

The Saint – The Testament (1226) - pp. 124-127

Those “who were with him,” the brothers who write in *The Assisi Compilations*, tell of a number of documents or “testaments” which Francis dictated as his health deteriorated and death drew near: that of Siena in which he outlined the basic principles of his Gospel vision, that concerning the Portiuncula in which he asked his brothers to care for this special symbol of their life, and another in which he provided guidelines for building new dwellings. This document has come to be known as “The Testament,” has remained a primary expression of Francis’ profound wisdom and vision. While popular tradition maintains that it was written at the Portiuncula while he was dying, the document’s different styles of writing suggest that it was written at different moments of those final days and was prompted by different questions swirling around his simple Gospel vision.

The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I *showed mercy* to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.

And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way and say: “We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ, in all Your churches throughout the whole world and we bless You because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.”

Afterwards the Lord gave me, and gives me still, such faith in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them. And if I had as much *wisdom as Solomon* and found impoverished priests of this world, I would not preach in their parishes against their will. And I desire to respect, love and honor them and all others as my lords. And I do not want to consider any sin in them because I discern the Son of God in them and they are my lords. And I act in this way because, in this world, I see nothing corporally of the most high Son of God except His most holy Body and Blood which they receive and they alone administer to others. I want to have these most holy mysteries honored and venerated above all things and I want to reserve them in precious places. Wherever I find our Lord’s most holy names and written words in unbecoming places, I want to gather them up and I beg that they be gathered up and placed in a becoming place. And we must honor all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words and respect them as those who minister to us *spirit and life*.

And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me. And those who came to receive life gave whatever they had to the poor and were content with one tunic, patched inside and out, with a cord and short trousers. We desired nothing more.

We clerical [brothers] said the Office as other clerics did; the lay brothers said the Our Father; and we quite willingly remained in churches. And we were simple and subject to all.

And I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness. And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door. The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say: “*May the Lord give you peace.*”

Let the brothers be careful not to receive in any way churches or poor dwellings or anything else built for them unless they are according to the holy poverty we have promised in the Rule. *As pilgrims and strangers*, let them always be guests there.

I strictly command all the brothers through obedience, wherever they may be, not to dare to ask any letter from the Roman Curia, either personally or through an intermediary, whether for a church or another place or under the pretext of preaching or the persecution of their bodies. But, wherever they have not been received, *let them flee into another country* to do penance with the blessing of God.

And I firmly wish to obey the general minister of this fraternity and the other guardian whom it pleases him to give me. And I so wish to be a captive in his hands that I cannot go anywhere or do anything beyond obedience and his will, for he is my master.

And although I may be simple and infirm, I nevertheless want to have a cleric always with me who will celebrate the Office for me as it is prescribed in the *Rule*.

And let all the brothers be bound to obey their guardians and to recite the Office according to the *Rule*. And if some might have been found who are not reciting the Office according to the *Rule*, and want to change it in some way, or who are not Catholics, let all the brothers, wherever they may have found one of them, be bound through obedience to bring him before the custodian of that place nearest to where they found him. And let the custodian be strictly bound through obedience to keep him securely day and night as a man in chains, so that he cannot be taken from his hands until he can personally deliver him into the hands of his minister. And the minister be bound through obedience to send him with such brothers who would guard him as a prisoner until they deliver him to the Lord of Ostia, who is the Lord, the Protector and the Corrector of this fraternity.

And the brothers may not say: "This is another rule." Because this is a remembrance, admonition, exhortation, and my testament, which I, little brother Francis, make for you, my blessed brothers, that we might observe the *Rule* we have promised in a more Catholic way.

And let the general minister and all the other ministers and custodians be bound through obedience *not to add to or take away* from these words. And let them always have this writing with them together with the *Rule*. And in all the chapters which they hold, when they read the *Rule*, let them also read these words. And I strictly command all my cleric and lay brothers, through obedience, not to place any gloss upon the *Rule* or upon these words saying: "They should be understood in this way." But as the Lord has given me to speak and write the *Rule* and these words simply and purely, may you understand them simply and without gloss and observe them with a holy activity until the end.

And whoever observes these things, let him be blessed *in heaven with the blessings* of the Most High Father, and *on earth* with the blessing of His Beloved Son with the Most Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and all the powers of heaven and with all the saints. And, as far as I can, I, little brother Francis, your servant, confirm for you, both within and without, this most holy blessing.

The Founder – Chapter IV - pp. 74-75

How he began to overcome himself by his dealing with lepers, and to consider sweet what was previously bitter.

One day, while he was praying enthusiastically to the Lord, he received this response: "Francis, everything you loved carnally and desired to have, you must despise and hate, if you wish to know my will. Because once you begin doing this, what before seemed delightful and sweet will be unbearable and bitter; and what before made you shudder will offer you great sweetness and enormous delight."

He was overjoyed at this and was comforted by the Lord. One day he was riding his horse near Assisi, when he met a leper. And, even though he usually shuddered at lepers, he made himself dismount, and gave him a coin, kissing his hand as he did so. After he accepted a kiss of peace from him, Francis remounted and continued on his way. He began to consider himself less and less, until, by God's grace, he came to complete victory over himself.

After a few days, he moved to a hospice of lepers, taking with him a large sum of money. Calling them all together, as he kissed the hand of each, he gave them alms. When he left there, what before had been bitter, that is, to see and touch lepers, was turned into sweetness. For, as he said, the sight of lepers was so bitter to him, that he refused not only to look at them, but even to approach their dwellings. If he happened to come near their houses or to see them, even though he was moved by piety to give them alms through an intermediary, he always turned away his face and held his nose. With the help of God's grace, he became such a servant and friend of the lepers, that, as he testified in his *Testament*, he stayed among them and served them with humility.

Changed into good after his visit to the lepers, he would take a companion, whom he loved very much, to

FRANCISCAN JOURNEY Additional Readings – Chapter 6

secluded places, telling him that he had found a great and precious treasure. The man was not a little overjoyed, and gladly went with him whenever he was summoned. Francis often led him to a cave near Assisi, and, while he went alone inside, he left his companion outside, eager for the treasure. Inspired by a new and extraordinary spirit, he would pray to his Father in secret, wanting no one to know what was happening within except God alone, whom he consulted about acquiring heavenly treasure.

The enemy of the human race, observing him, strove to lure him from the good he had begun by striking fear and dread in him. There was in Assisi a deformed, hunchbacked woman, whom the devil, appearing to the man of God, recalled to him. He threatened to inflict him with her deformity unless he reneged on the plan he had conceived. But the very brave *knight of Christ*, shunning the devil's threats, prayed all the more fervently within the cave that God would direct his path.

He endured great suffering and mental anxiety, unable to rest until he accomplished in action what he had conceived in mind. Different thoughts followed one after the other, and their relentlessness disturbed him even more severely. For he was burning inwardly with a divine fire, unable to conceal outwardly the flame kindled in his soul. He repented that he had sinned so grievously. While his past and present transgressions no longer delighted him, he was not yet fully confident of refraining from future ones. This is why, when he emerged from the cave, he seemed to his companion to have changed into a different man.

Clare of Assisi – the Lady – pp. 66-67

THE BLESSING - INTRODUCTION: The Legend of Saint Clare describes the last hours of the saint's life and tells of her blessing the sisters of San Damiano as well as those of the other monasteries and those who would come in the future. This is possibly the source of the special blessings that have been traditionally attributed to Saint Clare. However, there is also evidence of a blessing that Saint Clare sent to Blessed Agnes of Prague, another sent to Ermentrude of Bruges, and a third to all the sisters. The earliest known text of the blessing is found in a Middle High German translation in a manuscript associated with the Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague that is dated 1350. A Latin text, associated with Ermentrude of Bruges, comes from a much later period, the seventeenth century, and another text addressed to all the sisters is found in various languages in manuscripts of different dates. The tradition of the Order of Saint Clare has always considered this text as a precious remembrance similar to that blessing given by Saint Francis to Brother Leo while they were on La Verna.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May He show His face to you and have mercy on you.

May He turn His countenance to you and give peace to you, my sisters and daughters, and to all others who come and remain in your company and to others both now and in the future, who have persevered until the end in every other monastery of the Poor Ladies.

I, Clare, a handmaid of Christ, a little plant of our most holy father Francis, a sister and mother of you and the other poor sisters, although unworthy, beg our Lord Jesus Christ through His mercy and the intercession of His most holy Mother Mary and of blessed Michael the Archangel and of all the holy angels of God, of our blessed father Francis, and of all men and women saints, that the heavenly Father give you and confirm for you this most holy blessing *in heaven* and on *earth*: on earth, by multiplying you in grace and His virtues among His servants and handmaids in His Church Militant: in heaven, by exalting you and glorifying you among his holy men and women in His Church Triumphant.

I bless you during my life and after my death, as I am able, out of all the blessings, with which the *Father of mercies* has blessed and will bless His sons and daughters *in heaven* and on earth and a spiritual father and mother have blessed and will bless their spiritual sons and daughters. Amen,

Always be lovers of your souls and those of all your sisters. And may you always be eager to observe what you have promised the Lord.

May the Lord always be with you and may you always be with Him. Amen.

Scripture reflection – Colossians 1:9-14

And so, from the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Holy Bible. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Lk 8:9–15). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.