

***Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance - The Saint* – pp. 41-44;**
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The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful (1209-1215)

The earliest manuscript of this writing, located in the Guarnacci Library in the Italian city of Volterra, introduces it with these words: “These are the words of life and salvation. Whoever reads and follows them will find life and draw from the Lord salvation.” While Kajetan Esser entitled it “The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful,” it has been more correctly seen as an exhortation given to the first penitents who came to Francis desiring to share in his Gospel way of life. Since 1976, when Kajetan Esser brought the text into prominence, it has served as the Prologue to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.

In the Name of the Lord!

[Chapter One]
Those Who do Penance

All those who love the Lord *with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength* and love their neighbor as themselves, who hate their bodies with their vices and sins, who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who produce worthy fruits of penance. O how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them, because *the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and make Its home and dwelling place among them*, and they are children of the heavenly Father Whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers to Him when we do *the will of the Father who is in heaven*. We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through a divine love and pure and sincere conscience and give birth to Him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others.

O how glorious it is to have a holy and great Father in heaven! O how holy, consoling to have such a beautiful and wonderful Spouse! O how holy and how loving, gratifying, humbling, peace-giving, sweet, worthy of love, and, above all things, desirable to have such a Brother and such a Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who laid down his life for His sheep and prayed to His Father, Saying: *Holy Father, in your name, save those whom you have given me in the world; they were yours and you gave them to me. The words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and have believed in truth that I have come from you and they have known that you have sent me.*

I pray for them and not for the world. Bless and sanctify them; I sanctify myself for them. I pray not only for them, but for those who will believe in me through their word that they might be sanctified in being one as we are.

I wish, Father, that where I am, they also may be with me that they may see my glory in your kingdom. Amen.

[Chapter Two]
Those Who Do Not Do Penance

All those men and women who are not living in penance, who do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who practice vice and sin and walk after the evil concupiscence and evil desires of their flesh, who do not observe what they have promised to the Lord, and who in their body serve the world through the desires of the flesh, the concerns of the world and the cares of this life: They are held captive by the devil, whose children they are, and whose works they do. They are blind because they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ. They do not possess spiritual wisdom because they do not have the Son of God, the true wisdom of the Father. It is said of them: *Their wisdom has been swallowed up and Cursed are those who turn away from your commands.* They see and acknowledge, know and do evil, and knowingly lose their souls.

See, you blind ones, deceived by your enemies: the flesh, the world, and the devil, because it is sweet for the body to sin and it is bitter to serve God. For every vice and sin flow and *proceed from the human heart* as the Lord says in the Gospel. And you have nothing in this world or in that to come. And you think that you will possess this world's vanities for a long time, but you are deceived because a day and an hour will come of which you give no thought, which you do not know, and of which you are unaware when the body becomes weak, death approaches and it dies a bitter death. And no matter when, or how a person dies in the guilt of sin without penance and satisfaction, if he can perform an act of satisfaction and does not do so, the devil snatches his soul from its body with such anguish and distress that no one can know [what it is like] except the one receiving it.

And every *talent, ability, knowledge, and wisdom* they think they have will be taken away from them. And they leave their wealth to their relatives and friends who take and divide it and afterwards say: "May his soul be cursed because he could have given us more and acquired more than what he distributed to us." Worms eat his body and so body and soul perish in this brief world and they will go to hell where they will be tortured forever.

In the love which is God we beg all those whom these words reach to receive those fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ written above with divine love and kindness. And let whoever does not know how to read have them read to them frequently. Because *they are spirit and life*, they should preserve them together with a holy activity to the end.

And whoever has not done these things will be held accountable *before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ on the day of judgment*.

The Later Rule (of the First Order-1223) – The Saint – pp. 99-106;

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The Earlier Rule of Francis' brothers had its origins in the statement presented to and approved by Pope Innocent III in 1209/10. It grew as the experiences and structures of the brothers became more complex. The Rule which received its final redaction at the Chapter of 1221, inspirational as I may have been, received a re-working that its vision would be more succinct and forthright. This later description of the Gospel life became a papal document on November 29, 1223, when Pope Honorius III placed the papal seal on it. Since that time it has been the foundational document forming and inspiring the Gospel vision of Franciscans of the First Order (Conventual, Capuchin Friars as well as those of the Leonine Union), of the Sisters of Saint Clare whose Rule incorporates many of its passages, and of the Religious and Secular Third Order. While some of the language of this document seems foreign to that of Francis himself and thus suggests the presence of canonists or other religious, e.g., the Cistercians, who helped with its composition, there is no doubt that it expresses his Gospel vision.

Bull of Pope Honorius III: Bishop, Servant of the servants of God, to His Beloved Sons, Brother Francis and the other brothers of the Order of the Lesser Brothers, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

The Apostolic See is accustomed to grant the pious requests and favorably to accede to the laudable desires of its petitioners. Therefore, beloved sons in the Lord, attentive to your pious prayers, We confirm with Our Apostolic Authority, and by these words ratify, the Rule of your Order, herein outlined and approved by Our predecessor, Pope Innocent of happy memory, which is as follows:

[CHAPTER I] In the name of the Lord! The life of the Lesser Brothers Begins

The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers 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.

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.

[CHAPTER II] Those Who Wish to Adopt This Life, and how They Should Be Received

If there are any who wish to accept this life and come to our brothers, let them send them to their provincial ministers, to whom alone and not to others is permission granted to receive the brothers. Let the ministers examine them carefully concerning the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church. If they believe all these things, will faithfully profess them, and steadfastly observe them to the end; and if they have no wives, or if they have wives who have already taken a vow of continence and are of such an age that suspicion cannot be raised about them, and who have already entered a monastery or have given their husbands permission by the authority of the bishop of the diocese, let the ministers speak to them the words of the holy Gospel that they go and sell all they have and take care to give it to the poor. If they cannot do this, their good will may suffice. Let the brothers and the minister be careful not to interfere with their temporal goods that they may dispose of their belongings as the Lord inspires them. If, however, counsel is sought, the minister may send them to some God-fearing persons according to whose advice their goods may be distributed to the poor.

Then they may be given the clothes of probation, namely, two tunics without a hood, a cord, short trousers, and a little cape reaching to the cord, unless, at times, it seems good to the same ministers, before God, to act otherwise. When the year of probation has come to an end, they may be received to obedience promising always to observe this rule and life. On no account shall it be lawful for them to leave this Order, according to the decree of our Lord the Pope, for according to the Gospel: *“no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

Those who have already promised obedience may have one tunic with a hood and another, if they wish, without a hood. And those who are compelled by necessity may wear shoes. Let all the brothers wear poor clothes and they may mend them with pieces of sackcloth or other material with the blessing of God. I admonish and exhort them not to look down upon or judge those whom they see dressed in soft and fine clothes and enjoying the choicest food and drink, but rather let everyone judge and look down upon himself.

[CHAPTER III] The Divine Office, Fasting and How the Brothers Should Go About in the World

Let the clerical [brothers] recite the Divine Office according to the rite of the holy Roman Church excepting the psalter, for which reason they may have breviaries. The lay [brothers], however, may say twenty-four *Our Fathers* for Matins, and five for Lauds; seven for each of the Hours of Prime, Terce, Sext, and None, twelve for Vespers, and seven for Compline. Let them pray for the dead.

Let them fast from the feast of All Saints until the Lord's Nativity. May those be blessed by the Lord who fast voluntarily during that holy Lent that begins at the Epiphany and lasts during the forty days which our Lord consecrated by His own fast; but those who do not wish to keep it will not be obliged. Let them fast, however, during the other [Lent] until the Lord's Resurrection. At other times they may not be bound to fast except on Fridays. During a time of obvious need, however, the brothers may not be bound by corporal fast.

I counsel, admonish, and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or argue 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. They should not ride horseback unless they are compelled by an obvious need or an infirmity. Into whatever house they enter, let them first say: “Peace be to this house!” According to the holy Gospel, let them eat whatever food is set before them.

[CHAPTER IV] Let the Brothers Never Receive Money

I strictly command all my brothers not to receive coins or money in any form, either personally or through intermediaries. Nevertheless, the ministers and custodians alone may take special care through their spiritual friends to provide for the needs of the sick and the clothing of the others according to places, seasons and cold climates, as they judge necessary, saving always that, as stated above, they do not receive coins or money.

[CHAPTER V] The Manner of Working

Those brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace of working may work faithfully and devotedly so that, while avoiding idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things must contribute. In payment for their work they may receive whatever is necessary for the bodily support of themselves and their brothers, excepting coin or money, & and let them do this humbly as is becoming for servants of God and followers of most holy poverty.

[CHAPTER VI] Let the Brothers Not Make Anything Their Own; Begging Alms, the Sick Brothers

Let the brothers not make anything their own, neither house, nor place nor anything at all. As pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go seeking alms with confidence, and they should not be ashamed, because, for our sakes, our Lord made himself poor in this world. This is that sublime height of most exalted poverty which has made you, my most beloved brothers, heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven, poor in temporal things, but exalted in virtue. Let this be your portion which leads to the land of the living. Giving yourselves totally to this, beloved brothers, never seek anything else under heaven for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wherever the brothers may be and meet one another, let them show that they are members of the same family. Let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit! When any brother falls sick, the other brothers must serve him as they would wish to be served themselves.

[CHAPTER VII] The Penance to Be Imposed on the Brothers Who Sin

If any brother, at the instigation of the enemy, sins mortally in regard to those sins concerning which it has been decreed among the brothers to have recourse only to the provincial ministers, let him have recourse as quickly as possible and without delay. If these ministers are priests, with a heart full of mercy let them impose on him a penance; but, if the ministers are not priests, let them have it imposed by others who are priests of the Order, as in the sight of God appears to them more expedient. They must be careful not to be angry or disturbed at the sin of another, for anger and disturbance impede charity in themselves and in others.

[CHAPTER VIII] The Election of the General Minister of This Fraternity and the Chapter of Pentecost

Let all the brothers always be bound to have one of the brothers of this Order as general minister and servant of the whole fraternity and let them be strictly bound to obey him. When he dies, let the election of his successor be made by the provincial ministers and custodians at the Chapter of Pentecost, at which all the provincial ministers are bound to assemble in whatever place the general minister may have designated. Let them do this once in every three years, or at other longer or shorter intervals, as determined by the aforesaid minister.

If, at any time, it appears to the body of the provincial ministers and custodians that the aforesaid general minister is not qualified for the service and general welfare of the brothers, let the aforesaid brothers, to whom the election is committed, be bound to elect another as custodian in the name of the Lord.

Moreover, after the Chapter of Pentecost, the provincial ministers and custodians may each, if they wish and it seems expedient to them, convoke a Chapter of the brothers in their custodies once in the same year.

[CHAPTER IX] Preachers

The brothers may not preach in the diocese of any bishop when he has opposed their doing so. And let none of the brothers dare to preach in any way to the people unless he has been examined and approved by the general minister of this fraternity and the office of preacher has been conferred upon him.

Moreover, I admonish and exhort those brothers that when they preach *their language be well-considered and chaste* for the benefit and edification of the people, announcing to them vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with brevity, because our Lord when on earth kept his word brief.

[CHAPTER X] The Admonition and Correction of the Brothers

Let the brothers who are the ministers and the servants of the others visit and admonish their brothers and humbly and charitably correct them, not commanding them anything that is against their soul and our rule. Let the brothers who are subject, however, remember that, for God's sake, they have renounced their own wills. Therefore I strictly command them to obey their ministers in everything that they have promised the Lord to observe and which is not against their soul or our rule.

Wherever the brothers may be who know and feel they cannot observe the rule spiritually, they can and should have recourse to their ministers. Let the ministers, moreover, receive them charitably and kindly and have such familiarity with them that these same brothers may speak and deal with them as masters with their servants, for so it must be that the ministers are the servants of all the brothers.

Moreover, I admonish and exhort the brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ to beware of all pride, vainglory, envy and greed, of care and solicitude for the things of this world, of detraction and murmuring. Let those who are illiterate not be anxious to learn, but let them pay attention to what they must desire above all else: to have the spirit of the Lord and its holy activity, to pray always to him with a pure heart, to have humility, and patience in persecution and infirmity, and to love those who persecute, rebuke and find fault with us, because the Lord says: *Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you. Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. But whoever perseveres to the end will be saved.*

[CHAPTER XI] The Brothers May Not Enter the Monasteries of Nuns

I strictly command all the brothers not to have any suspicious dealings or conversations with women, and they may not enter the monasteries of nuns, excepting those brothers to whom special permission has been granted by the Apostolic See; and they may not be godfathers to men or women, so that scandal may not arise among the brothers or concerning them on account of this.

[CHAPTER XII] Those Going Among the Saracens and Other Non-Believers

Let those brothers who wish by divine inspiration to go among the Saracens or other non-believers ask permission to go from their provincial ministers. The ministers, however, may not grant permission except to those whom they see fit to be sent. In addition to these points, I command the ministers through obedience to petition from our Lord the Pope for one of the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, who would be the governor, protector and corrector of this fraternity, so that, being always submissive and subject at the feet of the same Holy Church and steadfast in the Catholic Faith, we may observe poverty, humility, and the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as we have firmly promised.

It is forbidden, therefore, for anyone to tamper with this decree which we have confirmed, or rashly dare to oppose it. If anyone presume to attempt this, let him know that he shall incur the anger of Almighty God and of His blessed Apostles Peter and Paul. Given at the Lateran, the twenty-ninth day of November in the eighth year of Our pontificate.

The Life of St. Francis - Chapter IV - Julian of Speyer – The Saint – pp. 383-387;
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HOW HE RECEIVED A RULE AND PERMISSION TO PREACH FROM THE POPE, WAS REFRESHED
IN SOLITUDE, DETERMINED TO BE PERPETUALLY POOR AND TO HELP HIS NEIGHBORS, AND
HOW HE GUARDED HIMSELF AND HIS OWN BROTHERS WITH STRICT VIGILANCE.

Seeing that the number of brothers was gradually increasing, blessed Francis explained more fully to them his heart's proposal, not to mention the hidden design of divine revelation. He wrote a rule in a few words, inserting into it words from the holy gospel, for the perfection of which he strove as much as he could. He desired what he had written to be confirmed by the supreme pontiff, so he *took* the eleven brothers that he had *with him*, himself being the twelfth, and made his way with them to Rome. When he arrived, he went to one of the cardinal bishops, an esteemed and discerning man, and explained fully and in an orderly manner his reason for coming to Rome. He carefully heard the business of the poor man of Christ and, even though he deservedly praised the plan, he nonetheless first suggested to Francis that he enter the eremitical or monastic life. But the servant of Christ remained firm on what he had begun and, as humbly as he could, refused his urgings. But, *with the Lord's cooperation* he persisted until, thanks to the arrangements of the same bishop, the matter came to the hearing of the supreme pontiff.

Divine Providence was with the blessed man in everything he was doing, and its clear revelations and visions made him confident. At that time he also saw a vision that promised the Lord Popes assent to his proposal: *a tree of great height, amazingly tall*, and taking its top into his hands he easily bent it to the ground. Later on, when the most excellent and most magnanimous Lord Pope Innocent III, who was then ruling the church, condescended to the poor man, the meaning of this vision became evident.

The supreme pontiff gave the twelve brothers his kind consent confirming their rule and also gave them a mandate to preach penance, and with joy, he blessed and dismissed them. But he promised that later, when their number had increased, he would give them even more.

Therefore, it was not without reason that Blessed Francis thought it a wondrous thing that he had obtained such great benefits from the Vicar of Christ, and so he gave thanks to divine mercy for everything. After praying during a visit at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, he joyfully left the City with his brothers.

The purpose of the gift moved him to act immediately, lest perhaps he remain ungrateful, and he began to discuss with the brothers: first, how by observing the rule they could grow in virtue; and then, how by edifying their neighbors they might earn interest for the Lord on the *silver piece* entrusted to their care.

As they were dutifully discussing these and other similar matters, it happened that they came, and the hour was *late, to a deserted place* where they seemed to be bereft of all human aid, though they were in need of bodily food because of the hardships of their journey. But divine providence, which was with these poor ones, marvelously provided bread through a man who came up unexpectedly and disappeared all of a sudden. They ate the bread, marveled at the manner it had been provided, and, returning thanks to the Lord, continued their journey much comforted. Then they went to a solitary place near the city of Orte, where they remained for almost forty days in great want of necessities. Some of their number went begging in that same city. There they renewed the beginnings of holy poverty with great joy and confirmed it with a perpetual covenant.

These zealots of a new justice next entered the Spoleto valley, and a pious discussion arose whether in the future they should live in solitary places or among people. But truly, the holy man of God, as if despairing of his own efforts, anticipated every undertaking with attentive prayer through which he learned infallibly what to do, and, influenced by godly zeal, chose to live for the good of everyone rather than just for himself alone.

Then, comforted *in the Lord*, Saint Francis began to speak out *more boldly* owing to the apostolic authority granted him, and going around through *cities, towns and villages*, he steadfastly preached penance. He was particularly careful to *show himself blameless in all things* lest he be thought to gloss over the truth with flattering words. Educated men marveled at the power of his words, taught by no human teacher, and seeing the

well-born and the lowly, the rich and the poor crowd around him in bands, they astutely made their way to him as though to a new star rising in the darkness. In fact, he gave instructions for salvation to every state and condition, age and sex, giving them all a rule of life. Today, the church rejoices that his felicitous leadership of both sexes has brought about a threefold army of those who are to be saved.

As we mentioned above, he arrayed three Orders, the first of which he held above all others by profession and habit, and which, as he had written in its Rule, he called the Order of Lesser Brothers. The Second Order, the Order of the Poor Ladies and virgins of the Lord, also recalled earlier, likewise had its happy beginning from him. The Third, also an Order of considerable perfection, is called the Order of Penitents, which profitably brings together clerics and laity, virgins, unmarried, and married persons of both sexes.

Who will be able to tell in detail just how Blessed Francis himself magnificently served the Order of Lesser Brothers in the pinnacle of every virtue by going beyond what was asked, or how he taught his brothers and sons concerning all matters of true religion.

How sufficiently taught in all things perfect by his tutor, the grace of the Holy Spirit, he wished to come to know in himself every kind of perfection by experience. And so, he first taught his brothers by his example those things which he later urged on them by frequent sweet words.

How these brothers, personally serving as knights under such a leader, became more proficient in all perfection by his teaching and example, must, I think, be kept secret rather than described in detail with profuse words. For the blessed man *was watchful of his guard* with the highest vigilance over himself and his own.

He continually forewarned them most diligently not only lest they suffer some obvious attack of sin, but also lest a secret thought grow into a vice, lest any deceit, under the guise of virtue or the occasion of necessity, rush upon them, or death enter their inner selves through the unguarded openings of the external senses.

He did not allow in himself or others any punishable offense to pass with impunity, lest perchance a careless hand bring on the sluggishness of neglect. In fact, he exercised the rigor of justice in himself so greatly that if ever, as happens, a temptation of the flesh seized him stealth, if it were winter, he would immerse himself into a place filled with ice or snow to drive away the illicit impulse.

Seeing him hold himself under such great restraint, the other brothers were moved to do similar things. Thus, as has been said, the man of God not only uncompromisingly checked the prompting of the flesh, but also secured his bodily senses with bars of the greatest caution, lest they cling to any vanity.

For while he was staying in a place called Rivo Torto near Assisi, it happened that the Emperor Otto, with great pomp and a great retinue, was passing on the way to Rome for his coronation. Blessed Francis, who was residing *beside the road* with his brothers in their hovel, wished that neither he nor any of his brothers go outside or even look out to see the emperor, but he instructed one of them to proclaim to the emperor continually that this sort of glory would endure only a little while.

That most true zealot of poverty gathered his brothers, in an abandoned dwelling, in the place just mentioned, so that there they might protect themselves as best they could from the heat and rain. But this dwelling was so confining that they were unable to rest comfortably in it. But the narrowness of the place did not constrict *the breadth of their hearts*. Quite the contrary, they lived happily in this extreme want and persisted in giving *thanks and praise to God* continually. The holy man wrote the names of the brothers on the beams of the little house so that no one could disturb in the slightest another who wished to rest or pray, and that each brother would know the place assigned to him.

One day a man came to the place with an ass, maybe looking for shade, and wanting to enter freely and without being sent away said to the ass: "Get inside, for we shall do well for this place." But the man of God liked neither the words nor the intentions of this fellow who believed that the brothers had come together there to build houses and enlarge or appropriate the little spot for themselves. So the saint soon left the little house and moved to the place called the Portiuncula, where he had rebuilt a church of the Glorious Virgin.

Scripture reflection – *Matthew 5:13-16*

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.