle of page 117, beginning with, "A little before breathing his last...").

What strikes you in Br. Bernard's words?

Do his words inspire you to begin to make any changes in your life?



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Week 7

Chapter 8: “St. Clare and the Order of the Poor Ladies”

1. Consider the description of Clare on page 124 in the second paragraph, beginning, “Clare possessed...”.

In the Discussion Questions from Week 1, you considered your own personality traits and asked how you are using them in the service of God.

Now, think of *someone else* you know well, someone whom you admire. What personality traits do you observe in that person? How is he/she using them to serve God? Keep in mind that we can, and should, serve God at home, at work, at church, and anywhere else we happen to be.

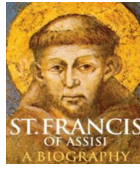
Scripture teaches us to “encourage one another and build one another up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). If you think it would encourage him/her, you might consider sharing your reflection with the person.

2. Re-read the incident that begins just after the inset quote on page 128 with the words “Afterward, not only did the...” and concludes at the top of page 129 with “he revoked the decree.”

The author does not tell this story in chronological order, which makes it a little challenging to follow. Re-tell it in your own words, to be sure it makes sense to you.

Now consider Clare’s statement that begins, “Go back to your Minister, and tell him from me....” Re-state her point in your own words. What does this tell us about Clare’s priorities regarding bodily and spiritual needs?

What do your daily/weekly choices say about your priorities regarding bodily and spiritual needs? Is any re-prioritizing in order? If so, what is one thing you could do to begin to live that in your life?



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Week 8

Chapters 9 and 10: “Growth in the Order” and “The Meeting With St. Dominic”

1. During Francis’s time, there were many people trying to “fix” the Church who were sowing “seeds of rebellion and hatred” (p. 146). Francis’s teaching took a different approach. He “built [people] up, showed the tasks that needed to be done, and nourished souls eager for perfection and holiness.” Accordingly, “Men blessed this herald of spiritual springtime” (p. 146).

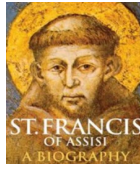
Why do you think Francis’s approach was better received and more successful than that of the other “reformers”?

Today, there are many who are trying to reform the Church (and society at large), using podcasts and social media to spread their messages. Consider some of the voices you listen to. Do they sow seeds of rebellion and anger, or do they build you up for holiness and the good works that need to be done? Are there any voices you might consider weeding out of your spiritual garden this summer?

2. At the Fourth Lateran Council, Pope Innocent III said, “[O]nly those...will obtain mercy, who have mortified their flesh and conformed their life to that of the Crucified Savior” (p. 160). The author gives us four examples of religious people of that day, and how they lived. We already know how Francis and his Friars Minor lived. Dominic and his followers “practiced rigorous penance, went barefoot,...” (p. 161). The Albigensian (a.k.a., Cathar) heretics were “admired” by the people for their “austerity” (p. 161). And finally, “the papal legates appear with great pomp, followed by a train of mules loaded with baggage” (p. 161).

It was Francis and Dominic, not the papal legates, who saved the Church from the Albigensian heresy. What role do you think their willingness to mortify their flesh and conform their lives to that of the Crucified Savior played in their success?

Most people are not called to the kind of poverty St. Francis and St. Dominic lived, but we are called to live a way of life that shows us to be followers of the Crucified Savior. In what ways does your life give a true Christian witness to today’s culture? Might God be calling you to take the next step in conforming your life to the Crucified Savior? What would that look like?



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Week 9

Chapters 11 and 12: “The Indulgence of the Portiuncula” and “Missions in Christian Lands”

1. Chapter 11 tells how Francis obtained, from Pope Honorius III, a plenary indulgence for anyone who visited the chapel of St. Mary of the Angels on the day of its dedication (August 2, 1216) or who would ever, for all time, visit the chapel of St. Mary of the Angels on the *anniversary* of its dedication. At the beginning of our current year (2026), in the Decree announcing the Jubilee Year of St. Francis, Pope Leo XIV refers to the Indulgence of the Portiuncula and proclaims a plenary indulgence for all the faithful who make a pilgrimage to a church named after St. Francis and fulfill certain conditions (mass, confession, and certain prayers).

St. Francis parish in Fulton offers a “Jubilee Sunday” opportunity on the second Sunday of each month during this Jubilee year. The next opportunity will be immediately following the 11:00 a.m. mass on August 9. In solidarity with those faithful who received an indulgence at the dedication of the chapel, you might consider making a pilgrimage to St. Francis in Fulton on August 9 (or any of the other remaining Jubilee Sundays) to participate in the indulgence prayers and to receive a plenary indulgence for yourself or for a departed loved one.

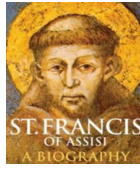
If you wish to learn more about indulgences or purgatory, please see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), paragraphs 1471-1479 and 1030-1032. You can find the online version of the CCC at <https://www.usccb.org/catechism-of-the-catholic-church>.

2. Consider Francis and Masseo’s experience, beginning with “Arriving at some village...” on p. 182 and ending, at the top of p. 183, with “Then, singing hymns, they arose and went on their way.”

Why do you think Francis saw “abundance” where Masseo saw “poverty”?

Can you think of a time when you were able to see your abundance, although someone looking for the outside might have seen only scarcity or lack?

What power do humility and thankfulness have in shaping our happiness? Is there something you could do to strengthen those valuable virtues in your life?



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Week 10

Chapters 13 and 14: “Missions in Pagan Lands” and “Crisis in the Order”

1. Let us begin by looking back at Chapter 12. The last sentence reads, “They were known at first by the name of ‘Brethren of the Order of the Apostles,’ so greatly did their way of life evoke in the eyes of the people that of the humble founders of the Church.” (p. 193). The people among whom St. Kateri Tekawitha lived, called her “She who prays always.” What name might people who regularly observe you or your family give to you or your family? (“She who...”, “He who...”, “The Family that...”)
2. Chapter 13 contains the famous story of St. Francis’s definition of Perfect Joy (beginning near the bottom of p. 196 and concluding with the first paragraph on p. 198).

How can we make sense of this story? Do you think Francis was saying that freezing, starving, bleeding, being covered with mud and snow, being denied shelter, and being beaten should, inherently, give us joy?

How does the final sentence of the story (near the top of p. 198, beginning, “Well, Leo, if...”) provide the key to Francis’s meaning?

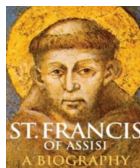
How is Francis’s definition of Perfect Joy connected with the virtue of humility? How could having greater humility lead to having greater joy?¹

3. Briefly summarize what was happening in the Order, as described throughout Chapter 14. How were the goings-on in the Order causing Francis suffering, injustice, and humiliations (p. 221)?

On pages 221 - 222 (beginning, “Consider this word...” and ending, “...Glory in Your Kingdom.”), Francis teaches his Friars Minor how to be disciples of Christ. Please read those two paragraphs carefully. Considering how Francis was being treated, what do you think he meant by the words, “We ought to love them with our whole heart, for they obtain for us everlasting life” (p. 221)?

Francis encouraged his followers to “build within [themselves] a tabernacle and dwelling for Him” (p. 222). How are you building a tabernacle for Jesus within yourself? What is one thing you could do to strengthen your interior tabernacle?

¹ Hint: G.K. Chesterton said, “Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly.”



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Week 11

Chapter 15: “The Third Order”

Clarification: The current name of the Third Order, which Francis founded, is “Third Order Secular” or “Secular Franciscan Order” (“OFS”).¹ Francis created this Order so that all people who are not called to consecrated life, whether married or single, would have a Franciscan path to holiness through their own vocations.

On page 231, Francis teaches us the path to holiness. Let us consider his advice in three parts.

1. Beginning on line 4 of page 231 with, “But they deserve...” and ending with, “...deserving of our respect”, Francis encourages the faithful to pray and partake of the sacraments. What two sacraments does he specifically recommend? How important are those two sacraments in your life? How often do you partake of them? How have you experienced the graces from those sacraments in your life?
2. Continue reading on page 231 with, “The Gospel likewise...” through, “...should be a sin.” In this section, Francis offers concrete advice on how to live Jesus’ call to “love our neighbors as ourselves” in our daily lives. In what ways does your life involve judging (not in the bad way, but as a necessary part of fulfilling your duties), leading, and obeying? Do you see opportunities in your life to exercise *merciful judgement*, *servant leadership*, and *humble obedience*, as Francis recommends? How are you striving to live up to the Gospel call in these areas?
3. Continue reading on page 231 with, “Let us avoid...” through, “...to the poor.” Here Francis is advocating for temperance, particularly with regard to food; penance; and generosity to the poor, not just during Lent, but all year round. Consider each item. How do you incorporate temperance, penance, and generosity to the poor into your life? Which of the three areas is most in need of renewed attention in your life right now? What is one thing you might do to strengthen your Christian living in that area?

¹ Not to be confused with the Third Order Regular (TOR), to which the friars at the Shrine of St. Anthony belong. They take vows and live in community, whereas the members of OFS live their regular, secular lives as married or single men and women.