

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.

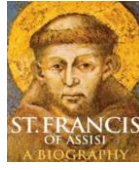
In what ways is Francis's "nobility of soul" an embodiment of Christian virtues? (For examples of living Christian virtues, see Galatians 5:22-23¹, Colossians 3:12-15², and 1 Corinthians 13:4-8³.)

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.

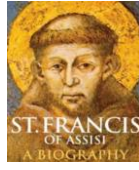
Whatever our state in life, we are all called to holiness. How does the Church guide and support us in finding and walking the path to holiness? What does walking your path to holiness look like?

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.

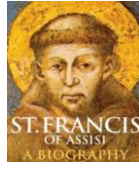
In what ways do you encounter scripture (at mass, private reading, group Bible studies, Catholic podcasts,...)? How do you prepare your mind and heart to listen to or read scripture? What things might you do to try to get more out of God's Holy Word?

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).

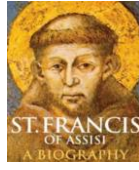
As Christians, our lives and our way of being in the world should bear a resemblance to Jesus' life and His way of being in the world.

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?