



**FRANCISCAN RENEWAL
THE LIFE OF FRANCIS AND SPECIFIC SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS FROM
HIS LIFE**

Intention of this course:

- *You can study F's virtues coming from Fcan thought, but you can also study specific virtues coming directly from his life*
- *that's what I intend to do and what makes this reflection significant (different from a "normal" talk on Fcan virtues)—look at Francis' life as defined by arguably the best biography of F, and then make some spiritual conclusions from specific moments that can apply to the daily life of a Third Order member*

**PRIMARY SOURCE: FRANCIS OF ASSISI: A NEW BIOGRAPHY
Augustine Thompson, O.P.**

1. The Fcan (including all three Orders) must make Francis and his virtues acceptable in twenty-first century living
 - we do not live in the thirteenth century; we do not live in Italy; and we are not saints, but what F was and stood for are **"ideals"** and **"interpreted directives"** to a better life here on earth
 - "Christianity squared"
 - it is clear that there are many areas of Fcan spirituality that are in reality the thought of the "concerned Christian"
 - our spirituality, the Will of God for a Fcan is this: your life
 - including 1 -- your own individual holiness;
 - 2 -- your family's holiness;
 - 3 -- your chosen line of gainful employment—holiness in the market place)
 - lived according to these Fcan virtues (and other Fcan virtues as garnered from Fcan books and articles and talks)
2. Attempts to detect Historical Francis have uncanny similarities to attempts to reconstruct Historical Jesus.
 - since the Fcan should "know the Gospels" (more to come on this), the Fcan should know the basic "agenda" of the individual Gospels
 - part of our "knowledge fodder" reading should be reading about the Gospels

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I. “WHEN I WAS IN MY SINS” (1181-1205)

3. F’s early life

- b 1181/2
- early virtues: generosity and courtesy

[Francisthought 1]

- Military adventures

- F’s family supported Assisi government, probably had a horse and some armour
- Assisi suffered disastrous defeat, F imprisoned with aristocratic knights
 - prison hard on F, released in 1203, health damaged
- 1204 Assisi’s military situation changed, city now swore allegiance to papacy
- 1205—F was a broken veteran; condition showing symptoms commonly found in soldiers who have survived horrible experiences during war (PTSD)
- Spring, 1205 – F broke out of depression, and began to prepare for a new military venture, decided to go to war with some others

[Francisthought 2]

- F realized that he had to follow the “lord” but not good spiritual motivation—F had a very unsettled mind
- went to Foligno (18 or so miles), sold his finery and arms and horse,

[Francisthought 3]

- F came to San Damiano (in squalid disrepair), found the priest—Don Peter, would not take F’s money (legal risks of money belonging to a local youth with a reputation for prodigality), F left the money on a window ledge, went back to his family
- still trying to determine the direction of his life, leaning toward what God wanted for him

4. F in Crisis

- F not his old self, although moved in the same circle

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- F may have been suffering from self-loathing and guilt, performed traditional works of penance: almsgiving, prayer, bodily mortification, sought spiritual relief by going on pilgrimage to Rome

[Francisthought 4]

- Coming back to A, went to Bishop Guido
 - F was racked with demonic fears and perhaps hallucinations
- prayed at San Damiano, took up residence there in late 1205

5. F leaves the world

- Pietro, a loving father deeply wounded by his son's agony, strove to help him; F hid from him, Pietro took him home, locked him up
 - Pica let him out, went back to San Damiano
 - Pietro came back, thought F was out of his mind, Pietro made one last attempt; F did not truly grasp what was at stake

[Francisthought 5]

- F beaten by robbers, taken into a monastery, went back to Assisi
- **LEPER EXPERIENCE**
 - the core of his religious conversion

[Francisthought 6]

- then F began to work with lepers
 - F sensed himself, by God's grace and no power of his own, remade into a different man. Just as suddenly, the sins that had been tormenting him seemed to melt away
 - he experienced a spiritual rebirth and healing

II. THE PENITENT FROM ASSISI (1206-1209)

6. F at San Damiano

- F decided to adopt an external sign of his choice of penance
 - dressed in plain subdued tunic typical of a **brother of penance**
 - no "habit" as such
- had some money, bought stones and other supplies, then begged

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[Francisthought 7]

7. God Sends F Followers

- F stayed as a hermit and a person who “hung around church” for 2 years
- then Bernard and Peter followed him
 - they wanted to imitate F in the practice of penance
 - they found a parish priest (one F trusted) and they opened the Bible at random—a practice of lay piety
 - **Go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me – Mark 10:17-21**
 - **Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics – Luke 9:1-6**
 - **If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me--Matthew 16:24-28**
 - these became the core of what F would call his “form of life”

[Francisthought 8]

8. The Penitents Go to Rome

- stayed this way for perhaps a year
 - but F was worried about the risk of delusion: the identification of one’s own desires, possibly selfish or deluded, with divine commands.
 - F, obedient Catholic wanted the Church’s approval—he and the 3 headed for Rome

[Francisthought 9]

- Guido was in Rome, and felt F going over his head, but gradually came to help him
 - sent him to Cardinal Colonna
 - set up meeting with Pope Innocent III
 - approved the cardinal procurator’s request
 - to be lay preachers which they did not expect
- and they were not prepared for
- Colonna had them tonsured, official preachers then
 - F was reduced to spiritual agony over how to combine the solitary aspects of penance and prayer with the public work of preaching
 - but F did not immediately go into preaching

9. The Fraternity of Brothers

- F made the decision to take up a more ordered and structured way of life

5

- first place, 2 miles outside of Assisi—Rivo Torto
- there about 3 months, working probably with lepers
- took up a “habit” and cord

[Francisthought 10]

10. F at the Porziuncula

- F realized that he needed a “church” since they were “tonsured” and should recite DOffice
- no one would give him a church but the Benedictine monks gave him Santa Maria degli Angeli in the district known as the Porziuncula, the “Little Portion”
- fixed up churches in Assisi
- more brothers arrived probably much to F’s surprise

III. THE PRIMITIVE FRATERNITY (1209-1215)

11. F as a spiritual leader

- how he felt at this time described by F in “The First Letter to All the Faithful”
- significant phrase: “May the Lord give you peace”
- actually gave peace together with F’ presence

[Francisthought 11]

12. On the road around Assisi

- F and brothers worked around Assisi for “pay”
- brothers wondered from town to town working with their hands and serving lepers and “singing” the office in churches
- in no way like a religious order of today—without superiors, permanent place (although they would come to Porziuncula from time to time), F merely a “presence”
- F assumed that the brothers would learn from his example: he never gave a rule at this time
- F greatest sermon was always his own life

[Francisthought 12]

- already began to be considered a saint
- healings happened

6

- F was having difficulty adapting to his new role as a leader of a religious movement and a public person
 - invariably, people began to call him a “saint”
 - miracles were attributed to him, and he realized that he was becoming a celebrity
 - therefore F was having difficulty adapting to his new role as a leader of a religious movement and a public person
 - he began to wander away
 - F finally decided that he had to embrace his cross in a new way: he resolved to leave Assisi and travel to the Holy Land, perhaps finding martyrdom
 - his plan was thwarted however (storms in the seas) and F was back in his homeland

[Francisthought 13]

13. The Conversion of Clare

- after coming back two lifelong friends joined him, Leo, confessor and chaplain and Rufino, first cousin of a niece in aristocracy of Assisi, Clare di Favarone di Offrediccio (who was 11 years younger than F)
 - Rufino came to F to explain that C wanted to meet him
 - C was 18 in 1212 when the approach was made

[Francisthought 14]

- Palm Sunday, 1212, accompanied by her sister Pacifica, C left the family’s house through a security door
 - her family did not like it and warned off her father and uncles by showing them her shaven head, no further protest
 - she was joined by her sister Agnes
 - within a couple months F settled the two women on their own at the cathedral chapter’s church of San Damiano—the first convent of the female Franciscan movement with episcopal (Bishop Guido) protection
 - at C’s request, F prepared a “form of life” sounding very much like his own instruction of 1209
 - from this point until his last illness, C completely disappears from F’s life
 - they exchanged letters, but probably no visits

[Francisthought 15]

14. F Faces New Growth

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- F received a gift from Count Orland of Chiusi (powerful aristocrat), the possession of an isolated mountain in the Tuscan Apennines, La Verna

- 1213-1216 most obscure period in F's life

- F had to deal practically with the growth of his movement and provide for a brotherhood that extended beyond Assisi

- name was given "Lesser Poor" and by 1216 Fratres Minores, Lesser Brothers

- around this time, the newly elected bishop of Acre in Syria, Jacques de Vitry arrived in Perugia, expecting to be consecrated by Innocent who had just died, eventually consecrated by Honorius III

- F struggled with his need to follow Christ's less practical directives, yet not think well of himself for doing so

[Francisthought 16]

IV. EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION (1216-1220)

15. F and Nature

- F felt a deep union with living creatures, who like the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, lived the G precept of complete reliance on God

- he loved living things: they moved him to prayer

- he encountered nature as a unified whole

- see "Canticle of Brother Sun"

[Francisthought 17]

- seeming contradiction—shouldn't he of all people forbid the eating of meat—he was the only medieval religious founder who permitted the eating of meat

- Scripture was more important" "eat what is set before you" (mythought: maybe F tried to compromise)

16. Integration into the Life of the Church

- although not many brothers, the movement had grown large enough that it could now fulfill Christ's command to preach the G to all nations

- in May 1217 Francis selected leaders to lead groups of brothers outside of central Italy

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- about 60 brothers were sent to different areas, we guess that around 300 or 400 brothers were involved
- after F sent out his missionaries, he set out for France
 - one of the reasons may have been that France had a strong Eucharistic devotion and France had that
 - F chose Silvester, a priest to go with him so the F would never be without the Eucharist on his journey

[Francisthought 18]

- F traveled toward France ending up in Florence where Cardinal Hugolino was
 - the cardinal did not agree that F should leave the P and ordered F to return home and fulfill his major responsibility: leadership of his growing movement.

[Francisthought 19]

- the cardinal offered his services as an advocate at the Curia and F accepted
 - this signaled a major change in the status of F, his movement and its relations to the hierarchy

17. F Dispatches Letters and Missions

- F was probably ordained a deacon at Hugolino's assistance in 1217-18
- within a year of his return to A, F composed his first of two "Letters to the Clergy"
 - what motivates him is the same passion that sent him on the road to France, his love of the E
 - comparing the E to the Incarnation
 - he knew that he could have direct contact with God during the Mass, and had very harsh words for those who ignored the E's presence

[Francisthought 20]

- in his "letter to the Clergy", F warned of reverence for priests as well as the Blessed Sacrament
 - we grasp a little of F's developing spirituality: before he had focused on praying, repairing and cleaning churches and reverence for priests
 - now his piety focused on God's most tangible manifestation in the world: the E itself
 - F also had a profound sense of God's presence in the concrete here and now

- F had a very difficult time refraining from judgment of others, especially when he was obliged to correct others

[Francisthought 21]

- there were pressing matters of administration and governance to be addressed, but by talent and temperament, F found himself unsuited to the task

- the missions had a good result of making the Fcan movement known
- as missionaries returned home frustrated, F found that they did not consider passive acceptance of rejection as a virtue

[Francisthought 22]

- some came to him to ask him to request a papal privilege
 - F reacted sternly for not accepting their rejection without complaint
 - prelates were to be won over by the brothers' obedience and humility, not papal order
 - some brothers went behind F' back and it angered F greatly
 - Hugolino procured a papal letter of recommendation certifying the brothers' orthodoxy
 - F did not like it, of course, nevertheless, it gave F the fulfillment of a dream—to go to the Holy Land
- in June 1219, appointed vicars Gregory of Naples and Matthew of Narni
 - made his departure different from the France fiasco

18. F Abroad

- recapture of Jerusalem had been a project of Innocent III and now Honorius III
 - Crusader forces were in position to move against the sultan of Egypt Malik-al-Adil
 - the invasion of Egypt would become known as the Fifth Crusade
 - in the fight al-Adil died, succeeded by Malik al-Kamil, not as good as his father, but known for clemency and humanity
 - Cardinal Pelagius Galvani took leadership of Crusader forces which had become divided by rivalry and faction

[Francisthought 23]

- contact with Crusaders profoundly disturbed F
- crusader forces suffered a major defeat

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- F asked permission to cross enemy lines
 - Cardinal flatly refused, but F continued to harass the Cardinal, who finally allowed it saying in effect: if you are harmed or killed, do not expect any help from me
- F was taken to al-Kamil
 - received well, no doubt hoping that they were men who were charged with reopening negotiations
 - F got immediately to the point: he was an ambassador of Jesus and had come for the salvation of the sultan's soul
 - F never spoke ill of Muhammad just as he never spoke ill of anyone

[Francisthought 24]

- F received some followers including some connected to de Vitry, and this time de Vitry was very critical of F's movement
 - the horror of the sack that followed the breach of the walls probably brought back painful flashbacks
 - F heard disturbing news from home

V. F RETURNS HOME (1220-1221)

19. F and the Cardinal

- twelve months from spring 1220 to spring 1221 were F's *annus horribilis*, the most painful year of his life

[Francisthought 25]

- F would have realized that this year would make him stronger although at the time he was too wrapped up in the problems
 - F faced the brothers who had established the new dietary rules
 - F was offended because the brothers were not willing to suffer the humiliation of the criticism of the pious people who thought they were less strict than the other Orders
 - he discovered two other problems as well
 - Brother John of Cappella had gone off on his own and formed a community to serve lepers
 - F did not want his friars to be social workers or hospital attendants



- another brother, Br Philip Longo who was responsible for Clare and the Poor Ladies, had petitioned the Holy See to grant letters of protection for the nuns, giving him authority to excommunicate anyone who disturbed them
 - a lesser brother, following Christ's command to turn the other cheek, was not to resist evil under any circumstance or in any way

[Francisthought 26]

- this caused dissension which divided the brotherhood
 - F had a famous dream: small black hen and under him so many chicks were hatching that he could no longer keep them under his wings
 - obvious conclusion: for F, he had failed
 - F went directly to the Pope Honorius III
 - asked for someone with whom he could discuss affairs
 - gave him "The Lord of Ostia," Cardinal Hugolino who had already been advising F
 - F got Hugolino, who was acting as "pope" in F's eyes to revoke the letters of Philip Longo and reject John of Cappella's project
 - De Vitry in his history said that he had never encountered a group whose identity was so tied up with the personality of its founder, a founder who was himself uncomfortable with his position of leadership

[Francisthought 27]

Mythought:

[F's personality can speak to the Catholic people in the midst of the current moral crisis among the Catholic hierarchy including Pope, Cardinals and Bishops.

Quote from Michael Gerson, Washington Post: (non-Catholic author)
"When religious institutions are corrupt, there are at least two paths of reform. The first is the way of St. F of A. He reacted to the ecclesiastical and social corruption of his time by renouncing his father's wealth, stripping off his clothes and living a life of poverty and service. He touched lepers, cared for animals, tried to mediate a crusade and introduced gentleness and love into the harsh 13th century. At one personal turning point, he heard God saying, 'F, seest thou not that my house is in ruins? Go and restore it for me.' And he did, by returning to the example of Christianity's founder, but staying within the established church."

----Note; the other path of reform he cites Martin Luther, who left the Church. He closes his article with: *“F or Luther? In either case, Christian reformers start with an advantage. The founder of their faith was also a radical religious reformer—an opponent of complacent religious leaders, a tough critic of hypocrisy and a defender of children. And he calls his followers to restore a house in ruins.”*]

- F and Hugolino chose Peter of Cataneo, Cesarius of Speyer and Elias of Assisi to be his advisors
- F called for a chapter at the P (with H’s help)
- Honorius III released encyclicals on behalf of F’s movement, calling them for the first time an Order
 - establishing rules for those entering the Order, the novitiate, etc.
 - H decided that the best way to introduce F to the Curia was to have him preach before a papal consistory
 - he did and the pope and cardinals were edified as he preached from the heart and not from a prepared text as H wanted
 - F no doubt consulted with experts together with Peter and Caesarius about the “form of life” that he now undertook to write
 - F and Angelo Tancredi stayed at Rome in a Cardinal’s (Brancaleone, friend of H) residence
 - F became very sick, probably the malaria that he contracted in Egypt which F interpreted as the demons attacking him
 - F looked at it as the “sin” of abandoning his flock, and returned to the brothers where he wanted to work on the Rule

[Francisthought 28]

20. F Resigns

- after six months or so of work on his Rule, F announced his intention to relinquish leadership of Order and appoint Peter of Cataneo as his replacement
 - no one was deceived: F remained the de factor leader
 - Peter was not strong willed, and truly struggled with what to do with F
 - F looked at himself as the “example” for the brothers, and he struggled with that role as exceptions were made to him because of his illness (malaria, probably)
 - F suffered greatly from bouts of temptation and spiritual suffering

[Francisthought 29]

- F looked at them as diabolical attacks

13

- only in solitude and prayer did he find any relief, a refuge that, by isolating him from the brothers and depriving them of his example, probably further fed his doubts and temptations

- God had given him a burden and he could find no escape from it even in retirement

21. More Letters and a Spiritual Testament

[Francisthought 30]

- one way that F addressed the confusion of the brothers was to write letters to groups for which he had a special concern

- those letters that F wrote on his return to Italy give us an idea of his spiritual state of mind

- they were actually some of his thoughts before he left for the Holy Land, and we can see his development as a spiritual writer and mentor

- he wrote in Latin, the style of the Latin psalter which F sang or recited every day for several hours

[Francisthought 31]

- F wrote to priests, Franciscan ministers, and the podestas of Italian cities, all during 1220 probably

- one of F's letters spoke of honor to the Blessed Sacrament

- with similar ideas but calling for a bow to the Blessed Sacrament (the clerical gesture) rather than a genuflection (lay style preferred by F) at the elevation

- begged recipients to pick up and keep in reverence any piece of parchment on which was written one of the holy names of God

- that he wrote twice on this topic of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament is a window into F's mind

See *Francisthought 18*

- another letter was to rulers stressing that death will come and will take away all of what they have, and he warned them of hell

[Francisthought 32]

14

- but his specific thinking was a writing known as “Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers of Penance”
- legend has it that this would later become the “rule” for the Franciscan Third Order,
 - but F had no direct hand in that document
 - reworks what he wrote to the Sisters and shows some development of spiritual thought
 - two parts, the first to Christians practicing the virtues and the sacramental life, the second to those who neglect them
 - first part opens with a long section on the Incarnation and its links to the E
 - how the Lord chose poverty—exalted above all creation, he humbled himself to take flesh from the Virgin
 - interesting that this is the only mention of poverty in F’s letters of 1220-1221
 - does not dwell on poverty in itself, but on what J did

[Francisthought 35]

- highlights a theme consistent with F’s post-conversion: the imitation of Christ’s act of self-offering which is seen in the E
 - horrified F that some were indifferent or even hostile toward the E and preferred other shadows more than the Light
 - second major revision of the Earlier Exhortation
 - he links “penance” (within sacramental confession) directly to reception of communion
 - three specific acts of penance:
 - those who have power and can exercise it are to show mercy rather than judgment
 - those who have possessions are to give them up by giving them away
 - all believers can abstain from their “vices and sins” practicing prayer and fasting
 - also part of this Later Exhortation is a lengthy section devoted to love of neighbor, indeed love of enemies
 - subordination of “will”, therefore, obedience

See *Francisthought 19*

- only after this does F bring about physical mortification

- F uses the word “cursed” who do not treat the E well—only time he used the word

- F closed the Later Exhortation as he did the Early one: quoting and commentating on **John 17:1-26**, high priestly prayer of Jesus

- F made that prayer his own—that he and his followers be perfectly one with the Father

- therefore good meditation material for the Fcan

22. Brother Elias and the 1221 Chapter

- After Peter of Cataneo (who was superior) for only 6 months, F chose Elias of Assisi

- looks to be a bad choice because Elias was not what F wanted his friars to be

- actually for F, he was exactly what F wanted—good administrator not afraid to give orders as F was, like Hugolino

- Elias was a layman, and the partnership worked well while F was alive

- the chapter of 1221 was the largest to date—3000 which may even be correct, people of Assisi fed them with food left over, F spoke through Elias by “tugging on his tunic” in order to say something, and then Elias would say it

[Francisthought 33]

- Hugolino not there, but other clerics and bishops were

- chapter (through F) directed friars to Germany again

- Jordan of Giano was one of them, and so we lost one of the great “eye-witness” historians of F’s life and times

VI. RULES AND RETIREMENT [1221-1223]

23. F’s Working Paper

- F wrote the Rule because only an approved rule could free him of personal leadership responsibilities so that he could become as he wished the “least of the brothers”

- F was not a legislator; he looked at the reforms suggested by the Church

- redaction of the Earlier Rule took place in 1221, roughly the same time as the document “Later Admonition”

- not a canonical rule at all, but best understood as F's working paper in the project of establishing a form of life that could be lived by the brothers independent of him

- it is a composite document made up of disparate material composed at different times in response to very particular issues facing the brotherhood

- divided into 24 chapters and composed in grammatically correct Latin which means that it underwent revision by Cesarius of Speyer and other literate friars

- the first note in the Earlier Rule is obedience, with the stress as always being that the friars must be "lesser brothers" even if they are in charge—what he wanted himself to be

[Francisthought 34]

- then various Gospel texts, then a verbal formula that had already received Papal approval of other religious orders: of poverty, chastity and obedience

- the central chapters of 2-19 are in the form of a Rule and chapters 1, and 20-23 F summarizes deeper personal spiritual concerns

- the first datable writing of F in which he speaks about poverty directly, and it shows that his ideas were still developing and rather flexible

- it was around this time that F produced a small rule governing the life of friars in hermitages

- F loved solitude but he still favored above all the vocal prayer of the Church

- that Rule was set up with the idea of "mothers" who would be the Martha and "sons" who would be the Mary

24. Revision and Approval of the Rule

- a number of problems forced F to rethink his Rule (eg obedience, lay brothers wanting to be priests, Psalter possession, dealing with recalcitrant friars)

- the Earlier Rule, while very much a personal expression of F's character, remained too homiletic, too disorganized and ultimately too sketchy to serve as a "constitution"

- F took this upon himself at Fonte Columbo, and the result of this revision, what is known as the "Later Rule", was finally approved by Pope Honorius on November 8, 1223, and betrays the "hand of a ghostwriter with training in canon law"

- in the end, F depended more and more on Cardinal Hugolino

- the Later Rule reveals how much the brotherhood had changed from the early days at Rivo Torto, eg numbers, internal governance
- F and Hugolino did not think they were creating a rule for an “order” in the traditional sense
 - F was certain that his group was something wholly different. But the Church began to think of it as an “order.” Even F used the word occasionally and never objected to it

[Francisthought 36]

- the Fcans were the first order to use the Office of the Roman Church outside of Rome
 - F seems to have accepted this development without any difficulty, perhaps even favoring it
 - he received his own personal copy of the Roman Breviary as a gift
 - in spite of this perhaps inevitable institutionalization, the Later Rule did not remove many revolutionary elements of F’s way of life
 - F reacted strongly to his friars receiving houses, even though they were owned by others
 - in a legal sense, the bull establishing the Later Rule by Honorius III ended the probationary period granted by Innocent III
 - with the active and self-possessed Elias as his vicar, and a papally approved Rule, F now devoted himself more and more to his new self-appointed task: acting as a model for the brothers

25. F Prepares to Retire

- while Elias and the ministers were in charge of day-to-day governance around this time of 1223, more serious matters were regularly passed by F for his advice
 - slowly, either by design or by circumstances, F’s direct involvement in the order diminished
 - the brothers themselves had conflicted attitudes toward their founder
 - he traveled to Greccio for Christmas in 1223
 - F called on someone named John of Greccio and had him erect a grotto modeled on Bethlehem, with straw-filled manger, ox and donkey, and an image of the Child Jesus
 - they then celebrated Christmas Midnight Mass with F singing and preaching on the Gospel

- so-called miracles occurred with the straw and the other parts of the manger

- F was already on the way to becoming a miracle-working saint two years before his death

- the humiliation of the Son of God, who became a child in the stable amid squalor and domestic animals, was for F a model of spiritual perfection

- Christmas was always special to F

[Francisthought 37]

- he went on a preaching journey toward the end of 1223

VII. THE WAY OF THE CROSS [1223-1225]

26. F Withdraws from Leadership

- F spent the Lent of 1224 in the “lesser cell” as he called it in Greccio

- he had problems sleeping, experienced spiritual dryness and showed a lack of patience

- he attributed it to the devil and not self-indulgence

- a group of friars became priests in March 1224

- it transformed the order into something that F could never have imagined because priests had to be trained and that meant the use of books, etc.

- F showed even exaggerated respect toward priests but he always felt that manual labor was preferable to mental labor

- to Anthony of Padua, he wrote that while he taught, he should not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion

- it was literally a revolution in the order and F actually claimed that he was “pleased”

[Francisthought 38]

- by the summer of 1224, F was in physical decline

- and he was not an easy patient

- he was insistent that he not receive special treatment although he had to have it because of his illness

27. On Mount Verna

- F went to La Verna to spend some time in solitude

- F asked for a sign that his actions were in accord in God’s Will

19

- he got it in birds singing seemingly just for him
 - he further asked for divine guidance for the Gospels (he had a copy with his Breviary)
 - three times he opened it, each time finding a passage treating the Passion of Christ
 - as Mass was not said daily on La Verna, F asked, according to his usual custom when he could not attend Mass that a brother read him the day's Gospel before he took his principal meal of the day

See Francisthought 8

- he also suffered because of his desires to have things
 - F's prayer, always focused so intently on the sufferings of Christ, became ever more so
 - the example in his "Office of the Passion"
 - virtually nothing is from F, most of it allowing Scripture to guide his meditation
 - F spent the whole time of retreat living through the events of salvation

[Francisthought 39]

- one day F described a seraph, an angel that brought him peace and consolation
 - at the same time, this otherworldly being seemed fixed to the Cross, a sight that terrified him
 - after this vision, F began to manifest strange marks on his body
 - F concealed the marks, but later some of his companions discovered them
 - miraculous or not, the form of the marks is difficult to square with some natural cause
 - in any case, the stigmata were the culmination of F's life since his conversion, a search for total conformity to Christ
- at that time working with Brother Leo, F composed the "Praises of God"
 - it is the closest we will come to a prayer from the saint's own lips
 - for F, his sufferings are not physical disabilities, but ultimately an experience of God on the Cross
 - the suffering is a positive experience of divine presence and its fruit is good

28. F Descends the Mountain

- sometime near the end of September 1224 F ended his retreat and came down from the hermitage of LaVerna
 - his health had declined greatly
 - and went to be cared for by the sisters of San Damiano
 - meanwhile the privilege of “portable altars” for Mass was extended to the friars by Honorius III
 - his retreat and return are the background to the “Letter to the Entire Order” which was in a way F’s farewell address
 - his first concern is that all possible reverence be had for the Body and Blood of the Lord

See Francisthought 18

- there is a reference that F made to limiting the number of celebrations of Mass
 - it is possible that F was concerned that daily celebration of Mass by every priest in a community would create a “clerical class” raised up above the others in the order
 - F remained concerned about how his brother priests celebrated the Mass
 - remainder of the letter shows that F intended it as a farewell to the friars urging the friars to follow the Rule
 - signed with the tau cross which had become for F his sign

29. The “Canticle of Brother Sun”

- as winter moved on, F stayed in a room attached to the church of San Damiano
 - severely affected by the cold and in need of medical treatment, Elias urged him to get it
 - but F remained in the little hut suffering and was tormented by vermin and mice, F convinced it was a trial sent by the devil
 - told the brothers that he wanted to compose a new “praises of God” expressing his will to rejoice in the tribulation
 - the work—the Canticle of Brother Sun—is the first great poem of the Italian vernacular
 - makes no mention of any living creature
 - F could not shake off the sense that animal creation, so dear to him, had, like the mice and vermin of his cell, somehow become infested by demons who attacked and tempted him

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- F also composed the music which has been lost
- above all, it is a prayer of thanksgiving

[Francisthought 40]

- F never composed a prayer or poem without the language of the liturgy and Bible in the back of his mind
 - it was a living text and on two occasions added to it
 - first not able to escape the chaotic world around him, heard that Podesta of Assisi and Bishop Guido had fallen out, probably over court jurisdiction

[Francisthought 41]

- F responding using the one faculty he could make use of, his voice, adding a stanza to his Canticle, praising those who like Christ, forgave their enemies
 - F sent two brothers to sing it to the Podesta who was moved to beg forgiveness of Guido
 - pressure mounted on F to leave San Damiano for medical treatment
 - he wrote the “Canticle of Exhortation” a testament for Clare and her sisters
 - urging them to “live in truth” and in holy obedience, to cultivate the Spirit within, and to ignore the world without
 - as to those who are sick and those who care for them, he implored them to “bear it in peace”
 - finally in June of 1225, F obeyed the wishes of Elias and Hugolino and went to Rieti for medical treatment

VIII. FROM PENITENT TO SAINT [1225-1226]

30. Failed Medical Treatments

- F took up residence at the hermitage near Condigliano, just outside Rieti
 - his ailments: nearly blind, hardly able to eat, suffering probably from severe inflammation of the eye and mucous membranes that line the inner part of the eyelids
 - had to be excruciating pain
 - spoke nostalgically about returning to service of the lepers
 - group of friars chosen from those closest to F, were assigned to care for him, and he was not a cooperative patient

[Francisthought 42]

- flatly refused medical treatment, refused medicine and food
- Elias ordered F to go to Rieti to get medical treatment for his eyes
 - he did try to be a better patient, and always felt badly about receiving special treatment and special food
- he did not lose his love of music
- the consulting doctor told F that he needed to cauterize the flesh of his face from the jaw to the eyebrow of his weaker eye
 - F begged that the treatment be put off
 - again Elias and Hugolino told him to do it
 - F blessed the fire, and the operation was not successful
- moved to the palace of the bishop of Rieti
 - many sick visited him and F tried to give away anything he had
 - then moved to little town of San Fabiano to try to prevent people from seeing him
- spent the entire winter of 1225-26 most likely in Rieti
 - in April, ministers decided that F should go to Siena to seek further medical attention
 - whatever medical attention, it did not have effect
- Elias suggested that he propose a final message for the brothers
 - he said to love each other, love poverty, remain faithful to the prelates and clerics of holy Mother Church
- in midsummer, F's sickness abated
 - able to travel with Elias to go to Celle near Cortona
 - within a very short time, his sickness was back
 - finally begged Elias to take him home, back to Assisi

31. The Return to Assisi

- took F eventually to the abode of the bishop in Assisi
 - everyone considered him a saint
 - he asked the brothers to sing the "Praises of the Lord" for him
 - Elias wanted him to meditate on his death and not be so joyful
 - F replied that he continually meditated on death and now: "Let me rejoice in the Lord, and sing his praises in my infirmities, because, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, I am so closely united and joined with my Lord, that, through His mercy, I can well rejoice in the Most High himself."

[Francisthought 43]

- Assisi people caught up in the idea that they would have a saint in heaven
 - doctors could do nothing
- F wrote the final verse of the Canticle of Brother Sun

32. F's Testament

- it was customary to make one's wishes before he dies
 - F really had only one "possession" – his Breviary which he had already given to Brothers Leo and Angelo so they could read to him. Br. Leo would keep it after his death
 - F asked an unnamed friar to take down his thoughts and translate them into Latin known as the "Testament"
 - F talked about his own life:
 - leper experience "when he was in his sins"
 - his "faith in churches" and priests
 - linked not to any particular holiness of their lives, but to the reality of the Eucharist
 - Host should be honored above all things and kept in a fitting place
 - as well as a scrap of parchment with the name of God or a bible verse
 - recorded his faith in theologians
 - recounted that God had send him followers and showed him a new path to take
 - that I ought to live according to the form of the Holy Gospel
 - simplicity of life in early days
 - imposed two commands on the brothers
 - receive none of the churches which are constructed on their behalf unless they would be such as befits holy poverty
 - do not seek any letter in the Roman Curia
 - F focused in how admiring donors could subvert simplicity by their generosity and the brothers could collude in the sham, and so he "warned" the brothers
 - but more pressing and dangerous to F's mind was the brothers' habit of invoking papal protection and ecclesiastical privileges
 - there are examples of privileges being given to Fcans immediately before F's death and F knew that these privileges placed the Lesser Brothers in positions of power over others
 - for F, Catholicity was about things and actions, not just about ideas

[Francisthought 44]

- his greatest fear, as he lay on his deathbed, was that those who came after him would replace this homely piety with the pride of intellectualized abstractions and assumption of religious status

- the testament was merely an admonition to observe the Rule in a “more Catholic way”

- he wanted his friars to observe it simply, without trying to divine unwritten intentions or meanings from the words

33. Last Days with the Brothers

- around mid September of 1226, F asked to be taken to the Porziuncula to die

- it was there that the Order had begun

- it was natural that F would want to die there instead of in the bishop’s palace

- faced Assisi on the way, blessed it

- week before his death, put his affairs in order

- had a physician brother and priest brother whom he could go to confession

- to the end remained a difficult patient

- no outside visitors, except Jacoba de Settesoli, a matron of means from a penitent Roman family

- only woman with whom F developed a close friendship

[Francisthought 45]

- celebrated his Last Supper

- F asked to be clothed in sackcloth, placed on floor and sprinkled with ashes (the custom of the time)

- a brother read the passion from John’s Gospel to him

- larks filled with the air with their songs

- died October 3, 1226

34. From Death to the Altar

- some doubt about the stigmata, even by Hugolino and Bonaventure, but those who saw the wounds knew it was real

- took his body first to the sisters, then to San Giorgio where Requiem Mass was sung, placed in a tomb prepared by Elias

- body viewed through grating

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- body raised off the ground so one could crawl under it (common in those days)

- first posthumous miracle was for a girl who crawled under it

- no petition for his canonization right away until Hugolino two years after his death

- Hugolino elected to be Pope Gregory IX

- in a consistory of cardinals in Perugia (Pope has been forced to flee Rome) pope declared him a saint of the Catholic Church

- no miracles necessary he said because “we have seen it with our own eyes”

- Elias resigned as minister of the order in order to begin construction of the basilica of San Francesco

[Francisthought 46]

- worked quickly and by the spring of 1230, the new church was ready to receive the saint's body

- the pope and dignitaries were planned to be present for the translation of the body, but because of rumors about stealing the body, the friars moved the body to the basilica three days before

- because of Elias' careful planning, the body was protected for the next 600 years