

## ON BLESSED FRANCIS

### SERMON 1

*I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God* [Rev 7:2]. On opening the sixth seal, John saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, by whom we understand blessed Francis who like an angel was sent at the end of the world, sealed with the sign of the cross, to restore the worship of the cross and to preach its glory.

Blessed Francis is described and commended in this text in three ways. He is described, firstly, as sent by God; secondly, as raised above the earth; thirdly, as someone conformed and made like to Christ. That he was sent by God is stated in the words: *I saw another angel*. Greek uses the word angel and Latin uses the word sent.<sup>1</sup> He says *another angel*, because he was not an angel by identity of nature but by conformity in grace. We commonly say of a person who deliberately copies and imitates another that he or she is a second of that person. That he was raised up above the earth is stated in the words: *ascending from the rising of the sun*. The raising up refers to the lifting up of the mind and the rising of the sun refers to the strength of love, the principle of rising and acting above. That he was conformed to Christ is stated in the words: *having the seal of the living God*, that is, bearing in his body the stigmata of the Crucified, the living and true God, so that he would apply to himself the text: *I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body* [Gal 6:17]. Therefore when you hear *angel*, understand ‘sent by God’ and then honour him; when you hear *ascending* understand ‘raised up from the earth’ and then imitate him; when you hear *having the seal of the living God* understand ‘made like and conformed to Christ’ and then admire him. In this text holy Francis is presented to us as a person to be honoured, imitated and admired.

The text says: *I saw another angel* etc. Blessed Francis can be called another angel because by his various privileges of virtues and

gifts he conformed himself to all the orders of angels. The complete perfection of the Church militant, of the Church's hierarchy, and of each person in the Church militant or in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, consists in conformity and likeness to the angelic hierarchy, according to what was said to Moses: Go, *and see that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain* [Ex 25:40]. Dionysius says<sup>2</sup>:

Theology has named all the nine heavenly substances with clear titles. Our heavenly writer, the perfecter of charity, separates them into three groups of threes.

In other words, the nine heavenly substances are divided into orders in three hierarchies, that is, into a lower, middle and higher each of which contains three orders. The lower hierarchy contains the angels, archangels and principalities; the middle contains the powers, virtues and dominations; the higher contains the thrones, cherubim and seraphim. These orders are distinguished by gifts, offices and by actions or works of graces. Although an order or orders begin to be distinguished by and arranged from nature, their completion comes from grace so that, as Gregory says,<sup>3</sup> each order takes its name from what has been more fully given to it. It has to be understood that a higher order is always named by someone higher.

I. The lower order contains three orders, namely, angels, archangels and principalities. The work of angels is to help and guard people against falling and should they fall to help them up; archangels reveal; principalities rule or guide. So Bernard says<sup>4</sup>: In angels there is help in piety, in archangels revelation in light, and in principalities a ruling for a beginning.

1. Blessed Francis was an angel, that is, he was conformed to the order of angels by an affection of piety. An affection of piety consists in being compassionate, in helping the unfortunate, or in giving support, being of service or at least by showing affection.<sup>5</sup>

This is indicated in the text in which is said: *the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim*<sup>6</sup> and *when the angel of the Lord spoke these words, the people lifted up their voices and wept* [Judg 2:1 and 4]. Gilgal means a wheel.<sup>7</sup> What does a wheel signify other than the sky that always rotates and turns? Therefore, *the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim*, that is, came down from the height of heaven to the need of the unfortunate. The worst misfortune is sin. When then the angel of the Lord spoke to them, *the people lifted up their voices and wept*, because as the angel was compassionate over their sins, the angel stirred them to weeping and contrition. The Apostle teaches us to *rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep* [Rom 12:15].

Just how much blessed Francis was moved by an affection of piety towards all creatures is clear in the *Legend*.<sup>8</sup> This is especially true when he was compassionate for souls that he knew Christ had redeemed by his blood. He prayed to the Lord for them, wept bitterly over their sins and stirred them to cries of penance. He was compassionate to the poor for whom he often gave away his clothes for he recognized in them the poor Crucified one. He was compassionate to the sick and so gave personal service to lepers. He had a piety of affection also for irrational creatures, calling them brothers and sisters, for in them traces of the Trinity shone forth.

This is the office of prelates of whom is said: *He will command his angels concerning you* etc. [Ps 91:11]; and of whom is said: *Guard this man; if he is missing, your life shall be given for his life* [1 Kings 20:39]. But unfortunately more zeal is given to guarding wages and money than souls; the processes and arguments in the churches clearly show this.

2. Secondly, blessed Francis was an angel, this is, conformed to the order of archangels by his teaching of truth, for the work of archangels is to reveal. Blessed Francis taught and observed in his own life what he taught,<sup>9</sup> namely, ‘vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with brevity’. Even though he was not book-learned, still his words were not empty or laughable but they penetrated to the core of the heart. They were *like fire, like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces* [Jer 23:29].<sup>10</sup> His words were like fire, *warming people to love,*

*and like a hammer that breaks, softening by fear. From where did his learning come when he was not taught [Jn 7:15]? Certainly it did not come from reading or study but from the desire for and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. So he could say with Paul: I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ [Gal 1:12]. From such a revelation he not only understood and explained mysteries of the Scriptures, but he preached future events and searched the secrets of consciences, as is clear from many examples in his Legend.<sup>11</sup> A text of Malachi can be applied to this archangelic man: For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts [Mal 2:7]. The lips of a priest should guard knowledge: by holiness of life; and people should seek instruction from his mouth: by the truth of the teaching; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts: by divine authority. He is an angel of peace, announcing peace and salvation so that we may sing of him<sup>12</sup>:*

‘He announces peace and salvation  
in the power of the Spirit,  
he joins in true peace  
those far from salvation.’

Those fulfil this office poorly who either do not preach or, if they preach, do so not to edify souls but for personal ambition; not for value but out of curiosity; preaching not Christ but rather themselves.

3. Thirdly, blessed Francis was an angel, that is, conformable to the order of principalities whose duty is to direct and rule by an example of goodness. Indeed, blessed Francis is the model of every goodness, purity, austerity and religion; he became a rule and example, as a leader and prince of the Christian army, so that one can apply to him the following text: *Look at me, and do the same* [Judg 7:17]; and also: *I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me* [Rom 15:18]. Whoever follows this leader cannot stray nor be overcome in battle, since this leader carries the banners of the most high King with which he conquers all contrary powers, namely, the stigmata of the Crucified. To this angel or angelic person can be applied the text: *I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the*

*place that I have prepared* [Ex 23:20]. This angel goes *in front of you* to direct you, *to guard you* by leading you out, *and to bring you* by arriving.

Therefore, they follow him, are joined to him,  
 all who go out of Egypt;  
 under his leadership, in a clear light,  
 they carry forward the banners of the King.<sup>13</sup>

But unfortunately, those today who are made leaders, princes and powers in the Church to build up others by their example of virtue, to direct and lead them on the way, turn them rather from the right way and scandalize people by bad example. However, *woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes* [Mt 18:7]. *For if any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in Christ it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea* [Mt 18:6].

II. In the middle hierarchy there are also three orders, namely, powers whose task is to restrain contrary powers lest they cause the harm they intend; virtues whose task is to work miracles in the elements and from the elements of the world to build up the Church; dominations whose task is to rule others.<sup>14</sup> Bernard<sup>15</sup> says that in powers salvation is protected, in virtues virtue is active, and in dominations majesty is at work.

1. Blessed Francis was an angel, that is, he was conformed to the order of powers whose task is to restrain other powers by strict control. Francis<sup>16</sup> was a person of much restraint and strictness, for by restraint he overcame carnal desires in himself. Like many others, his only food was bread and water; when something tasty was put before him, he seasoned it with ashes or mixed cold water with it. He was happy with one poor habit and a mantle for clothing and he used a rope for his cord. His bed was wood, his pillar was a piece of wood or a stone. Whenever he felt a movement of concupiscence, he plunged into snow or cold water. He strove so much to conquer the flesh that he crucified it *with its passions and desires* [Gal 5:24]. Not only was he strict with himself, subduing his carnal desires, but he was strict also with others by reproving, by censuring sins, or by

punishing his subjects. So, like another Elijah, *never did he tremble before any ruler* [Sir 48:12] lest sins or vices be encouraged. He took the hood away from a disobedient Brother and, as an example to others, threw it into the fire even though the Brother was penitent. However, by the merit of the penance, the hood remained unharmed.<sup>17</sup> He confined and drove out demons. Once, when he came to Arezzo and the whole town was laid waste from internal warfare, it was revealed to him that demons were in the town and were stirring up discord. He sent a companion to the gate of the town to order the demons in the name of Almighty God, of Christ crucified and of his servant Francis to leave the town. This was done and peace and harmony were restored to the town.<sup>18</sup> The following texts can be applied to this angel or angelic man: *the angel of the Lord took his stand in the roads as his adversary* [Num 22:22], and: *Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, and the angel said to him: I have come out as an adversary* [Num 22:31-32]. The angel with the sword drawn against Balaam was Francis opposing Balaam; Francis by the sword of his word, by severe and hard rebukes reproved sinners.

But today, unfortunately, this sword of zeal is completely blunt. No one dares to reprimand or condemn sins, even though Augustine says<sup>19</sup>: 'For this leaders are appointed in the churches, not to allow but to condemn sins'. The text of Ezekiel is borne out: *they are taken away in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at the sentinel's door* [Ezek 33:6].

2. Secondly, blessed Francis was an angel in his miracles, that is, he was conformed to the order of virtues whose task it is to work miracles. God worked many miracles through blessed Francis not only while he was alive but also after his death, apart from the fact that his whole life was miraculous, as is clear in his *Legend*.<sup>20</sup> He cured various illnesses, cleansed lepers, gave sight to the blind, restored amputated limbs, as is clear in cases of eyes and tongues torn out. He made the dumb speak, the deaf hear, the lame walk and restored the use of their limbs to paralytics. He freed many women from danger in childbirth. He often raised the dead. He also worked miracles with the elements and substances of the world<sup>21</sup> as when he

changed water into wine, drew water from a rock, tamed the force of fire and made light shine in the darkness of night. From this it is clear that he belonged to the order spoken of in the text: *Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding* [Ps 103:20]. He was clearly powerfully strong, both because he *put his hand to* [Prov 31:19] what is difficult, and did *great things* [Lk 1:49] for the Lord and so God wanted to do great things for him. *Know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself* [Ps 4:3]. Although it is said that miracles have ceased because signs are given for unbelievers,<sup>22</sup> faith is now so weakened, that perhaps the smaller number of miracles is because few do great and wonderful things for God, and so God does not work great things through them. So the text is verified: *There is no one who does good, no, not one* [Ps 53:3].

3. Thirdly, blessed Francis was an angel by despising every earthly pleasure and so was conformed to the order of dominations whose task is to command. He despised whatever could give pleasure in the world, for he did not want any material possession for himself or his followers, either as his own or held in common.<sup>23</sup> He despised worldly superiority because he always wanted to be subject rather than in charge; he did not want to glory in any worldly joy other than in the cross of Christ; nor did he seek any comfort other than in the cross so that he could say: *May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ* [Gal 6:14]. He despised worldly learning because he wanted to know only Christ crucified for which reason he was able to say: *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified* [1 Cor 2:2]. He did not look for worldly favours or praise but, seeking the glory of God in all things, he regarded himself as useless, he despised himself, thinking of himself as nothing, in fact regarding himself as the greatest sinner.<sup>24</sup> But the more he thought of himself as useless, the more precious he was in the sight of God, as Gregory says.<sup>25</sup> Because he set aside and despised the whole world, he was lifted above the whole world and was lord of the whole world. Those who desire what is worldly, for example, riches or honours, are not lords of the world but rather its servants. The Apostle calls avarice a service of idols [Col 3:5] so all who in reality are servants of money, are not

lords of higher places, but are rather subjects of these things. And what is worse, as the Apostle says: *such people do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own appetites* [Rom 16:18]. Further, because Francis obeyed the divine commands perfectly, he arranged lesser things as he wanted and was a lord commanding them as when the wild animals were gentle with him.<sup>26</sup> He belonged to the order of which Zechariah speaks: *Then the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him and said to him, 'Run, say to that young man'* [Zech 2:3-4]. Gregory<sup>27</sup> says that this angel belonged to the order of dominations because it commanded others.

III. In the highest hierarchy there are three orders, namely, thrones on which, according to Dionysius,<sup>28</sup> God sits because of their stability; cherubs, who, being full of knowledge, understand all learning; seraphs, who are afire with love, and so in Hebrew are said to be glowing or burning. Bernard<sup>29</sup> says that God sits on thrones as courtesy, on cherubs as truth and on seraphs as love.

1. Blessed Francis was, firstly, an angel in the order of thrones, that is, he was conformed to this order by his stability of mind and tranquillity of soul. In truth blessed Francis was a throne, stable and tranquil, not elated in prosperity, dejected in adversity nor shaken by passion. It was as if he was restored to a state of innocence with what was lower, but so obedient to what is higher that he felt no rebellious movement against reason. So God rested in him as on a throne since *his abode has been established in Salem* [Ps 76:2].<sup>30</sup> The following words said about David can be understood of him: *For even as an angel of God, so is my Lord the king, that he is neither moved with blessing nor cursing* [2 Sam 14:17 DRB].<sup>31</sup> He was clearly an angel, stable and long-suffering, not moved by blessings because he despised human praise, nor by cursing because he sought tribulations, persecutions and abusive words for the honour of God. So he went to Morocco in his zeal for martyrdom and to the Sultan in Babylon choosing to die for love of the Crucified who died and was crucified for us.<sup>32</sup>

But, unfortunately, today people are not peaceful and stable like thrones but are like a reed unduly shaken by every wind [Mt 11:7; Lk 7:24]; they do not tolerate death nor even whipping, nor even words. They are elated in prosperity, dejected in adversity, disturbed by passion. The heart of *the wicked is like the tossing sea that cannot keep still* [Isa 57:20]. Hence, God does not make an abode in them.

2. Secondly, blessed Francis was an angel in his conformity to the order of cherubs by the clearness of his contemplation or the subtlety of his discernment. Francis, the angelic man, constantly contemplated God in all the Scriptures, in every creature and from these he made a ladder for climbing to God. Whatever he found in creatures redounded to the praise of the Creator while all creatures led him to the praise of God.<sup>33</sup> He was so intent in divine contemplation that often he was rapt above himself and, experiencing something above the human senses, he was totally unconscious of what was happening around him and he lost completely the use of his senses. Sometimes his brothers saw him raised up in the air, completely raised above the ground.<sup>34</sup> This would not be possible unless his soul was fixed on heavenly things. There is no doubt that, while he shone with these heavenly splendours and was in these excesses of the mind, *he heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat* [2 Cor 12:4]. From where did this holy man come? He was one of the angels whom Jacob saw ascending and descending on the ladder [Gen 28:12]. He ascended in contemplation and descended in his deeds and compassion for his neighbours. He was one of the angels of whom it is said: *their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven* [Mt 18:10]. It is not improper to think that in such rapture he was, like Paul, raised to a vision of the divine essence.

3. Thirdly, blessed Francis was an angel, that is, conformed to the seraphic order by an abundance of love and by lofty desires. With such warmth of spirit, with such fervour of love, with such strong desire was he carried towards God that, becoming unconscious of self, melting and languishing with love for his Beloved, he moved towards and was transformed into him, not only in his mind but also in his flesh.<sup>35</sup> According to Hugo,<sup>36</sup> love transforms one into the

beloved. Hugo says: I know, my soul, that love is your life, and by the force of love you are transformed into a likeness of what you love, just as a solid mass is made molten and changed into money and wax is changed into a seal. Because the soul of Francis was perfectly transformed by the force of love into Christ crucified, his body and also his soul were changed by affection and by divine power; as a seraph appeared to him in the likeness of the Crucified, there were imprinted on his feet, hands and side the stigmata of the Crucified.

For immediately then marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet just as he had seen a little before in the figure of the man crucified. His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the centre by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on the inner side of the hands and the upper side of the feet and their points on the opposite sides. The heads of the nails in his hands and his feet were round and black; their points were oblong and bent as if driven back with a hammer, and they emerged from the flesh and stuck out beyond it. Also his right side, as if pierced with a lance, was marked with a red wound from which his sacred blood often flowed, moistening his tunic and underwear.<sup>37</sup>

He was the seraphic man of whom the angels speak in a psalm: *Who makes your angels spirits, and your ministers a burning fire* [Ps 103:4 DRB; Ps 104:4 NRSV]. And in a text speaking of the sacrifice of Manoah we read: *When the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, an angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar* [Judg 13:20]. Offering his whole self to God as a living host and being entirely consumed by the fire of love, he was carried above to God where he was filled with indescribable consolations until he came today to the eternal joys. To which joys may the Son, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever, bring us together with him. Amen.

## NOTES

- 1 Isidore, *Libri etymologiarum*, l. 7, c. 5, n. 5 (PL 82, 272).
- 2 *Hierarchia angelica*, c. 6, # 2 (PG 3, 199). In the division of heavenly spirits that follows, Matthew is using *Dionysiaca*, II, cc. 7-9, 830ff.
- 3 *In Evangelia*, l. 2, Homilia 34, n. 14 (PL 76, 1255); in P. Lombard, *Liber II Sententiarum*, d. 9, c. 3 (ed. Quaracchi, 1971, 372).
- 4 *De consideratione*, l. 5, c. 5, n. 12 (PL 182, 795).
- 5 See Augustine, *The City of God*, book 10, ch. 1, FOTC, vol. 14, 118.
- 6 In the Latin text *Bochim* is the *place of weepers*.
- 7 According to Jerome, *De nominibus hebraicis*, De Deuteronomio (PL 23, 843).
- 8 Bonaventure, LMj 2, 1-6 (FA:ED II 536-540).
- 9 Francis, LR 9, 3 (FA:ED I 103).
- 10 See Bonaventure, LMj 12, 7 (FA:ED II 625).
- 11 *Ibid.*, 11, 1-14 (FA:ED II 612-621).
- 12 Julian of Speyer, *Officium S. Francisci*, n. 15 (in *Analecta Franciscana*, vol 10, 381).
- 13 From the hymn written by Thomas Capuano for Second Vespers, in Julian of Speyer, *op. cit.*, n. 24, 386.
- 14 According to Gregory, *In Evangelia*, l. 2, Homilia 34, n. 10 (PL 76, 1251).
- 15 *De consideratione*, l. 5, c. 5, n. 12 (PL 182, 795), with some changes.
- 16 See Bonaventure, LMj 5, 1-3 (FA:ED II 560-562).
- 17 *Ibid.*, 6, 11 (FA:ED II 576).
- 18 *Ibid.*, 6, 9 (FA:ED II 5746).
- 19 *The City of God*, book 1, ch. 9, n. 3, FOTC, vol. 8, 1950, 32.
- 20 Bonaventure, LMj. *The Miracles*, 2 and 6-8 FA:ED II, 655-659, 668-676).
- 21 Bonaventure, LMj 5, 9-10, 12; 7 12 (FA:ED II 566-568, 584).
- 22 1 Cor 14:22: *Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers*. See Gregory, *Libri moralium*, l. 27, c. 18, nn. 36-37 (PL 76, 420).
- 23 Francis, LR 4 and 6, (FA:ED I 102 and 103); Bonaventure, LMj, Prologue, 2-3, 7 (FA:ED II 577).
- 24 Bonaventure, LMj 6 (FA:ED II 568-576).
- 25 *Libri moralium*, l. 18, c. 38, n. 50 (PL 76, 70).
- 26 Bonaventure, LMj 8, 11 (FA:ED II 594).
- 27 *In Evangelia*, l. 2, Homilia 34, nn. 10 and 14 (PL 76, 1251, 1255); *Libri moralium*, l. 4, c. 29, n. 55 (PL 75, 665).
- 28 *De coelesti hierarchia*, c. 7, n. 1 (PG 3, 206); see Gregory, *In Evangelia*, l. 2, homilia 34, n. 14 (PL 76, 1255).
- 29 *De consideratione*, l. 5, c. 5, n. 12 (PL 182, 795).
- 30 The Latin text has *in peace*.

- <sup>31</sup> NRSV has *discerning good and evil*
- <sup>32</sup> Bonaventure, LMj 9, 6 (FA:ED II 600).
- <sup>33</sup> See Julian of Speyer, *Officium S. Francisci*, n. 18, Antiphona 5 ad Laudes: 'He called birds, beasts and other creatures to the praise of the Creator' (in *Analecta Franciscana*, vol. 10, 383).
- <sup>34</sup> Bonaventure, LMj 10, 1-4 (FA:ED II 605-608).
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 13, 3 (FA:ED II 632).
- <sup>36</sup> Hugo de S. Victore, *De arrha animae* (PL 176, 954), the sense of the passage is quoted.
- <sup>37</sup> Bonaventure, LMj 13, 3 (FA:ED II 633).

## SECOND SERMON ON ST FRANCIS<sup>1</sup>

*So God created humankind in his image* [Gen 1:27]. Among all the saints of whom we read both in the Old and the New Testaments, and whom the Scriptures of both Testaments commemorate as being conformed to and like God, blessed Francis was conformed to and like Jesus Christ because he was sealed with the stigmata of the Crucified. As humans were made in God's image at the beginning of the world, so at the end of time God formed a singular man in the likeness of the Crucified so that the image of God almost lost, darkened and deformed in the first man, was, as it were, repaired and reformed in Francis.

So it is fitting to praise him by using the text quoted above, namely: *So God created humankind in his image*. In this text three things are described and commended, namely, the grandeur of the author, the dignity of the work, and the conformity to the word. *God created* and who is grander? *Humankind* was created and what is nobler among creatures? *In his image* was humankind created for who is more like to and more conformed to God? According to Augustine an image is an express likeness.<sup>2</sup> But since it does not seem much to say that Francis was created in God's image, for God so created all humankind, we are to understand the word created to mean that God repaired and restored the image [in Francis] by a special grace. We read: *When you send forth your spirit they are created* etc. [Ps 104:30]. When it is said that God created a man, the meaning is that Francis did not destroy or deviate from the rules of nature, as do many who fall from the dignity of human nature and degenerate into an almost bestial way of life. We read: *Mortals cannot abide in their pomp, they are like the animals that perish* [Ps 49:12 and 20]. When it is said that God created Francis in his image, it means that Francis was sealed and configured to the sign of the passion in accord with what John himself saw: *an angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God* [Rev 7:2].

The text says: *So God created humankind in his image*. We should then look to see how the image of God was perfectly repaired and reformed in blessed Francis and how it is repaired in each of us.

In works of art I find six ways by which an image is made. An image can be made by putting things together as with clay; by cutting and taking away as in sculpture; by arrangement and colouring as in painting; by an impression as in seals; by reflection as in a mirror; by joining together and by a kind of transformation as in things that can be fused together and made liquid. In these six ways, each step taken in order, as far as it is possible in this life, one arrives at and produces a perfect image of and conformity to God. By composition the image is made by justification; by sculpture when earthly goods are given up; by colouring when virtues conformable to Christ are imitated; by impression in a vehement, zealous and attentive remembering and reflection on the divine gifts; by reflection in a contemplation or observation of what is above; by joining together and a transfusion in a strong and ecstatic sweetness.

I. Firstly, a mind is reformed and restored to the image of God by a work of art or it is formed by justification or in justification. We see potters who make things out of clay, work with the clay and make the image they want; in this way in its first creation human beings were made in the image of God. Just as a potter fashions vessels and makes figures so God fashioned and shaped the human species. We read: *He who fashions the hearts of them all* [Ps 33:15]; *O Lord, we are the clay, and you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand* [Isa 64:8]; *Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness* [Gen 1:26]. According to Hilary,<sup>3</sup> this text of Genesis expresses the mystery of the divine union in its essence and the mystery of the Trinity of persons. In the words *let us make* and *our*, the plurality of persons is indicated; in the word *image* in the singular, the unity of substance is indicated.<sup>4</sup> Over the natural image, called the image of creation consisting in three natural powers and in a unity of substance, there is superimposed an image of grace, called an image of recreation, consisting in the three theological virtues and a unity of grace.<sup>5</sup> But by sin the image of grace or repair was totally banished: *You shall bring their image to nothing* [Ps 72:20 DRB; 73:20 NRSV]. Although the image of creation was not totally destroyed because *surely man passes as a shadow* [Ps 38:7 DRB; 39:6 NRSV], it

was still greatly deformed and darkened. For sin is the privation of the way, the image and the natural order<sup>6</sup> by which a rational nature represents God; so it was necessary that the God who created must recreate, who made must remake, who fashioned must refashion, who shaped and joined together must reshape.

So, sinners, look and reflect because by sin you have wiped out the image of grace and deformed the image of nature. Call out to God, utter a cry of contrition. Say: Lord, you made me, I destroyed myself, remake me; you formed me, I disfigured myself, reform me into your image and perchance the God who by the Word and Spirit made you, will remake you. This is indicated in a prophecy:

*So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him [Jer 18:3-4].*

The potter is God: *Like clay in the hand of the potter, so all are in the hand of their Maker [Sir 33:13].* The house is eternal wisdom in which are the diverse patterns of things to be made. This potter works on a wheel, that is, the potter made human nature able to turn with free will; but this vessel was spoiled by sin. God, moved by mercy, made another vessel because God remade it by grace in a way pleasing to God's eyes. This grace is completely free, not due to merit, *otherwise grace would no longer be grace [Rom 11:6].*

When blessed Francis saw that there was a stain on his mind from his earthly way of life and that it caused the beauty of the divine image in him to be deformed, he began to withdraw from the world, to avoid the company of others, to seek out solitary places suitable for grieving;<sup>7</sup> he filled dens and caves with groans as he deplored his former life and called on God: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me [Ps 51:10].* He did this and *the Father of mercies [2 Cor 1:3]* looked on him, poured into him a spirit to recreate, reform and renew him since the Father changed him into another man. We read of this image: *God created man of the earth, and made him after his own image. And he turned him into it again, and clothed him with strength according to himself*

[Sir 17:1-2 DRB]. God created human beings from the earth for the formation of the body because God formed us from the dust of the earth [Gen 2:7]. For the natural beauty of the soul God created us in the image of God and by adding freely given gifts God clothed us in virtue.

II. Secondly, a soul is reformed in the image of God like an image made by sculpture, by cutting and taking away as we give up and put aside all earthly things. We see sculptors break open, remove and cut off from any rough and shapeless material, be it wood or stone, what is not needed to shape the object; it seems that the object is hidden in the material, only needing to be discovered, as the author of the *Sex principiorum*<sup>8</sup> says that the form is from nature but it is made tangible and visible by art. But this opinion is doubtful. In the same way a rational soul should shed all that is superfluous so as to go back to its natural beauty and then the dignity of the divine image might appear. What is superfluous? Everything foreign to the nature of the soul, that is, everything temporal and earthly: worldly superiority, wealth, joy, friendship and even worldly wisdom. Even though such things are good in themselves, they are inferior to and less noble than a soul and so they soil a soul. Augustine<sup>9</sup> says:

A thing becomes defiled if it is mixed with a baser substance, even though that other substance be not vile in its own nature; for instance, gold is debased by pure silver if it is mixed with it. So also is our mind defiled by a desire for the things of earth, although the earth itself is pure in its own class and in its own order.

He says<sup>10</sup> also:

The dissimilarity of our soul to incorporeal, eternal, and immutable Being is measured by our lust for the things that change and pass with time.

O spiritual and simple soul made in the image of God, what do you have in common with what is changeable and temporal? Cut, take and throw away all such things so that you can continue in the

simplicity of your nature and that the image of God that was hidden might be seen. The image of God in a soul is covered and darkened by greed for what is earthly and bodily; then the mind, unable to ignore itself, is not able to think of or find itself. A soul,<sup>11</sup> eager and greedy for bodily things, cannot bring them inside to what is a non bodily area, but draws in their likenesses and images and joins itself to them with such love, that the soul can no longer distinguish itself from them. When then a soul is told to know itself, it does not mean that a soul can be ignorant of itself, but that it should discern and distinguish itself from the images to which it has joined itself by the glue of love. Further, a mind simple and spiritual by nature, from a love of bodily and earthly things becomes so fat and dull that it becomes deformed and swollen, unable to enter the simplicity of eternity for which it has no aptitude. So the Lord said: *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God* [Mt 19:24]. Therefore, all things earthly, bodily and temporal are to be torn off, cut away and amputated so that the mind will be suitable for eternity, by becoming conformable to the Person who is supreme and simple and that the beauty of the divine image might appear and shine forth. We read: *To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? An idol? A workman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with silver chains* [Isa 40:18-19]. As if to say: you are not to look for a bodily image in God who is incorporeal and simple. Nothing in God is ill shaped, as Damascene says.<sup>12</sup> A soul does not sculpt in gold or silver the image of God but rather bears this image in itself even though the image is covered over, is in the dark and shaded; so it is that the soul tears away and in a way sculpts the image of God in itself since a soul is naturally like and conformed to this image.

In whom was the image of God more evident than in Francis who despised, cast aside and gave up everything temporal and bodily; he even took off his underclothes which, together with his clothes, he threw back to his father in front of the Bishop.<sup>13</sup> For himself, his posterity and followers, he wanted to have ‘neither house, nor place, nor anything at all’,<sup>14</sup> that he might have an inheritance in heaven and that the *Lord God* alone might be his *inheritance* [Josh 13:33].

Because he was perfectly conformed to God by despising all earthly things, so Christ conformed also his body to be like his.<sup>15</sup>

III. Thirdly, a mind is remade in the image of God like a painting added to or coloured by a perfect imitation of Christlike virtues. Painters or writers have before them patterns from which they paint and form images, draw to scale and add features. In the same way all Christians should have before them the life and conduct of Christ as the pattern for directing and forming their lives and conduct. Moses said: *See that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain* [Ex 25:40]. Just as Christ as the uncreated Word is the pattern of all natural phenomena so, as the incarnate Word, he is the pattern of all moral perfection. The life and conduct of Christ are described in the Gospel. So Christians should form their lives from the Gospel so that, as they read the Gospel, the life of Christ is reflected in their lives and they put on Christ; in this way they can be called and be known truly as Christians. Otherwise they are not Christians, they lie in calling themselves Christians and they should rather be thought of as anti-Christians.

What does the Gospel say of Christ? It says he had perfect humility, perfect kindness and mercy, perfect purity and holiness, perfect love and peace, perfect innocence and patience. These are included in the sign of the cross in which is the depth of humility, the breadth of love, the length of perseverance and the sublimity or height of poverty. The Apostle warns us: *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ* [Rom 13:14], and:

*You have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator* [Col 3:9-10].

And further:

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other* [Col 3:12-13].

As if to say, put off the old way of life that he calls the old self, and put on the new self formed according to the image of Christ as he says in Col 3:9-10: and later he explains this: *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves etc.*

Unfortunately, today we do not see in the temple of God a painted image of Jesus Christ, but rather abominations of idols in the diverse images of beasts. This was prefigured in Ezekiel:

*'Go in, and see the vile abominations that they are committing here.' So I went in and looked; there, portrayed on the wall all around, were all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome animals, all the idols of the house of Israel [Ezek 8:8-10].*

The Apostle explains what these animals are:

*Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or fourfooted animals or reptiles [Rom 1:22-23].*

In the Church he saw one person resembling the fierceness of a lion, another the greed of a wolf, another the deceit of a fox, another the lewdness of a goat, another the rising and vanity of a bird, another the curiosity of a fish, another the covetousness of a snake as if creeping along with the belly and chest on the ground. Each person resembles the idol he or she adores.

It was not so with blessed Francis, the main imitator of Christ, who was a perfect evangelic, apostolic and Christian person. He did not transgress a single letter or stroke of the Gospel [Mt 5:18]. He formed his life and configured himself entirely to the image of the Crucified one. And since he worked to configure himself to Christ and to the cross of Christ, Christ configured him to himself, impressing on his heart the marks of the passion.

IV. Fourthly, a mind is led back and remade in the image of God by an impression like an image impressed by careful, vigorous and continuous remembering and acknowledging of the divine gifts. Just

as an image is impressed on another material by vigorous and strong pressure, so from a vigorous and strong remembering of God and the divine gifts the image of God is imprinted on the mind. But it has to be noted that if the material is solid, durable and firm the impression remains after the pressure; but if the material is flexible, the impression remains only as long as the pressure continues. When the pressure ceases the impression vanishes as is clear with wax and water. Our mind has a flexible quality.<sup>16</sup> The mind is pliable and so for an impression to remain in it there has to be a vigorous pressure from continuous remembering and acknowledgment. Something is impressed by one thought, more is impressed by a second thought, and from repeated, frequent and continuous recalling an impression and image remain, so that when the mind thinks on God as creator, governor, redeemer, the one who forgives sins, especially when the mind thinks of God born, suffered, crucified and dead for it, the thought never leaves the memory, the understanding, the tongue nor the hand. The memory always recalls, the understanding always reflects, the tongue always speaks of Christ and the hand always moves to make the form and sign of the cross. In this way the beloved spoke to the bride: *Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm* [Song 8:8]. The Apostle did this wonderfully *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus* [2 Cor 4:10], and the devout soul does this: *My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh, that lies between my breasts* [Song 1:13].

O soul devoted to Christ, act like the bride holding all the sufferings, sorrows and bitterness of Christ as in a bag of myrrh between your breasts, that is, between your understanding and affections so that the image of the Crucified is effectively imprinted on you. This imagination can be so powerful and vigorous that it also changes the body. The Philosopher says<sup>17</sup> that strong imagination in fowls produces a spur on the shin-bone as in the male. An example of this is found in Scripture, namely, in Genesis 30:37-42. When the shepherd and patriarch Jacob wanted his sheep and goats to bear male offspring, he placed various rods in the troughs where the flock was fed so that, as they looked on the rods in the heat and vigour of copulation, they were affected by a strong

imagination in the soul; their bodies were affected in a similar way and so they conceived and gave birth to spotted offspring.

Since the soul of blessed Francis reflected all the time most affectionately and attentively on the passion of Christ, he thought of Christ crucified with such great and vigorous affection and compassion that the Crucified seemed to him to suffer before his eyes. By divine power it happened that his flesh and body were changed into the same image and likeness and in his body were imprinted the seals of the crucified Christ. The Apostle advises us to such a continuous reflection and remembering: *The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; for that reason the second man is from heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven* [1 Cor 15:47-49]. The first man, Adam, was of the dust, savouring what is worldly, living a worldly way of life; the second man, Christ, is of heaven because his life and conduct are of heaven. So, *just as we have borne the image of the man of dust* in our worldly thoughts, *we will also bear the image of the man of heaven* by our reflection, our remembering and acknowledgment of the divine gifts, especially the gift of Christ, the heavenly man, given to us so that his image might be effectively imprinted on us.

V. Fifthly, a mind is remade and led back to the image of God by a reflection like an image produced by a dedicated and heavenly reflection or contemplation. Each object, placed opposite a mirror, produces and sheds its own likeness so that its image is represented in the mirror or reflected by the mirror. In the same way a mind turned towards the supreme God, directed to God, reflects the rays of eternal truth in itself, and in it is produced an image and likeness of this truth. According to Dionysius<sup>18</sup> and Damascene,<sup>19</sup> a mind has the nature of a mirror.

Turn then, O soul, and direct the mirror of your mind towards eternal truth, contemplate it so that you might be remade in the image of God. Recognize God in everything, from everything think on God, refer everything to God, and do everything for God; never turn the eyes of your mind away from God. Think<sup>20</sup> that some things

only exist; some things exist and are alive; some things exist, are alive and feel; some things exist, are alive, feel and think. Because these last things exist, are alive, feel and think in different ways, and they differ in their essence, life, feeling and intellect, it is necessary that there be a nature that exists, lives, feels and understands in an unchangeable way, so that it exists, lives, feels and understands from itself, and is its own essence, life and wisdom. Look then on this person, direct the eyes of your mind to this person.

Further,<sup>21</sup> think that things that are good and beautiful and are said to be such, are individual objects sharing in goodness and beauty; for this is good and that is good, this is beautiful and that is beautiful. But when you take away this and that object and they are removed you may be able to see the highest good and beauty, namely, God and if you hold on to God in love you will continuously be blessed. Or were you to go outside yourself to this tangible world, you would meet divine wisdom before you; wisdom's footprints are imprinted in every creature because wisdom made all things in number, weight and measure; measure, kind and order. And, as Augustine says,<sup>22</sup> for every existing thing there is something responsible for its existing, something responsible for its distinguishing mark, and something responsible for its coherence, and so everything displays a threefold cause. Or were you to withdraw within yourself, the image of the Trinity is even clearer to you in the memory, intellect and will, for the mind, knowledge and love exist in the unity of the substance of a rational soul. Or were you to go above yourself, reflecting, thinking and loving God, you would be conformed all the more to God and the image of the Trinity would be reflected in you. For, as Augustine says<sup>23</sup>:

Hence, this trinity of the mind is not on that account the image of God because the mind remembers itself, understands itself, and loves itself, but because it can also remember, understand, and love Him by whom it was made.

By reflecting and contemplating on this in the face of the mind as in a mirror, the image of God is formed or reformed by conversion as the Apostle says:

*And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another [2 Cor 3:18].*<sup>24</sup>

He says: *And all of us seeing the glory of the Lord*, that is, we are not in the dark, nor bent towards the ground but walking upright, not like those *who have set their eyes bowing down to the earth* [Ps 16:11 DRB; 17:11 NRSV]. What is the glory of the Lord that we see? The glory of the Lord is that the Father generates the Son, the Father and the Son spirate the Holy Spirit. By meditating on this glory of the Lord, that is, on the Trinity itself in whose image we are made, we are *transformed into the same image*, because from a damaged form we are changed into a beautiful and handsome form. So the image is remade *from one degree of glory to another*; from the glory of life here to the glory of heaven; from the glory of grace to the glory in heaven; from the glory of faith to the glory of vision.

Blessed Francis, a contemplative person, recognized God in all things, praised God in all things, referred everything to God, and acted for the sake of God. Like an eagle, he meditated on God without turning aside the eyes of his mind, and so was perfectly transformed into God, not only in his mind but also in his flesh.

VI. Sixthly, a mind is remade, led and brought back to a perfect image of God by fusion or transformation, like an image fused or transformed, through exceeding and ecstatic love. Just as workers in metal liquefy metals in fire and transform the liquid metal into the form and shape of some image, so a mind enkindled and inflamed by the fire of divine love becomes liquid and faint, like the bride in the Song of Solomon: *My soul failed me when he spoke* [Song 5:6]; and: *Tell him this: I am faint with love* [Song 5:8]. In this way a person, faint and liquefied, leaves itself and goes towards God. Dionysius says<sup>25</sup>: ‘Divine love provokes ecstasy, it does not recognize those who love themselves, but those who love the One who should be loved’. Because love is the life of a soul, by loving only God rather

than itself, the soul dies to itself, languishes and goes towards God. Love raises the mind, by raising the mind it unites, by uniting it assimilates, by assimilating it transforms the soul into the one loved. Hugo says<sup>26</sup>: I know, my soul, that love is your life and that by the power of love you are transformed into the likeness of the one you love, just as liquid metal is transformed into money. It is necessary that the soul be like what it loves. If the soul loves what is earthly it becomes worldly; for, as Augustine says<sup>27</sup>: If you love chaff, you become chaff. If God is loved fervently and strongly, the soul becomes completely divine, according to the Apostle: *Anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him* [1 Cor 6:17]. Therefore, by ecstatic love the mind is conformed to God and perfectly remade in the image of God and the soul is numbered among those of whom the Apostle speaks: *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son* [Rom 8:29].

Blessed Francis, a seraphic person, concentrated most ardently on God in an excess of love, loving God *with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength* [Mk 12:30]. From his fervour and love he was completely melted [Song 5:6], totally directed towards God and most perfectly transformed into God. Nevertheless, from the force of his compassionate love, his soul was wounded with Christ, the sword of the passion pierced it [Lk 2:35], so that he could say with the Apostle: *I have been crucified with Christ* [Gal 2:19]. In a similar way his love also wounded and marked his flesh so that it was completely transformed into a likeness and image of the Crucified. The *Legend*<sup>28</sup> relates that at one time, while he was fasting at La Verna during the Lent of the angels, near to the feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross, he was at prayer with mind raised up to God. As he prayed with seraphic fervour of desires, he saw a Seraph coming down from heaven through the air in the image of the Crucified. The angel approached the Saint and revealed to him *things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat* [2 Cor 12:4]. As the Seraph spoke Francis received the seal of the holy stigmata imprinted by God so that he could say the words spoken perhaps prophetically by the Apostle: *From now on let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body*

[Gal 6:17]. From this conformity he has today moved to a conformity of glory. The image is implanted in nature, deformed by sin, reformed by grace, but perfected in glory. May Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever, lead us to this glory.

## Notes

- 1 See Bonaventure, *De S. Patre nostro Francisco*, sermo III, *Opera omnia*, Quaracchi, 1901, 582-585.
- 2 *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Question 74, FOTC, vol. 70, 189.
- 3 *The Trinity*, book 4, nn. 17-18 and book 5, nn. 7-9, FOTC, vol. 25, 106-108 and 139-141.
- 4 P. Lombard, *Liber 1 Sententiarum*, d. 2, c. 4, 1971, 64.
- 5 P. Lombard, *Glossa* on Ps 4:6 and Ps 80:17 (PL 191, 88 and 842).
- 6 According to Augustine, *De natura boni*, c. 4, evil 'is nothing other than the corruption of the way, or of the image or of the natural order' (PL 42, 553).
- 7 Bonaventure, LMj 1, 5 (FA:ED II 534).
- 8 Cap. 1, n. 4: 'I say that the object is from nature but it is seen by the work' (ed. A. Heysse, *Opuscula et Textus*, VII, Monasterii 1929, 10).
- 9 *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, book 2, ch. 13, n. 44, FOTC, vol. 11, 152-153.
- 10 *The City of God*, book 9, ch. 17, FOTC, vol. 14, 105.
- 11 See Augustine, *The Trinity*, book 10, ch. 5, n. 7 and ch. 8, n. 11, FOTC, vol. 45, 301 and 305; also Matthew of Aquasparta, *Quaestiones de cognitione*, q. 3, arg. 2 and ad 2 (BFS I, ed. 2, Quaracchi 1957, 249 and 268).
- 12 *De fide orthodoxa*, l. 4, c. 16 (PG 94, 1171).
- 13 Bonaventure, LMj 2, 4 (FA:ED II 538).
- 14 Francis, LR 6, 1 (FA:ED I 103).
- 15 Namely, by the holy stigmata impressed on his body.
- 16 See J. Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, l. 1, c. 3 (PG 94, 795); see below page 27, notes 4 and 5.
- 17 Aristotle, *De animalibus historiae*, l. 9, c. 49, *Opera*, ed. A.F. Didot, vol. 3, Paris 1854, 206.
- 18 *De coelesti hierarchia*, c. 3, n. 2 (PG 3, 166) where the text speaks of angels.
- 19 See *De fide orthodoxa*, l. 2, c. 3 (PG 94, 867), where also the text speaks of angels.
- 20 See Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will*, book 2, ch. 6, FOTC, vol. 59, 123; *The City of God*, book 8, ch. 6, FOTC, vol. 14, 33.

- <sup>21</sup> See Augustine, *The Trinity*, book 8, ch. 3, n. 5, FOTC, vol. 45, 1963, 249.
- <sup>22</sup> *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Question 18, FOTC, vol. 70, 1977, 46.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Trinity*, book 14, ch. 12, FOTC, vol. 45, 432.
- <sup>24</sup> See P. Lombard, *Glossa* on this text (PL 92, 28-29).
- <sup>25</sup> *De divinis nominibus*, c. 4, n. 13 (PG 3, 711).
- <sup>26</sup> Hugo de S. Victore, *De arrha animae* (PL 176, 954).
- <sup>27</sup> The reference has not been found.
- <sup>28</sup> Bonaventure, LMj 13, 3 (FA:ED II 632).





### THIRD SERMON

*Abraham is our father* [Jn 8:39]. It is customary and natural for children to glory in the nobility, deeds and character of their parents. This glory is not useless because often children are held back and refrain from evil lest they seem to be unworthy. They are stirred, animated and impelled to good so as to be seen as imitators of their parents. Among all peoples the Lesser Brothers can glory in their father, since their father is Francis, a person of wonderful perfection and most noteworthy merit who was prefigured by Abraham, the main Patriarch. As almost all the words of the ancient Fathers were prophetic, so their deeds were mystical, and they prefigured the Fathers of today. Abraham prefigured blessed Francis in his conformity of life and merit.

In the text quoted above blessed Francis is commended and described in two ways: firstly, in his perfection of life: *Abraham*. Among all the Fathers of that era Abraham was the leader in merit and perfection of life. Secondly, in the setting up of a religious way of life: *our father*. It is customary to call the founders of religious orders and monasteries fathers, and so we say a certain abbot was the father of many monasteries, as many say of Gregory.<sup>1</sup> Lest we forget this father and wander from his footprints, Isaiah the prophet calls us to meditate on and imitate him: *Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you* [Isa 51:2].

The text says: *Abraham is our father*. There were twelve qualities in Abraham, like the twelve stars in the crown of the woman [Rev 12:1], and these qualities shone forth most brightly in blessed Francis for which reason he is fittingly prefigured by Abraham.

I. The first quality, like a star, was a humble opinion of himself. Humility, according to Augustine<sup>2</sup> and Bernard<sup>3</sup> ‘is a virtue by which one with completely exact knowledge thinks of oneself as worthless’. Every creature of itself is nothing since it is made from nothing and would turn back to nothing without the protection of the Creator, according to Augustine<sup>4</sup> and Gregory.<sup>5</sup> Besides this

nothingness of nature, human nature has a nothingness and baseness of sin and misfortune: *A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble* [Job 14:1]. If a rational creature turns the eye of the heart to reflect on its nothingness and baseness and then looks up to reflect on the divine and sublime majesty, the creature must acknowledge divine majesty as the principle, the source of all good, that on which all good depends and belongs and that which preserves it. By doing this a creature merits to progress. But if a creature presumes on itself, thinking it is something of importance, attributing, claiming for itself and considering the goods that it has as its own, and wants to be the source of such goods, then such a creature is necessarily distancing itself from the true source and is failing in itself. And so the more a person thinks of himself or herself as vile, the greater in fact is the person; and the more a person thinks of himself or herself as great, the viler and more abject is the person.<sup>6</sup> From this follows something wonderful but true, namely, humility that seems to put down but in fact exalts; and pride that seems to exalt but humiliates as spoken so truly by the Lord: *For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted* [Lk 14:11]. Look at the example of Lucifer [Isa 14:12] and the first man who were cast down because of their pride, and Christ who was exalted because of his humility [Phil 2:9].

Who was humbler in his opinion of himself than Abraham who said he was but dust and ashes, than which nothing is more vile or abject. When he prayed for his people in Sodom he said: *Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes* [Gen 18:27]. Who is humbler than Francis who wanted to be put down by others and spoken ill of, and he rejoiced in this contempt. We read in the *Legend*,<sup>7</sup> that he thought of himself as the greatest of all sinners, not pretending but truthfully, not superficially but deeply, saying that there is no other sinner so vile that, had God given this sinner the graces he had received, this sinner would have been better than he. Moreover, he said that if graces had been withheld from him as they are from another, he would be the vilest of all. Therefore, in himself and of himself he was the vilest of all sinners. That he was not the

vilest sinner was not due to him but to the grace of God; for this humility he wanted his followers to be called ‘Lesser Brothers’.<sup>8</sup>

II. The second quality, like another star, was the way he held and assented to the faith without doubting. Such an assent to faith is impossible without humility. Only a humble mind held in obedience to truth can give an assent to the first truth for its own sake in matters beyond nature, beyond understanding that cannot be reached by any of the senses or gasped by reason [2 Cor 10:5]. From pride come all errors, strange opinions, impious and profane novelties. But a humble mind assents to truth for its own sake and believes even those things it cannot see. This is completely necessary, not only for faith but for human society. I say for human society because if we accepted only what can be seen by the senses or understood by the mind, then every human action, every human contract, every bond or agreement of loyalty, every statement of truth would become void; did it not take too long this could easily be explained.<sup>9</sup> Faith is completely necessary for salvation because of the weakness of human understanding unable as it is by reason alone to reach an understanding not only of what is divine but even of natural phenomena and their causes. Faith is necessary also because of the excellence of the divine intellect that in its divine power, wisdom, goodness, justice and mercy surpasses human understanding, otherwise a creature would be equal to the Creator. Faith is necessary for the natural order of a creature and so a creature must cling to the highest good for its own sake and against its natural appetites just as the mind must cling to the highest truth. Faith is necessary for a creature’s final perfection, eternal happiness that exceeds every power of a creature; this perfection cannot be reached without faith just as one cannot finish a journey unless the way is known or one is content to be led by one who knows the way. This faith and belief is the first basis for justification because it is the first basis of the union, the coming together and belonging of a rational creature with God. For this reason, the Apostle says of this Patriarch: *Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness* [Rom 4:3]; *and he was called a friend of God* [Jas 2:23]. The same is said in

Galatians 3:6 and Judith 8:22 [DRB] and these texts are based on Genesis 15:6. Abraham believed the divine promises about his heir; he believed the divine commands. He was the first to name and confess explicitly the mystery of the Trinity. When the Lord appeared to him in the form of three men, as is stated in the text, he saw three and adored one,<sup>10</sup> since while there were three he spoke as if to one [Gen 18:1-3].

Who is more faithful, sincere, simple than Francis who believed most strongly in all that faith teaches, namely, God one and three, our Lord Jesus Christ true God and true man? He was always zealous for this faith and most strongly wanted to die for it. And so just as Abraham *received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith* [Rom 4:11], so too did blessed Francis; Abraham was sealed in a Christ yet to be born, and so he was sealed in the genitals of generation, but Francis was sealed with Christ crucified in the limbs of his passion.

III. The third quality, like another star, was the sublime height and building up of hope for which faith disposes and without which hope cannot exist. A rational creature destined by nature for happiness believes in God the highest truth, the highest good and the one who makes happy; this creature is built up and raised up and in some way assisted to desire and wait for this happiness. When grace is added to this desire, true hope is born in those who add to grace the works of which they are capable. For 'hope is a waiting for future happiness that comes from the grace of God and from merit'.<sup>11</sup> When grace and merit are lacking it is not hope but presumption. Just as faith enlightens so hope strengthens; faith begins, hope develops. Is not a person hopeful of receiving life eternal from merits, animated, spurred on and on fire to do and choose great things? When hope goes nothing good is done, nothing evil is avoided. Such negligence and lessening of effort is a sign of a lessening of hope since it is hope that leads us to work for eternal life. A farmer ploughs and cultivates the ground in the hope of a harvest: *Whoever ploughs should plough in hope* [1 Cor 9:10]; a merchant engages in business in hope of a return and has to submit to untold labours; a sailor navigates in the

hope of reaching port and can we hope to receive eternal life for a minimum of work? This holy Patriarch has the most vital hope and the Apostle says of him:

*Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become ‘the father of many nations’. He did not consider his own body which was already as good as dead, nor the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith [Rom 4:18-21].*

Because of the divine promise he hoped for what was hopeless in nature, namely, that from an old and barren woman a child would be born and that through and by this child a nation of the faithful would grow in numbers. In this he hoped for the redemption of the human race, the increase and spread of the Church and final glory through the Lord’s passion.

Francis imitated him in this hope. If the proof of great and lively hope is to do great things and take on what is difficult, who took on such great and difficult tasks as Francis?

IV. The fourth quality, as another star, was his devout and pious veneration or reverence of the first principle. This veneration was to be seen in the ritual of worship. Worship is piety, honour, service or ritual due only to God<sup>12</sup> in adoration, sacrifice, praise and thanksgiving. It is to be shown only to God as the one, first and highest principle, and to this all rites and ecclesiastical observances are to lead. The holy Patriarch was the main worshipper of God. The story of Genesis tells in many chapters that he built many altars and offered sacrifices [Gen 12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9-13].

But Francis adored the *Father in spirit and truth* [Jn 4:23], not offering victims of cattle but the sacrifice of a contrite heart [see Ps 50:13; 51:17; Heb 13:15], in praise and thanksgiving. Recognizing, affirming and confessing that God is the principle of all things, that his footprints are seen in all things, he praised God for and in all things, as we sing of him: ‘Whatever he found sweet in things, he referred to the glory of the Maker’.<sup>13</sup> Today, how few are true

worshippers of God and how many are idolaters serving *the creature, rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever* [Rom 1:25]. Some whose *god is their belly* [Phil 3:19] make delicacies a god; some make a god of themselves seeking their own glory and praise [Jn 7:18]; some, which is worse, make a god of demons as do people dedicated to divination, necromancy and other such superstitions. They submit themselves to demons and sacrifice to them so as to get a response from them.

V. The fifth quality, like another star, was his prompt and obedient carrying out of the divine commands. Obedience should be prompt, pure and voluntary, without argument, dispute, murmuring, rebellion or force. A subject should not dispute a command from God, obey unwillingly nor drag out delays, but be completely spontaneous and voluntary whenever anything serious or difficult is commanded. Augustine says<sup>14</sup>: ‘Leave the reason for the command in the Lord’s hands. He who is His servant must do His bidding, and then perhaps by the merit of his obedience he will have grounds for seeing the reason of God’s command’, so that one can say: *My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast* [Ps 57:7]. How precious it should be to a person to be ordered by God to do something!

Holy Abraham was an example of such obedience for when God, intending to test Abraham, called him: *Abraham*, and he replied: *here I am*, God said to him: *Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you* [Gen 22:1-3]. Abraham did not doubt, dispute nor delay but immediately got up in the night and prepared to obey the order. Taking fire, wood and a sword, he hurried to the place to sacrifice his only and beloved son in whom he was to receive the promise. But the Lord forbade him and gave him a ram to offer in sacrifice instead of his son [Gen 22:11-13]. Augustine says,<sup>15</sup> obedience is greater when what is ordered is more difficult, and so the obedience of Abraham was great because the obedience was against nature involving his son, and against his affections because the obedience involved his only and beloved son. You may ask could he not have doubted the order since

he was ordered to do something wrong? I reply<sup>16</sup>: some things are wrong in and of themselves, for example, something contrary to the commandments on the first tablet that immediately concern God; God cannot order such things for they are directly against God. Other things are wrong because they are wrong in themselves but not of themselves, for example, things contrary to the commandments of the second tablet that are not immediately concerned with God but with our neighbour; God can order such things as when God ordered Hosea to take a wife who was a harlot [Hos 1:2]. The order given to Abraham was of this second kind. So whatever God orders is to be done without delay no matter how much it seems to be wrong in itself, as Augustine says.<sup>17</sup> It is said of the obedience of Abraham: *Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and he kept the law of the Most High* [Sir 44:19-20].

Who was more prompt in obedience than Francis who wanted to observe not only the precepts but who also wanted to oblige himself and his followers to observe the counsels? He wanted to obey not only his superiors but also his companions,<sup>18</sup> and he bound his followers to the highest peak of obedience, namely, to obey their superiors in all things not contrary to God and their soul.<sup>19</sup> Because he submitted himself in all things to the wish of the Creator, irrational creatures obeyed his wish.<sup>20</sup>

VI. The sixth quality, like another star, was a true and affectionate love of neighbour. True and affectionate love is proven by compassion for a soul by coming to its aid in worship and in a benefit conferred, in preserving and upholding peace for a condemned person. A true lover of a neighbour suffers with a sufferer, helps when possible a person in need not only in the body but more in the spirit because spiritual need and misfortune are worse than bodily need. The holy Patriarch was moved with great compassion when the Lord revealed to him the destruction of Sodom:

*‘Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who*

are in it?’ And the Lord said: ‘If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake’ [Gen 18:24-26].

Abraham persisted before the Lord: ‘Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose forty are found there?’ [Gen 18: 27 and 29]. And the Lord said: ‘For the sake of forty I will not do it’ [Gen 18:29]. From persistence in prayer, the number was brought down to ten.

May we foster and preserve peace, may we support and tolerate weakness in our neighbours as the Apostle asks: *Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ* [Gal 6:2]; here the Apostle calls love the law of Christ. Because Abraham and his nephew Lot were rich in cattle, possessions and tents but were not able to live together, a quarrel broke out between their shepherds. Abraham said to Lot:

*Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left* [Gen 13:8-9].

Francis did not lack this quality. What affection he showed not only to rational creatures but also to irrational creatures and because he saw in them signs of the Trinity he called them brothers and sisters.<sup>21</sup> A poor soldier<sup>22</sup> was a witness to his compassion for the unfortunate, especially sinners,<sup>23</sup> and his kindness and generosity towards the needy. He personally served lepers washing their ulcers and wiping away the pus.<sup>24</sup> He kept and sought peace with everyone, and in all his preaching proclaimed peace choosing peace as his greeting for everyone.<sup>25</sup>

VII. The seventh quality, like another star, was his cautious, prudent and guarded avoidance of danger. Often the careless are trapped by dangers. Who could list how many dangers, coming both

from the enemy and from other people, threaten us and have to be prudently avoided? There is much need for prudence and caution.

Abraham displayed such caution when he went down to Egypt [Gen 12:10-20]. Fearing he would be killed because his wife, Sarai, was very beautiful he asked her to call herself his sister. When the Egyptians saw her, they told Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, of her beauty and brought her into Pharaoh's house. Because of Sarai they treated Abraham well. But God stopped Pharaoh from touching her in any way. God afflicted Pharaoh with severe plagues so that he realized Sarai was the wife of Abraham. After Pharaoh asked Abraham why he had said Sarai was his sister he gave her back to Abraham. An almost identical thing happened to Abimelech, king of Gerar, who was warned in a similar way not to touch her and he gave her back to Abraham [Gen 20:1-13]. Abraham said to him that he had called Sarai his sister from a fear of death and, moreover, she was in fact his sister since she was a daughter of his father but not of his mother. In all this Abraham cautiously avoided danger, being wary of human intentions, and entrusted the purity of his wife to God. Augustine says<sup>26</sup>: This was the reticence of a man, 'trusting God, not tempting God, as would have been the case had he not taken every precaution he could to ward off the danger'.

Such cautious care and prudent caution was in Francis, for he avoided most carefully the intentions of demons and other people.<sup>27</sup>

VIII. The eighth quality, like another star, was a zeal for correct judgment, something most necessary. One must love others but not their errors; nature is to be loved but sin is to be hated most zealously. Not to be zealous for God's honour is proof of not loving God, and not to detest sin in a neighbour is proof of not loving a neighbour. Whoever loves a neighbour for something that the neighbour hates in him or herself, shows not love but hate. This is to love in a sinful way, since *he that loves iniquity hates his own soul* [Ps 10:6 DRB; NRSV 11:5]. A just person must detest, pursue and punish evil in oneself and in others with great zeal, unflinchingly and with vigour and rigour. If any evil is seen in the Church it must be corrected, and if this is impossible one must lament and be sorry for

it. This is zeal and ordered judgment. Sometimes good people tolerate and hide the sins of sinful people among whom they live, and such good people are to be punished and condemned together with the sinful people, as Augustine says.<sup>28</sup> What of people who encourage, commend and praise sinners, for we read: *For the sinner is praised in the desires of his soul, and the unjust man is blessed, but the sinner has provoked the Lord* [Ps 9:23-24 DRB; 10:3-4 NRSV]? Often they see just and innocent people oppressed by tyrants, yet like *silent dogs* [Isa 56:10] they do not call out, nor do they fight back when they see wolves attacking the flock of the Lord, and even the pastors of the Church flee to the harm of their souls [see Jn 10:12].

Not such was the holy Patriarch Abraham. We read that four kings went to war against the king of Sodom, plundered all his goods as well as capturing Lot, the nephew of Abraham, and seized his goods [Gen 14:1-20]. On hearing this, the great zealot could not bear the news and with his servants he followed and fought them. He brought back Lot and recovered the possessions of Lot and his people. On returning victorious, *Melchizedek, a priest of God Most High, brought out gifts of bread and wine and blessed him; and Abraham gave him one tenth of everything* [Gen 14:18-20]. A great mystery is hidden in this, a mystery that cannot now be explained,<sup>29</sup> but the great zeal of this most holy Patriarch is clear in this incident. In brief, without zeal no one can be a person of courage, something especially recommended by the holy people in Scripture such as Moses, Phinehas, Elijah, Elisha, Judas Maccabeus, John the Baptist, the most meek Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ himself, Peter and Paul and so on.

In a special way this zeal was strong in Francis who boldly and undaunted accused sinners, and while he was most gentle, he punished the sins of his brothers most rigidly and strictly. On one occasion he threw into the fire the habit of a disobedient brother.<sup>30</sup> There are many examples in the *Legend* of this most correct zeal.<sup>31</sup>

IX. The ninth quality, like another star, was contempt for all worldly pleasure. Everything worldly and all that belongs to the world has to be rejected, despised and left behind so that the mind can

quickly and perfectly be centred on God. This applies to what concerns wealth, rank and pleasures. For, as Gregory says<sup>32</sup> : ‘the more a mind is separated from love for what is above, the more it delights in what is below’.

This great holy Patriarch despised the world and was great in his turning from what is worldly so that he lived in the world as a pilgrim and stranger [see 1 Pet 2:11], was not held by any bond or baggage because his thoughts were above, directed towards God. We read that the Lord said to him: *Abraham, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you’*. *So Abraham went, as the Lord told him* [Gen 12:1 and 4]. *From your country*, to despise riches; *and your kindred*, to despise rank because the regard of kindred and friends for him might lead him to think of himself as someone great and excellent; *from his father’s house*, to despise pleasures for in the father’s house a person often has more delights.

If someone were to ask how I can say that he despised pleasure when pleasure is most intense in touch<sup>33</sup> and he had not only wives but also mistresses, the answer is: Augustine says,<sup>34</sup> that Abraham had a most perfect habit of love and could easily have remained continent, but, from a divine command and to increase the number of people for the worship of God, he used the marriage act. Augustine says<sup>35</sup>: ‘Here is a man dealing with woman as a man should – restraint in regard to his wife, no taint in connection with the maid, giving to none any cause for complaint’.

Who despised the world more than Francis who chose for himself and his followers the strictest poverty, wanting to own nothing at all in this world and wanting to keep chastity and purity completely unharmed? So he wanted his sons not only to abstain from the act of marriage but even to avoid suspicious situations.<sup>36</sup> Because chastity is protected by mortification of the flesh, he *crucified the flesh with its passions and desires* [Gal 5:24], so that he might keep his spirit in purity. There are innumerable examples of this in the *Legend*<sup>37</sup> and *Life*,<sup>38</sup> and there is still available evidence of great value. He was most careful to avoid praise and human favours, ordinarily so pleasing to the children of this world.<sup>39</sup>

X. The tenth quality, as another star, was an ecstasy of heavenly contemplation. A spirit removed from the world, freed from the burden of earthly possessions, is easily raised up and lifted towards God; sometimes it is not so much lifted up as snatched up even to the third heaven where it hears *things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat* [2 Cor 12:4], and with an eye cleansed of sordid desires for what is worldly it sees unchangeable truth. The Saviour said: *Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God* [Mt 5:8].

And so God appeared frequently to this most holy Patriarch and in a familiar way revealed to him mysteries of God's secrets as is explicitly stated in many chapters of Genesis.<sup>40</sup> In this contemplation Abraham was given knowledge of future events. So God called Abraham a prophet. When the king of Gerar took Abraham's wife, whom Abraham had called his sister, the Lord said to the king: *Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet* [Gen 20:7], that is, a person who knows future events by divine revelation.

Who was more exalted, higher, more swept up in contemplation than Francis who was often seen raised above the ground in prayer and contemplation,<sup>41</sup> a sign surely of the mind being lifted up? He was led to the Maker and Creator by all things. Even though he was simple and without learning, such was the brightness of his understanding that he understood not only Scripture, but expounded the obscurities in Scripture, brought hidden things to light, examined what was deep and explained difficulties more clearly, and he also forecast future events and opened secrets of hearts. No one should doubt that he had a spirit of prophecy.<sup>42</sup>

XI. The eleventh quality, as another star, was his trust in the divine promise. Holy people who suffer tribulations and afflictions for love of God are consoled by God's promises.

Holy Abraham received from God most certain promises about the number of his descendents and the obtaining of the inheritance, as recorded in many chapters of Genesis, namely, chapters 12-13, 15, 17-18, 22. His descendents were not only of the flesh but also

spiritual descendents, and the inheritance was not only on earth but also in heaven. This was fulfilled in Christ:

*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, 'And to offsprings', as of many; but it says, 'And to your offspring', that is, to one person, who is Christ [Gal 3:16].*

And later: *But God granted it to Abraham through the promise.*

In a similar way, Francis received in a revelation from God a promise about the growth or spread of the Order and of its enduring until the end.<sup>43</sup>

XII. The twelfth quality, like the twelfth star, was a longsuffering and patient acceptance of misfortune, in which is the completion and achievement of perfection, indeed of all virtue: *By your endurance you will gain your souls [Lk 21:19]; and: But the one who endures to the end will be saved [Mt 10:22].* There is no gain in beginning or continuing unless one finishes in perseverance. We read of the Patriarch that he was an example for enduring difficulties:

*They must remember how our father Abraham was tempted, and being proved by many tribulations, was made the friend of God. So Isaac, so Jacob, so Moses, and all that have pleased God, passed through many tribulations, remaining faithful [Jdt 8:22-23],*

and: *And when Abraham was tested he proved faithful [Sir 44:21].* Some people are friends while things are favourable but go away when conditions are unfavourable; in doing this they prove they are not true friends but like those of whom the Lord said: *They believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away [Lk 8:13].*

Francis endured many troubles, afflictions and sicknesses for the sake of the Lord; he bore these for a long time, persevering steadfastly to the end so that nothing could separate him from divine love. Because of his conformity to these qualities it is fitting to commend Francis by using the words: *Abraham is our father [Jn 8:39].*

May God grant us to be true imitators of this holy Father so that following his footsteps we may reach the everlasting glory he entered today. Amen.

## NOTES

- 1 *Liber dialogorum*, l. 1 (PL 77, 149ff).
- 2 *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 25, n. 16, FOTC, vol. 79, 253: ‘Your humility depends on knowing yourself’.
- 3 *De gradibus humilitatis*, c. 1, n. 2 (PL 182, 942).
- 4 *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, book 4, ch. 12, n. 22, ACW, vol. 41, 117.
- 5 *Libri moralium*, l. 16, c. 37, n. 45 (PL 75, 1143).
- 6 Gregory, *Libri moralium*, l. 18, c. 38, n. 50 (PL 76, 70); Pseudo-Bernard, *De modo bene vivendi*, c. 39 (PL 184, 1260).
- 7 Bonaventure, LMj 6, 6 (FA:ED II 573).
- 8 *Ibid.*, 5 (FA:ED II 572).
- 9 See Augustine, *Confessions*, book 6, ch. 5, n. 7 FOTC, vol. 21, 137; *The Advantage of Believing*, chs. 10-12, nn. 23-27, FOTC, vol. 4, 429; Matthew also has before him his *Quaestiones de fide*, q. 2 (BFS I, ed. 2, Quaracchi 1957, 60-66).
- 10 See Isidore, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum*, in Genesim, c. 14, n. 6 (PL 83, 243); *Glossa ordinaria* in Gen 18:2-3 (PL 113, 125).
- 11 According to the definition of P. Lombard, *Liber III Sententiarum*, d. 26, c. 1, 1971, 671.
- 12 See P. Lombard, *Glossa* on Ps 98:5 (PL 191, 895).
- 13 Julian of Speyer, *Officium S. Francisci*, Antiphona 5 ad 1 Vesperas, in, *Analecta Franciscana*, vol. 10, 375.
- 14 *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, book 8, ch. 13, n. 30, ACW, vol. 42, 53.
- 15 *The City of God*, book 14, ch. 15, FOTC, vol. 14, 385.
- 16 This response is almost verbally the same as in Matthew, *Quaestiones de legibus*, q. 4, ad 7 (ed. C. Piana in BFS XVIII, Quaracchi 1959, 511).
- 17 *Confessions*, book 3, chs. 8-9, n. 15-17, FOTC, vol. 21, 53-67; see also *The City of God*, book 1, ch. 26, FOTC, vol. 8, 60.
- 18 Bonaventure, LMj 6, 4 (FA:ED II 571); Francis, Test 27-29 (FA:ED I 126).
- 19 Francis, LR 10, 1 (FA:ED I 105).
- 20 Bonaventure, LMj 8, 8-11 (FA:ED II 590-595).
- 21 See Thomas of Celano, 2C 124, 165 (FA:ED II 353); Bonaventure, LMj 8, 6 (FA:ED II 590); Francis, CtC (FA:ED I 113-114).
- 22 Bonaventure, LMj 1, 2 (FA:ED II 532).
- 23 *Ibid.*, 8, 1 (FA:ED II 586).

- 24 Ibid., 1, 6; 2, 6(FA:ED II 534 and 539).
- 25 Ibid., 3, 2 and 7 (FA:ED II 543 and 546); Francis, LR 3, 13(FA:ED I 102); Francis, Test 23 (FA:ED I 126).
- 26 *The City of God*, book 16, ch. 19, FOTC, vol. 14, 523.
- 27 See Bonaventure, LMj 10, 3 (FA:ED II 607).
- 28 *The City of God*, book 1, ch. 9, FOTC, vol. 8, 30.
- 29 See *Glossa ordinaria*, in Gen 14:18-19 (PL 113, 120).
- 30 Rather the hood. See Bonaventure, LMj 6, 11 (FA:ED II 576).
- 31 For his zeal for souls see *ibid.*, 3-4, 8 and 12 (FA:ED II 542-559, 586-595 and 622-629).
- 32 *In Evangelia*, l. 2, Homilia 30, n. 2 (PL 76, 1221).
- 33 According to Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*, book 3, n. 10, *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 9, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915, 1118<sup>a</sup>.
- 34 *The City of God*, book 16, ch. 25, FOTC, vol. 14, 533.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 533-534.
- 36 Francis, LR 11, 1 (FA:ED I 106)
- 37 Bonaventure, LMj 5 (FA:ED II 560-568).
- 38 Since Matthew has so consistently referred to the *Major Legend*, the word *Life* can be taken as another reference to this *Legend*; also the evidence referred to could be a reference to details about the life of Francis.
- 39 Bonaventure, LMj 6, 1-2 (FA:ED II 569-570).
- 40 For example Genesis, chapters 12-13, 15, 17-18 and 22.
- 41 Bonaventure, LMj 10, 4 (FA:ED II 607).
- 42 *Ibid.*, 11 (FA:ED II 612-621).
- 43 *Ibid.*, 3, 6 (FA:ED II 545).

# ON THE TRANSFER OF SAINT FRANCIS

## SERMON 1

*Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven* [2 Kings 2:11]. Blessed Francis is one of the saints of the New Testament who was like Elijah and what was said of John the Baptist can truly be said of Francis, namely, that he came *with the spirit and power of Elijah* [Lk 1:17]. Just as Elijah was to come *to turn the hearts of parents to their children* [Lk1:17] and the hearts of children to their parents, so Francis, like a messenger of true peace, came to announce peace;<sup>1</sup> and as Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, so the soul of Francis was seen to be taken up to heaven under the appearance of a radiant star.<sup>2</sup>

In the text quoted from 2 Kings the transfer of blessed Francis is described under four headings: firstly, the basis for his being borne or carried above; secondly, his progress and development towards such action above; thirdly, the effective principle of such action; fourthly, the final goal of this action above. The basis for the action is the holiness of his life, something indicated by the name *Elijah*, a most holy person. One strives in vain through contemplation for higher things unless the person is exercised and proven in a holy way of life; otherwise where the person thinks to go up, the person falls down. Progress and development are the height of the affections. This is indicated in the word: *ascended*. This ascent is nothing other than the lifting up of the affections. The effective principle is the strength of the spirit moving, rather pushing upwards, as indicated in the words: *in a whirlwind*. A whirlwind is a most fierce wind<sup>3</sup> by which is indicated the strength of the Holy Spirit by whose breath a soul is borne upwards. The goal is the excellence of final glory as noted in the words *into heaven*.

He is called *Elijah* to point out the holiness of his life, the basis for being borne above. Elijah was endowed with a fourfold virtue from which a good life is held together, - because virtue, according to Augustine, *The City of God*, book 4,<sup>4</sup> is the art of how to live - namely, the virtues of purity, justice, fortitude and prudence. A way

of life is holy, life is good, when everything is done with temperance, justice, fortitude and prudence.

Elijah, first of all, had the virtue of purity because he never had a wife or children. He was outstanding in abstinence for he fasted *for forty days and forty nights* before drinking from the water of the torrent [1 Kings 19:8], He wore a leather belt around his waist [2 Kings 1:8]. He was endowed with the virtue of justice for he boldly corrected Ahab [1 Kings 18:18], killed the prophets of Baal [1 Kings 18:40] and burnt with fire from heaven the captains of fifty and the fifty [1 Kings 18:40]. He was endowed with fortitude for, as Sirach says: *Never in his lifetime did he tremble before any ruler* [Sir 48:12], nor did any person overcome him. He was endowed with the virtue of prudence for he had the spirit of a prophet [2 Kings 2:15] and in fact he was outstanding among the prophets [Sir 48:1-15].

Blessed Francis was like Elijah in these four virtues as is clear from looking through *The Major Legend*.<sup>5</sup> These virtues are the chariot in which both Elijah and Francis were carried.<sup>6</sup> The four wheels are the four virtues; the two horses are the mind or sight and the affections;<sup>7</sup> the charioteer is free will, the faculty of the will and reason.<sup>8</sup> But free will would not be sufficient for ascending without a driving whirlwind, that is, a strong grace of the Holy Spirit. But one only ascends on this vehicle when it is of fire; for as stated the chariot and the horses were of fire: *King Solomon made himself a palanquin from the wood of Lebanon, its seat of purple, its interior inlaid with love* [Song 3:9-10]. And: *When the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar* [Judg 13:20]. This is the ascent of love; the more one progresses in love, the more one benefits from this heavenly action.

There are six steps in this fervent love by which a soul is borne up to God;<sup>9</sup> and so there are six steps of ascent. The first, the pleasure of companionship; the second is the stirring of desire; the third the abundance of refreshment; the fourth drunkenness of alienation; fifth security of mind; sixth is the tranquillity of perfect peace and quiet. These are *the six steps* [2 Chron 9:18] of the true Solomon, that is, of *the man of peace* [1 Chron 22:9]: the first is the pleasantness of love, the second the stirring of love, the third the

abundance of love, the fourth the drunkenness of love, the fifth the security of love, the sixth the tranquillity of love.

The first step of love by which a soul goes up towards God is the pleasure of companionship, and this is seen clearly in social love. When one begins to love and enjoy another person, one willingly sees, willingly hears, willingly speaks, willingly stays with and willingly adjusts to the other; and so enjoys seeing, hearing, affection and in being together. In this way friendship is fostered according to Augustine in *The Trinity*<sup>10</sup>:

For whence is the flame of brotherly love enkindled in me, when I hear of any man who has suffered bitter torments in defence of the beauty and the strength of the faith? And if this man himself is pointed out to me with the finger, I am eager to be united with him to make myself known to him, and to bind him to myself in friendship. Therefore, if given the opportunity, I approach him, address him, engage him in conversation, express my affection for him in whatever words I can; and in turn I wish the same affection should be brought about in him and expressed towards me.

Friendship with God is fostered in the same way. When we learn that God is the beginning of all things, the author of nature, the giver of graces, the judge of offences, we develop a certain love so that what we willingly hear said of God we would more willingly hear God speak, we would more willingly speak with and think about God. God speaks to us in our reading, our speech with God is prayer, our thinking about God is meditation, meditation is holy submission while trust is a most sure vision. As we persevere in these there comes a consolation or delight. Indeed it is impossible that from the mutual affection of a groom and bride, from seeing one another, from hearing one another, thinking of one another and even more from embracing one another there would not come delight. The bride says: *I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me* [Song 7:10]. *O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me* [Song 2:6; 8:3]. This consolation was tasted by the Prophet who said: *O taste and see that the Lord is good* [Ps 34:8].

On this ascent we read:

*He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short of stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today'. So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him [Lk 19:1-6].*

Zacchaeus, that little Francis, literally small in stature but spiritually small in humility, hearing of the sweet Jesus, desired and tried to see him *because he was short of stature*.

In Latin, the word crowd means also a disturbance<sup>11</sup> or it represents the world or a tumult of worldly images and cares.

*He climbed a sycamore tree*: a sycamore, a false fig tree, is the cross of Christ<sup>12</sup> that was *a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles* [1 Cor 1:23]; he climbed by faith and love; he climbed and the Lord came down and remained with him because Christ dwells through love in our hearts.<sup>13</sup> And there came great joy and salvation to that house. The Saviour is not present without bringing salvation and his love is not without consolation; it is said of Wisdom that *life with her has no pain but in friendship with her, is pure delight* [Wis 8:16, 18]. O barren souls who do not want to speak with him, hear of him, see him or even think of him, and by this disdain consolation!

II. The second step is a keenness of desire. When a soul is accustomed to the honeyed sweetness tasted when reading, meditating and praying, such hunger arises, such keen desire is enkindled in it that nothing else can refresh it, nothing else console it, except for the soul to possess him whom it loves. But because a soul is far distant from such perfection, and cannot fully understand him in this present life, it is anxious, longs with desire and taken outside itself in ecstatic love it calls out: *I would choose strangling and death rather than this body* [Job 7:15]. The bride reached this step

when she said: *Tell my beloved, I am faint with love* [Song 5:8]. And when the beloved suddenly speaks to the bride she melts with love. She says: *My soul failed me when he spoke*. So strong is the force of this love that the soul seeks the beloved always and everywhere, putting aside anything else. The Prophet reached this step when he said in a Psalm: *As a deer yearns for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, 'Where is your God'?* [Ps 42:1, 3]. The Apostle reached this step when he said: *My desire is to depart and to be with Christ* [Phil 1:23].

No less did Francis reach this step. His heart was afire with the fervour of such desire, he was so enkindled with a fire of love, that his soul melting went totally toward the beloved. The effect of this on his soul also affected his body so that he could say with the bridegroom: *I am wounded by love* [see Song 4:9]. He is wounded by the force of love so that his body is pierced and changed into the likeness of the Crucified so that he can say with Paul: *From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body* [Gal 6:17]. Of this climbing we read: *What is that coming up from the wilderness, like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?* [Song 3:6]. The wilderness is the world or religion from where the soul of Francis climbed up and down like a column. He was upright in the single minded intention by which he was careful to please only the Bridegroom in everything; he was thin from the unity of love by which he loved only God or for the sake of God.

Some have rich and divided loves such as all who love something else with God but they do not love the other thing for the sake of God. Such a plant is full of knots, rough and crooked. *Smoke perfumed* from the fragrance of devotion; *myrrh*, a most bitter substance, from the keenness of desire; *frankincense* from prayer offered up; but *with all the fragrant powders of the merchant* from the sum of all the virtues.<sup>14</sup>

III. The third step is complete refreshment. When a soul is directed towards God with strong desire and keenness and, enkindled

by the fire of love, goes towards God - anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him [1Cor 6:17] - it is so filled with the sweetness of consolation, so feasted in a richness of spirit that as food is loathsome to a body already full, and rather causes revulsion, so too a soul finds refreshment only in the beloved; it is repelled, sickened by everything earthly. With extreme horror the soul despises carnal delights, earthly honours and temporal riches. The bride reached this step when she said: *I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine with my milk* [Song 5:1]. Honey in the honeycomb is the divinity in the humanity of Christ and the same can be said of wine with honey.<sup>15</sup>

Francis who left behind all the delights of the world was seen to have reached this step. It would seem impossible to despise the world to this extent unless he was full from the sweetness and consolation of heaven. Of this ascent we read: *Who is this coming up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?* [Song 8:5 DRB]. The wilderness, as stated earlier,<sup>16</sup> is the religion in which Francis was nourished. Francis went up from this wilderness when he was carried above *flowing with delights* not bodily but spiritual and so fainting within himself he leaned on his beloved. Contemplatives are invited to this in the person of Jacob to whom an angel of the Lord said: *God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there'* [Gen 35:1]. Bethel means a house of refreshment.<sup>17</sup>

IV. The fourth step is inebriation from being alienated. Inebriation rightly follows abundance just as drink comes after food. Inebriation consists in this that a soul is filled with such love of God and refreshed with such delight that it cannot contain itself being driven beyond itself from these consolations. A soul so affected, like a drunk, not only disdains comforts but rather looks for torments and, for love of the person it loves, delights in suffering and disgrace. Just as a drunk will stand naked without shame and bear suffering without distress, so too will a soul inebriated with divine love and filled with an excess of consolation. The bride reached this step when she said: *The king has brought me into his chambers* [Song 1:4], and in another text: *He brought me to the banqueting house* [Song 2:4].

She invites others to this inebriation: *Eat, friends, drink and be drunk with love* [Song 5:1]. The Apostle who gloried in his sufferings reached this step [2 Cor 12:5] as did all the Apostles who were drunk with this wine: *As they left the Council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name* [Acts 5:41].

Francis who stood naked without shame before the Bishop<sup>18</sup> truly reached this step. He went about like one inebriated by the wine of the Holy Spirit, walking naked and singing through snow and forests. He sang in French, feeling neither the insults nor distress:

He was attacked with mud and stones,  
but as a patient man he tried  
to pass as if deaf.<sup>19</sup>

Of this ascent we read:

*Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah' – not knowing what he said [Lk 9:28-33].*

This text is too difficult to be explained now. Here it is enough to say that in the transfiguration the Lord wanted to show a little of his glory and brightness of which the Apostles with him could have had no experience. And Peter was so inebriated from only a slight smelling of the aroma of the wine that he wanted to stay there always, *not knowing what he said*. What if Peter had tasted more? Paul also, in rapture did not know *whether* he was *in the body or out of the body* [2 Cor 12:2].

V. The fifth step is unshaken security. This security comes from inebriation. When a soul feels it loves only God, that it will willingly choose for the sake of God all torments and adversities, it experiences such security as to exclude every fear. It trusts the divine help sure that nothing could take it away or separate it from God.

The bride reached this step when she said:

*Love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it* [Song 6:6-7].

But first she said: *Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm* [Song 8:6]. This means that the love is so strong that the bride can think only of the beloved, only embrace him in love; that is, *upon the heart and arm*. What is on an arm is linked to the chest. And she says: *a seal*; we are guided by a seal so that we may direct every thought and affection towards God. And then she adds: *Love is strong as death*; rather more than death because it takes away fear, and puts an end to carnal life more effectively than death puts an end to the life of the sense or temporal life. *Passion fierce as the grave*: there is a parallel in the opposites because love of salvation is more violent than hell [a grave] for damnation; love devours more in sweetness than hell devours in suffering.

The Apostle attained this step when he said: *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship* etc. [Rom 8:35]. Francis reached this step when he was assured of the forgiveness of all his sins even to *the last penny* [Mt 5:26].<sup>20</sup> Of this ascent we read: *I said: I will go up into the palm tree, and will take hold of the fruit thereof* [Song 7:8]. The palm tree represents victory and security follows victory.

VI. The sixth step is peaceful tranquillity, true and full peace, where a soul is placed in such peace that it remains silent and as if in a dream is disturbed by no promptings of greed or concupiscence, agitated by no frightening goads. There is no disturbance from below, no rebellious movement against reason, but as reason obeys

what is to its benefit, so it makes everything below it obedient. All animals move peacefully as did the animals in the ark of Noah.<sup>21</sup> There will be no disturbance from outside for if an enemy was to begin some persecution from outside, it would increase the glory that belongs to God; nothing in that kingdom is shaky and as the workings of the senses fail it becomes evident just how firm that kingdom is inside and outside. To a peaceful soul, as to a daughter, an inheritance is due. *Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called children of God* [Mt 5:9]. The bride reached this step when she said: *I was a wall and my breasts were like towers; then I was in his eyes as one who brings peace* [Song 8:10]. The Psalmist also reached this step: *I will both lie down and sleep in peace* [Ps 4:8].

No less did Francis reach this step in which the lower parts obeyed the higher; even external things such as animals unable to hear or think obeyed him as is clear in his *Legend*.<sup>22</sup> Of this ascent a Psalm says: *Jerusalem – built as a city that is bound firmly together. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord to give thanks to the name of the Lord* [Ps 122:3-4]. *Jerusalem* which means ‘peaceful’ or ‘a vision of peace’<sup>23</sup> is a soul at peace and tranquil, *that is bound firmly together*, that is, in an unchangeable eternity. *Firmly* is something that is not changed as Augustine<sup>24</sup> says. *To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord*, that is, crowds of thoughts and affections in which the soul gives thanks to God. We read also: *I will not enter my house, or get into my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob* [Ps 131:3-5]. This is the place of peace because his abode has been established in Salem (peace) [Ps 76:3]. Let us ask God etc.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Bonaventure, LMj 2, 2 and 7(FA:ED II 543 and 546).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 14, 6(FA:ED II 644).

<sup>3</sup> According to *Glossa ordinaria* on 2 Kings 2:1 (PL 113, 611).

<sup>4</sup> Rather book 19, ch. 3, FOTC, vol. 24, 192; in book 4, ch. 21, FOTC, vol. 8, 218 on the other hand there is another definition of virtue: ‘Virtue is defined by the elders as the art of living well and correctly’.

<sup>5</sup> Bonaventure, LMj 3-6, and 9 (FA:ED II 542-576 and 596-604).

- 6 On the vision of the fiery chariot see *ibid.*, 4, 4 (FA:ED II 552).
- 7 See Matthew, *Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. C. Murray, p. 146.
- 8 According to P. Lombard, *Liber II Sententiarum*, d. 24, c. 3, 421.
- 9 The division and description of these six degrees is found at times verbatim, at times according to the sense in Bonaventure, *The Triple Way*, ch. 2, n. 9, *Works of Bonaventure*, vol. 1, Paterson: St Anthony Guild Press, 1960, 77.
- 10 Book 9, ch 6, n. 11, FOTC, vol. 45, 279-280.
- 11 See Augustine, Sermo 103, c. 3, n. 4 (PL 38, 614).
- 12 According to *Glossa ordinaria* on Lk 19:4 (PL 114, 326).
- 13 See Eph 3:17 – *May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.*
- 14 See *Glossa ordinaria et interlinearis* on Song 3:6, in Lyranus (*Biblia sacra cum Glossa*, III, Venice 1588, f. 359v).
- 15 See Gilbertus Abbas, *In Cantica*, Sermo 40, n. 8 (PL 184, 212-213).
- 16 See above page 46.
- 17 Rather ‘a house of God’. Bethlehem means ‘a house of bread’ according to Isidore, *Libri etymologiarum*, l. 15, c. 1, nn. 22-23 (PL 82, 529-530); see *Glossa interlinearis* on Gen 35:1 and 35:19, in Lyranus (I, 98v, 99v).
- 18 Bonaventure, LMj 2, 4-5 (FA:ED II 538-539).
- 19 Julian of Speyer, *Officium S. Francisci*, 1 Nocturn, resp. 3 (p. 380).
- 20 See Bonaventure, LMj 3, 6 (FA:ED II 545); Julian of Speyer, *Vita S. Francisci*, c. 3, n. 18 (ed. *Analecta Franciscana*, X, Quaracchi 1926-1941, 343).
- 21 See Ambrose, *Hexaëmeron*, l. 3, c. 13, n. 53 (PL 14, 178); Isidore, *Libri etymologiarum*, l. 17, c. 7, n. 1 (PL 82, 609).
- 22 Bonaventure, LMj 8, 6-11 (FA:ED II 590-595).
- 23 ‘Peaceful’ according to Isidore, *Libri etymologiarum*, l. 15, c. 1, n. 5 (PL 82, 528); ‘a vision of peace’ according to Jerome, *De nominibus hebraicis*, de Isaia (PL 23, 873).
- 24 *Enarratio in Ps 121*, n. 6 (PL 37, 1622).

## TRANSFER - SERMON 2

*Enoch pleased God, and was translated into paradise* [Sir 44:16 DRB]. Today we celebrate the transfer of the body of our most blessed father Francis. The transfer of the bodies and relics of saints from one place to another, especially to a sacred place, undoubtedly represents the transfer of their spirits from this world to the Father, from a prison to a palace, from earth to heaven, from living in exile to one's true home, from suffering to glory, from death to life. The Church refers to the transfer of the saints not as death but as birth;<sup>1</sup> for following what is best one should not speak of death but of birth to eternity. This spiritual transfer is much more pleasing than a bodily transfer and it is described in the text above from three points of view: firstly, with reference to the merit effectively making it possible; secondly, with reference to the principle acting benignly; thirdly, with reference to the goal happily attained.

If you ask who is being transferred, it is Francis, perfect in merit, who was prefigured by Enoch which means 'walking with God',<sup>2</sup> and of whom the Apostle says: that *before he was taken away 'he had pleased God'* [Heb 11:5]. If you ask by whom was he transferred, it was by God, by God's good pleasure, since it is said *he pleased God*. If you ask to what was he transferred, it was *to paradise* to where he was raised up as a reward.

The text says: *Enoch pleased God etc.* In our father Francis there were seven clear signs of virtues for which he was accepted by God and transferred into paradise. The seven were: truth in faith, humility in reverence, integrity of chastity, earnestness of wisdom, affection of charity, generosity of mercy, longsuffering perseverance.

I. Firstly, blessed Francis was accepted by God for his truth in faith. Among the things most acceptable and pleasing to God is most holy faith. The reason for this is that among the things that should please God is that a creature thinks well of the Creator. It is by faith that a creature thinks well of God, and by thinking well we approach, magnify, hope in, love and praise God and so faith is the first of the

virtues and the foundation of all good things<sup>3</sup>: *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ* [1 Cor 3:11], this is, Christian faith. The Apostle commends this faith in an elegant way by giving examples of how the Fathers from the beginning of the world pleased God by this faith and *without faith it is impossible to please God* [Heb 11:7]. A person who does not believe cannot think well of God. By faith we recognize that God is the Creator: *By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible* [Heb 11:3], that is, everything visible has been made and given its form from unformed and invisible matter;<sup>4</sup> or from what is invisible, that is, everything visible has been formed from the eternal patterns, because according to Augustine: ‘Invisible sources of what is visible remain in God’.<sup>5</sup> It is by faith that we recognize God as the one who provides, upholds, repairs and rewards; for this reason we magnify, hope in, love and praise God. Because in faith we recognize God as the Father who created us and gave us new birth, so by faith we become his children: *he gave them power to become children of God* [Jn 1:12].

Further, since it is by faith that we are conscious of sin and believe in the great divine mercy, we beg for pardon. For this reason faith is said to be the principle of justification: *justified by faith* [Rom 5:1].

Again, since it is by faith that the mind is first lifted above itself and assents to the truth of who it sees but does not understand, so it is faith that merits to work miracles: *If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move* [Mt 17:20]; and: *All things can be done for the one who believes* [Mk 9:23].

Francis’ faith was most active and sincere. A sign of his great faith was when he made a crib for Christmas and placed a child in it among the animals in memory of the child Jesus.<sup>6</sup> He celebrated most devoutly the feast of the Trinity.<sup>7</sup> Out of zeal for the faith he crossed the sea and approached the Sultan so as to preach faith in Christ.<sup>8</sup>

II. Secondly, blessed Francis pleased God by his humility in reverence. It is a correct order for deep humility to follow truth in faith. A person who believes that God is great, in fact infinite, and that he or she is small and of little worth, is without doubt humble before God, fears and turns to God from reflecting on the divine immensity in comparison with one's own smallness. We read: *There is none like you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is great in might. Who would not fear you, O King of the nations* [Jer 10:6-7]? This is particularly pleasing to God: *Nor from the beginning have the proud been acceptable to you, but the prayer of the humble and the meek has always pleased you* [Jdt 9:16 DRB; 9:11 NRSV]. Pride is hateful to God and to us, humility is pleasing to God and to us. Why? Because pride prefers itself to God while humility despises and disdains its own honour, desiring only the honour of God as it says: *Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory* [Ps 115:1]. It is certain that pride pulls down while humility lifts up and the greater one thinks oneself to be, so much the more abject is that person in the eyes of the divine majesty.<sup>9</sup> The more one is abject in one's own eyes so much greater is that person in the eyes of the divine majesty since: *All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted* [Lk 14:11]. Examples of this are seen in Lucifer, Adam and Christ, Eve and Mary. Because of pride, Lucifer was thrown down into hell, Adam was sent into exile from paradise, Christ for his humility was exalted to the right hand of the Father: *He humbled himself, therefore God highly exalted him* etc. [Phil 2:8]. Eve became the mother of pride and sin, Mary by her humility was made the mother of God: *He looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant* [Lk 1:48].

But, unfortunately, many today follow Lucifer rather than Christ; many imitate Eve rather than Mary. *The prayer of the humble and the meek has always pleased you* [Jdt 9:16 DRB]. And rightly, because a humble person seeks to please only God and so it is impossible for the prayer of the humble not to be heard. *The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds* [Sir 35:21]. *Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years* [Mal 3:4]. An offering of Judah is the humble spirit of a

penitent people. *A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit, a contrite and humbled heart* etc. [Ps 50:19 DRB; Ps 51:19 NRSV]. *And Jerusalem is the prayer of those desiring peace. As in the days of old and as in former years* refers to how the people pleased God before they sinned. This is perfect justice. Augustine in *De moribus Ecclesiae*,<sup>10</sup> says: Justice is love serving only God and so commanding well in earthly matters. Pride wants to dominate those who by nature are one's equals. Of this humility Augustine speaks well in *Ad Dioscorum*<sup>11</sup>: This is the only way to find truth. *I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth* etc. [Mt 11:25].

It is evident in his *Legend*<sup>12</sup> that this virtue of humility shone forth strongly in Francis.

III. Thirdly, blessed Francis pleased God in a particular way by the integrity of his chastity. It is the correct order for chastity to follow humility because people commonly are particularly proud of their chastity; so humility should always come before chastity. Another reason is that while we are subject to and serve God by humility, by chastity we may serve God in holiness: *We might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness* [Lk 1:74-75]. This is most acceptable to God because it is impossible for a person to please God unless that person seeks to please God alone. This is done above all by chastity:

*I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband.*  
[1 Cor 7:32-34].

In all this the Apostle wants us to understand that, among all the things that distract, divide and make the soul drift away, the marriage bond must be included; and if this is true of the marriage bond it is even truer of a bond to a harlot. Augustine says in *The Soliloquies*<sup>13</sup>

that there is nothing that casts a soul from the heights more than feminine allurements without which no wife is to be found. Augustine says in his *Confessions*<sup>14</sup>: ‘Through continence, in fact, we are gathered in and returned to the One from whom we have flowed out into the many’. This virtue is the beauty and adornment of all the virtues as Gregory says;<sup>15</sup> and according to Augustine<sup>16</sup> only the beautiful is pleasing. Nothing pleases God more than a chaste person and so it is said to the Bride: *You are altogether beautiful my love; there is no flaw in you* [Song 4:7]. For a soul to be joined to God in marriage it must be completely beautiful so that there is nothing that might offend the eyes of the eternal Bridegroom. It must be beautiful in its thoughts, its senses, its harmony, its affections and gestures.

This virtue was particularly evident in Francis who, a virgin from the womb of his mother, served the Lord and wanted his followers to serve the Lord in purity; he avoided not only impure actions but also suspicious dealings and conversations with women.<sup>17</sup> And since, according to Jerome,<sup>18</sup> chastity cannot be saved without austerity nor can continence be saved without abstinence, Francis strove to subdue his flesh with its vices, as is clear from the course of his life and is explicitly stated in his *Legend*.<sup>19</sup>

IV. Fourthly, blessed Francis pleased God by the earnestness of his wisdom. In an ordered development wisdom comes after purity since, as the wise person said: *Wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, or dwell in a body enslaved to sin* [Wis 1:4]. That eternal Wisdom, a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty, passes only into holy souls [Wis 7:25-27]. And so the Saviour said: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God* [Mt 5:8]. What we read in 1 Kings 3:10 is most apt: *It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked for wisdom*. Why? The reason is that wisdom is the highest gift, a gift by which a rational creature is assimilated into God and shows forth, as Augustine says,<sup>20</sup> an image of God; it is a gift by which a rational creature exceeds other creatures because it shares in wisdom. So God approves when a rational creature searches for wisdom. But it has to be noted that Solomon searched for wisdom not by research or study

but by prayer and by a lifting of his desires. *Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me* [Wis 7:7]. Therefore, anyone who wants to be wise is not to research in curiosity, to search in the writings and books of the philosophers, but to *ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and wisdom will be given to you* [Jas1:5].

But today, unfortunately, the children of Israel, the children of Sarah, have become children of Hagar<sup>21</sup> and search in the earth for a wisdom that is carnal, animal and diabolical, not the wisdom that *comes down from above* and is *pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits* [Jas 1:15, 17].

Francis searched for this wisdom in devout prayers, in continual meditations, so as to have not only an understanding of the Scriptures, for he was an unlettered person, but that he might recognize God in all creatures, that he might have a vision of future events and know the secrets of peoples' consciences. Examples of this are clear in his *Legend*.<sup>22</sup>

V. Fifthly, blessed Francis pleased God by the affection of his charity. Charity rightly follows wisdom for while wisdom begins with knowledge it is perfected in love; it begins in looking but ends in tasting and embracing and is a certain spiritual touching; for, as Augustine says,<sup>23</sup> touching is the completion of knowledge. The mind remains outside but the affections enter in, as Hugo says,<sup>24</sup> like something sharp and strong. It is not surprising that charity pleases God for Wisdom says: *I love those who love me* [Prov 8:17]. Charity is nothing other than the love by which God is loved for God's own sake. The more God is loved the more God loves; and since love is not without pleasure, the more one is loved the more lovers please one another. *Phinehas in the goodness and readiness of his soul appeased God for Israel* [Sir 45:29-30 DRB; 45:23 NRSV]. Goodness is nothing other than charity. The degree to which a rational creature has charity, to that degree does it have goodness. Charity gives birth in the mind to joyfulness and eagerness, things particularly pleasing to God. This virtue raises a soul towards God like a weight on a

scale;<sup>25</sup> it holds a soul together and unites it to God, because love is a uniting force, joining the lover to the person loved;<sup>26</sup> love transforms a soul and makes it move towards God, as Hugo says in *De arrha sponsae*.<sup>27</sup>

This most noble virtue was particularly strong in blessed Francis. For the love of God Francis despised all things so that nothing would hold him back from going towards God. And he wanted his followers to despise everything, to have ‘neither house, nor place, nor anything at all’, so that as strangers in this world they might run all the more quickly towards God.<sup>28</sup> By the force of this strong love he was transformed into God not only in his mind but also in his flesh. And since the Beloved placed a seal upon *his heart* [Song 8:5] the Beloved sealed him not only on his heart but also on his body. This was done by the force of love that like fire melts a soul, as the Bride says [Song 5:6], like metal melted down to make money, and, as already stated, makes a soul move towards God. A soul strongly affected has a similar affect on the flesh and so Francis’s mind inflicted suffering on his flesh and he bore the seal of Christ in his body for two years.

VI. Sixthly, blessed Francis pleased God by the generosity of his mercy. This fittingly follows charity because the love of God follows the love of neighbour that is seen most clearly evident in mercy. Mercy is so pleasing to God that God is most merciful and so the Saviour commands us: *Be merciful, therefore, as your heavenly Father is merciful* [Mt 5:48].<sup>29</sup> Sharing a common nature and the beauty of the divine image should move one to be merciful. We read: *Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it* [Heb 13:1-2] as did Abraham and Lot.<sup>30</sup> Charity in a fraternity should exist in piety and compassion of heart, but hospitality should be evident in actions; for as John says: *Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action* [1 Jn 3:18]. To commend hospitality and piety, Christ wanted to transform himself and appear as a stranger. Often when someone was caring for, clothing, [feeding or restoring a poor person, Christ, hidden beneath

the likeness of the poor person, appeared to the carer]. Gregory<sup>31</sup> gives an example of blessed Martin. Christ said: *Just as you did it to one of the least of these you did it to me* [Mt 25:40]. Mercy is shown in a particular way when injuries and offences are forgiven. Of this we read: *Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy* [Mt 5:7]. On the contrary: *Judgement will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy* [Jas 2:13].

What piety blessed Francis felt towards both rational creatures and even dumb creatures, is clear in his *legend*.<sup>32</sup> Those who knew him while he was alive bear witness to this.

VII. Seventhly, blessed Francis pleased God by his longsuffering perseverance. This is put in the seventh place because it is not so much a virtue as the state of the virtues. It is the perfection and completion of the virtues and without it no virtue is fully developed. The Lord says: *The one who endures to the end will be saved* [Mt 10:22; 24:13]. This is especially pleasing to God because it desires not only to do great things for God but also to suffer great things. *So Abraham, so Isaac, so Jacob, so Moses, and all that have pleased God, passed through many tribulations, remaining faithful* [Jdt 8:22-23 DRB; 8:26 NRSV]. Perseverance proves, conquers and wins a crown. *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness* [2 Tim 4:7-8]. James 1:4 [DRB] says: *Patience has a perfect work*.

Blessed Francis had such perseverance, made progress by it, was perfected by it and entered paradise by it, so that we may rightly say of Francis what was said in praise of Enoch: *Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken up* into paradise. May the Son of God who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever lead us to join Francis. Amen.

## NOTES

- 1 See, for example, *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* (in *Acta Sanctorum*, November, tome II, part 2; Brussels 1931); P. Chrysologus, *Sermo 129*, in *D. Cyprianum martyrem* (PL 52, 555).
- 2 Gen 5:22 *Enoch walked with God*. According to Jerome, *De nominibus hebraicis*, de Genesi, Enoch means ‘dedication’ (PL 23, 822).
- 3 See P. Lombard, *Liber III Sententiarum*, d. 23, c. 9 (p. 660); Fulgentius, *De fide ad Petrum*, c. 1 (PL 40, 753).
- 4 See *Glossa* of P. Lombard on this text (PL 192, 489).
- 5 *Confessions*, book 1, ch. 6, n. 9, FOTC, vol. 21, 10: ‘The immutable sources of all mutable things dwell’.
- 6 Bonaventure, LMj 10, 7 (FA:ED II 610).
- 7 Julian of Speyer, *Officium S. Francisci*, Hymn (written by Gregory IX) for 1 Vespers, verse 6 (p. 376); see also Bonaventure, LMj 3, 3 (FA:ED II 544); W. Lampen, *S. Franciscus cultor Trinitatis*, in AFH XXI, 1928, 449-467.
- 8 Bonaventure, LMj 9, 3 (FA:ED II 602); see H. L. Gottschalk, *Al-Malik al-Kamil von Egypten und seine Zeit*, Wiesbaden 1958.
- 9 See Gregory, *Libri moralium*, l. 18, c. 38, n. 50 (PL 76, 70); Ps.-Bernard, *De modo bene vivendi*, c. 39, n. 100 (PL 184, 1260); see Matthew of Aquasparta, *Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, transl. C. Murray, p. 27.
- 10 L. 1, c. 15, n. 25: ‘Justice, love in the service only of the beloved, and so ruling correctly’ (PL 32, 1322).
- 11 C. 3, n. 22 (PL 33, 442), not a literal quotation.
- 12 Bonaventure, LMj 6 (FA:ED II 569-576).
- 13 Book 1, ch. 10, n. 17, FOTC, vol. 5, 365.
- 14 Book 10, c. 29, n. 40, FOTC, vol. 21, 299.
- 15 *In Evangelia*, l. 1, Homilia 13, n. 1 (PL 76, 1124).
- 16 *Confessions*, book 4, ch. 13, n. 20, FOTC, vol. 21, 90: ‘Do we love anything but the beautiful?’ *De vera religione*, c. 32, n. 59 (PL 34, 148).
- 17 LR 11 (FA:ED I 106).
- 18 *Epistola 54* (ad Furiam), n. 8 (PL 22, 554).
- 19 Bonaventure, LMj 5 (FA:ED II 560-568).
- 20 *Enarratio in Ps 103*, n. 2 (PL 37, 1378-1379).
- 21 See Gal 4:22-23.
- 22 Bonaventure, LMj 11 (FA:ED II 612-621).
- 23 *The Trinity*, book 1, ch. 9, n. 18, FOTC, vol. 45, 27-28.
- 24 *Expositio in hierarchiam caelestem S. Dionysii*, l. 6, c. 7 (PL 75, 1038).
- 25 See Augustine, *Confessions*, book 13, ch. 9, FOTC, vol. 21, 416; *The City of God*, book 11, ch. 28, FOTC, vol. 14, 232.

- <sup>26</sup> According to Augustine, *The Trinity*, book 8, ch. 10, n. 14, FOTC, vol. 45, 266.
- <sup>27</sup> Rather *De arrha animae* (PL 176, 954).
- <sup>28</sup> LR 6 (FA:ED I 103).
- <sup>29</sup> Note that in the text of Matthew of Aquasparta and in the Latin Bible the word *merciful* is not used but the word *perfect*.
- <sup>30</sup> See Gen 18:3 and 19:2-3.
- <sup>31</sup> Rather Sulpicius Severus, *Life of St Martin*, ch. 3, FOTC, vol. 7, 106-107.
- <sup>32</sup> Bonaventure, LMj 8 (FA:ED II 586-595).





### TRANSFER - SERMON 3

*And the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great commotion, saying: Blessed be the glory of the Lord, from his place* [Ezek 3:12 DRB]. In these words there is described and made clear the transfer of blessed Francis by the fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit with which blessed Francis was full. For this reason the Church rejoices and praises God. The transfer is understood of Francis being full of the Spirit when Francis says in the person of the Prophet: *the spirit took me up*; he refers to the rejoicing and thanksgiving in the Church when he says: *I heard behind me the voice of a great commotion, saying: Blessed be the glory of the Lord.*

Francis says: *the spirit took me up*. About these words one must note and understand that blessed Francis was taken up by the Spirit in his conversion; he was directed or led by the Spirit in his way of life; he was anointed in his preaching; he was heard or filled in prayer; he was taken up in contemplation; he was transferred in his glorification.

I. Firstly, Francis was taken up in his conversion: *The spirit lifted me up and bore me away; I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me* [Ezek 3:14]. The Spirit took up his soul when the Spirit turned him from sin and converted him to the Lord as we read in a Psalm: *He took them out of the way of their iniquity* [Ps 106:17 DRB; 107:17 NRSV]. Then the Spirit humbled him, made him sorry and made him detest every sin. So Francis says: *I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit*. This is a humbled and contrite spirit not despised but welcomed by God: *A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise* [Ps 51:17], rather God accepts such a soul and pours the Spirit upon it. We read: *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him* [Isa 42:1].

II. Secondly, Francis was directed or led by the Spirit in his way of life: *Let your good spirit lead me on a level path* [Ps 143:10]. Just as it is the Spirit who raises up so too the Spirit directs and leads.

Wisdom says: *I have led you in the paths of uprightness* [Prov 4:11]. They are paths that are a direct or level route so that the face of the mind is always directed towards God and the attention is always centred on God, just like those animals moved by the spirit went straight ahead: *wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went* [Ezek 1:12].

III. Thirdly, Francis was anointed by the Spirit in his preaching. *The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed* [Isa 61:1]. No one should dare to preach or proclaim the word of God unless the Spirit sends the person since the anointing of the Spirit teaches us all things: *His anointing teaches us about all things* [1 Jn 2:27]. This is why at times unlettered people preach more practically and with more effect than great clerics and scholars. It is not they who speak but the Holy Spirit speaking in them and so the tongue of a preacher is an instrument of the Holy Spirit. *My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe* [Ps 45:1]; we read also: *It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you* [Mt 10:20].

IV. Fourthly, the Spirit heard his prayers. *With open mouth I pant* [Ps 119:131] and draw in the Spirit. The mouth is opened in prayer, not only the bodily mouth but also the mouth of the mind when desire is extended; a broadened and strong desire attracts the Holy Spirit. Blessed Francis was filled with a double spirit in prayer: firstly, by the spirit of grace: *I will pour out upon the house of David, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of prayers* [Zech 12:10 DRB]; secondly, he was filled with the spirit of wisdom: *Therefore, I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called on God and the spirit of wisdom came to me* [Wis 7:7]. And further<sup>1</sup>: *If the great Lord is willing, he will be filled with the spirit of understanding; he will pour forth words of wisdom of his own and give thanks to the Lord in prayer* [Sir 39:6]. And: *In the midst of the church she shall open his mouth, and shall fill him with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, and shall clothe him with a robe of glory* [Sir 15:5 DRB].

V. Fifthly, he was lifted up by the Spirit in contemplation. Acts 8:29 says: *The Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away*. Since the Holy Spirit is divine fire, no one can be lifted up in contemplation unless he or she is on fire with the heat of this Spirit so as to rise like fire. Was not Paul heated by this fire when he *was caught up to the third heaven, and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat* [2 Cor 12:2-4]? *To the third heaven*, that is, to an intellectual vision to see the essence of God as the saints in heaven see it, according to Augustine.<sup>2</sup> It is recorded of Francis that when he stood in prayer, he was frequently lifted up between heaven and earth so that no part of his body touched the ground.<sup>3</sup> Another time it seemed to the Brothers that he was like the globe of the sun, like another Elijah being carried into heaven on a fiery chariot by the Holy Spirit<sup>4</sup> for the Holy Spirit snatches away and lifts up to heaven, but a diabolical spirit casts down and plunges into hell.

VI. Sixthly, blessed Francis was transferred by the Spirit in his glorification. *Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken up* [Sir 44:16], to give wisdom to all people. We read also: *Enoch walked with God, then he was no more because God took him* [Gen 5:24]. This gives us wisdom because when we read that Enoch was carried into paradise, we are inspired to desire the same and on the basis of his example to hope for it. The transfer of relics and the bodies of the saints from one place to another represents the transfer of the blessed spirits into the kingdom of eternal happiness,<sup>5</sup> to where we have no doubt the soul of Francis has been transferred. To that glory etc.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Julian of Speyer, *Officium S. Francisci*, ad 1 Vesperas, antiphona ad Magnificat: 'In you rests a double spirit of the Prophets; it shines out in signs, and in announcing future events' (p. 377).

<sup>2</sup> *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, book 12, ch. 28, n. 56, ACW, vol. 42, 219.

<sup>3</sup> Bonaventure, LMj 10, 4 (FA:ED II 607).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 4, 4 (FA:ED II 552).

<sup>5</sup> An almost identical sentence is found on pages 52 and 65.





## TRANSFER - SERMON 4

*You brought a vine out of Egypt* [Ps 80:8]. The transfer of the bodies and relics of the saints from one place to another, especially a sacred place, undoubtedly represents the transfer of the blessed spirits from the present world to the Father, from unhappiness to glory, from death to eternal life. The transfer of our most blessed Father Francis, which we celebrate today, is expressed in the text quoted above and is described in three ways. Firstly, with regard to his perfection in merit when it says: *a vine*. The perfection of merit is explained in the parts of a vine as we will see as we continue the sermon; for this reason it is not unfitting that a vine represents blessed Francis. Secondly, with regard to his perfect deliverance from the world when it says: *out of Egypt*. In Sacred Scripture Egypt represents and points to the world.<sup>1</sup> The deliverance of the saints from the world is represented by the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt, as described in the history in Exodus and Numbers. Thirdly, with regard to his perfect glorification and high place in heaven or in paradise, when the text says: *brought*, a word spoken by the Church to God who is the principle and author of this transfer. There are two points of reference of this transfer, namely, the world and paradise represented by Egypt and the promised land. The entry of the blessed spirits into paradise is prefigured in the entry of the children of Israel into the promised land, freed from Egyptian slavery. This transfer of blessed Francis is prefigured in the transfer of Enoch into paradise of which we read: *Enoch pleased God, and was translated into paradise, that he may give wisdom<sup>2</sup> to the nations* [Sir 44:16].

The text says: *You brought a vine out of Egypt*. There are seven features of a material vine, all seven of which are found in Francis and should be found in every just person because by the merit of these features a person is transferred into paradise. Firstly, a vine is planted, not in any place but in a suitable place because it must not be in swampy or low-lying land, but in high and mountainous country, suitable for receiving outpourings from the sky and the benefit of the sun; secondly, it is planted; thirdly, it is enclosed and

protected against human intrusions and ravages of animals; fourthly, it is cultivated, fifthly, it grows and spreads out; sixthly, it flowers and gives off a scent; seventhly, it bears fruit. So I note seven features of a vine in the earth, namely, planting, position, fencing in, cultivation, growth and spreading, flowering with the spread of its scent, and bearing fruit. In a spiritual sense, blessed Francis and every just person should be a vine planted by gratuitous election, situated in a high place by a raising of the mind, closed in and protected by discipline and continence, refined by penance, and spread out in fraternal love. In a particular way, Francis put forth leaves, flowered and gave off a scent from the building up of others, fruitful in good works and abounding devotion.

I. Firstly, blessed Francis was a vine planted by the hand of the heavenly farmer out of a gratuitous election. The heavenly farmer planted this vine when it was predestined from all eternity, called in time and justified by grace: *And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified* [Rom 8:30]. No one, therefore, is to claim or credit him or herself with the gift of conversion, calling or the grace of justification. These are completely gratuitous; *otherwise grace would no longer be grace* [Rom 11:6].<sup>3</sup> Of this planting we read: *I planted you as a choice vine* [Jer 2:21]. The vine is *choice* because of eternal predestination and *planted* by the present calling and justification. The text says: *I planted you* so that no one is to glory but give thanks to God. Just as truth is in being firstly, so it is in being secondarily, because *it is he who made us and not we ourselves* [Ps 100:3].<sup>4</sup> Each person should rise up to give thanks for the gift of calling and conversion. I give you thanks, Lord God, who converted me, called and planted me, lest I am swept away by ingratitude! And since the one Person is planter, controller or preserver and perfecter, so we should ask that the Person who planted might also control and perfect the vine. *Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see; have regard for this vine* [Ps 80:14].

Blessed Francis was not ungrateful for this grace, but praised God with continual thanks, referring everything in himself to God as

to its primary source. So there was written<sup>5</sup>: ‘In giving praise he advised all to praise’ etc.

II. Secondly, the vine was planted in high ground from the raising up of the mind. Just as higher ground receives more easily outpourings from the sky, so minds lifted up and turned to God receive outpourings of divine charisms. *You shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria* [Jer 31:5]. A *mountain* means a firm, high and cultivated prominence. So the mind of holy people should be firm from a humble faith. Nothing is firm and stable unless it is founded in truth. What is founded in truth is humble faith as Dionysius says in *De divinis nominibus*<sup>6</sup>: ‘Faith is the only foundation holding people in truth’. This is the surest foundation upon which the spiritual structure of the building rises, able to withstand every storm as stated in Matthew: *Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock* etc. [Mt 7:24]. The mind should be raised up in desire and in contemplation of eternal realities so that concerned with what is above and turned towards God the mind can receive Godlike outpourings; not bent toward earthly realities and concerns like a brute and irrational beast. The mind has to be made simple by a pure and sincere intention, so that in everything said or done a person seeks the glory of God, not personal glory nor human favours, according to the text: *Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory* [Ps 115:1].

The mind of Francis was like this, firm in faith, and out of zeal for this faith he crossed the sea<sup>7</sup> and came to the Sultan to whom he preached Jesus Christ; he wanted to die for the spreading of this faith as it is said of him: ‘O martyr in desire’ etc.<sup>8</sup> Raised up and concerned with what is above by contemplation and the desire for what is eternal, at times as he stood in prayer he was raised off the ground without touching the ground at all;<sup>9</sup> made simple by a right intention, desiring to please only God in everything so that he seemed to be already planted *in the house and the courts of the Lord* [Ps 92:13] of the heavenly Jerusalem.

III. Thirdly, he was a vine closed in and protected by discipline and continence. As Gregory says,<sup>10</sup> cuttings and vines newly planted that are left open to human traffic and the gnawing of beasts, are soon pulled up and become dry; for this reason they are fenced in, closed off and surrounded with a hedge; so too inexperienced and delicate souls are lost when left open to the temptations of demons and are exposed to human disturbances and earthly pleasures. Such souls need the protection of continence and discipline. We have doors and openings or entrances in the senses that should be closed; otherwise, as Jeremiah says, *death* comes up *into our windows* [Jer 9:21]. Forms and images of what is beautiful and desirable enter through the eyes, like a kind of idol or representation leading a soul from God to fornication. Every image in which a soul delights to an inordinate degree is a kind of robber plundering a soul. *My eye has wasted my soul* [Lam 3:51 DRB]. Ornaments of sounds and words enter through the ears pleasing, disturbing and moving a soul to impatience, joy, or incitement to petulance, such as ugly words, words of contradiction, detraction of oneself or another. Sensations of pleasing scents enter through the nose and in these a soul can delight in an inordinate way. Words of provocation come out of the mouth while what is pleasing to taste comes in. In nature two things go together, namely, taste and speech. Experience teaches how many wrongs are done by hands for, it would seem, to touch is the final completion of sin. Therefore, a protection of discipline and continence must be applied to these doors, openings and entrances and these senses are to be most carefully confined. Of this protection we read: *There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower* [Mt 21:33]. And: *A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower* [Mk 12:1]. The word *fence* refers to discipline, continence or regular observance without which the collection and treasure of virtues are snatched away. *Where there is no fence, the property will be plundered* [Sir 36:30]. The *wine press* in which the wine is pressed out, refers to the divine law or wisdom by which a human heart is made glad; the *watchtower*

in which the guards take their place refers to prudence whose duty it is to warn against attacks or dangers, according to Augustine.<sup>11</sup>

Who was more guarded, continent and disciplined than Francis? His discipline is most evident in his *Rule* by which he enclosed and most strictly regulated his own life and the lives of others, namely, his followers.

IV. Fourthly, Francis was a vine cultivated by severe penance. Vines are cultivated in two ways, namely, by digging around and by pruning; this is mortification of desires and the giving up of everything worldly. *What the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit* [Gal 5:17], and from the flesh come the source and prompting to sin. Sickness cannot be cured unless the cause and matter of the illness are eradicated, and so carnal desires are to be mortified so that *the flesh with its passions and desires* may be crucified [Gal 5:24]. All that is worldly is to be amputated and cut off from a soul as something superfluous that frequently leads a soul away from God. Whatever is over and above what is sufficient is superfluous. So Augustine in *The Free Choice of the Will*<sup>12</sup> says: ‘Avarice is to want more than is sufficient’. It is clear and confirmed by experience that nature is content with little. Further, each person has to examine him or herself daily to see if anything superfluous and useless has developed in thought or affection, and, if it has, then it has to be amputated by a blade of judgment. Of this cultivation of a vine by digging we read: *For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard* [Mt 20:1]. Every person is a labourer in the vineyard of the Church and in the vineyard of oneself; each person is led and called to dig the vineyard, that is, to mortify the flesh. Concerning the pruning of the vines we read: *I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit* [Jn 15:1-2]. This text is a word of the head or of the whole body, of which God the Father is the labourer who cuts off with the blade of judgment the sterile and barren branches as something useless to be burnt in the fire of hell. The text can also be a word of each member of the body from whom

*God, the Father of mercies* [2 Cor 1:3], cuts off and restrains every useless and superfluous thought, affection and desire for what is worldly, while cleansing what is useful and fruitful to encourage richer fruit. On the other hand we read of the lazy and negligent worker: *I passed by the field of one who was lazy, by the vineyard of a stupid person; and see, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles* [Prov 24:30-31].

Blessed Francis was a most diligent carer for this vine, mortifying in himself every carnal desire by most strict abstinences, frequent vigils and other penitential exercises, crucifying the flesh with its vices [Gal 5:24]. He rejected, put away from himself, cut off and gave up all; his followers were to give up all earthly possessions whether they be held in common or personally.<sup>13</sup>

V. Fifthly, Francis was a vine spread out in fraternal love or in the increase of the Order. A faithful person should extend fraternal love to all friends, enemies, to those near and those far away, to relatives and strangers, in good-will and in kindness, in affection and in deeds. The commandment of love is a broad commandment: *I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad* [Ps 119:96]. This love, like a fire, stretches the mind so that it can run in the way of God's commandments: *I run the way of your commandments, for you enlarge my understanding* [Ps 119:32]. The mind of a just person, like a vine spreading out and increasing its branches, should relate to all; good spreads out from itself.<sup>14</sup> In this way the affection of love is not closed in and directed towards a love for a friend, but is broad and spread out by fraternal love. For, *the spirit of the Lord has filled the world* [Wis 1:7].

What broad, what heartfelt affection was in blessed Francis. Not only did he love for the sake of God rational creatures in which the divine image shone, but also irrational and insensitive creatures in which he saw some trace of the divine image because of their conformity to this likeness and the identity of their original source; these he loved as if by some fraternal affection calling them brothers and sisters.<sup>15</sup> He was a vine spread out by the increase of the Order to which can be applied the text: *It sprouted and became a vine*

*spreading out* [Ezek 17:6]. By birth blessed Francis was lowly, not of noble birth, not scholarly, and yet he took root and grew into a vine spreading wide throughout all the areas of the world, putting forth shoots and branches in every climate. His vine, that is, his Order, contains the noble, the wise and the powerful; a humble person converted the noble, an unlearned and simple person converted, sowed and brought forth the wise. God chose this simple, humble and unlearned person so that whatever he might be or do, God was and did in him to whom all was to be credited. Of the spreading and growth of this vine, that is, of this Order, we read: *You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; it sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River* [Ps 80:9-11].

VI. Sixthly, Francis was a leafy vine, flowering and giving off a scent from the building up of others. He put forth leaves in his writings on formation for in Scripture leaves represent words.<sup>16</sup> Of great quality and efficacy were the words of Francis! As the *Legend*<sup>17</sup> says his words were neither hollow nor worthy of ridicule, but they penetrated the marrow of hearts. It can be said of him: *Is not my word like fire and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?* [Jer 23:29]. He flowered by giving an edifying example. A good life and an honourable way of life is like flowers: *I am the mother of beautiful love* [Sir 24:17 footnote]; and later: *And my flowers are the fruit of honour and goodness.*<sup>18</sup> Certainly Francis was a rule, a mirror and example of all goodness. The fame of his name spread like fire. In Scripture, scent implies a praiseworthy fame, according to the text: *Through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing Christ. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing* [2 Cor 2:14-15]. The fame of the name of Francis spread through the whole world so that there can be said of him: *The smell of your garments is as the smell of frankincense* [Song 4:11 DRB]. And in praise of him can be said: *The name of Josiah is like blended incense prepared by the skill of the perfumer; his memory is as sweet as honey to every mouth* [Sir 49:1-2]. Enlivened, remade and delighted by this scent many

imitate him and they can say: *We will run after you to the odour of your ointments* [Song 1:3 DRB]. Each person should strive for a good name, not for personal glory but for the honour of God and the building up of others, according to the text: *Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven* [Mt 5:16].

But woe to those who by their example scandalize rather than build up, whose names and memory do not give off a scent but rather stink. They are guilty of as many souls who run and fall into sin because of their example. Most dangerous of all is the bad example of prelates for, as Gregory<sup>19</sup> says, when a pastor goes down the paths of vice, necessarily the whole flock will be led into the precipice. Of the flowering and spreading of perfume from spiritual vines we read: *The vines are in blossom, they give forth fragrance* [Song 2:13], that is, holy souls diffuse a praiseworthy fame in the Church. It is said that the perfume of vines drives out serpents and toads,<sup>20</sup> because good example and praiseworthy fame drive out demons from the hearts of sinners.\*

\* Note also that a vine in flower is easily broken down if animals get in and so it is necessary to place guards. For this reason it is said: *Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom* [Song 2:15]. This Order is the vine of blessed Francis and it flowered as is evident. But how many wolves today want to destroy it. Let them be caught, therefore, in the perfume of this vine. Note and develop.

VII. Seventhly, Francis was a vine fruitful in good works and abounding devotion. Leaves, flowers and perfume are insufficient without fruit just as words, external example and fame are insufficient if they do not make an impact. The Lord cursed and withered a fig-tree that had only leaves; it showed promise of fruit but had none. A vine of the Lord must not then be barren and without fruit but productive, fertile and fruit bearing, lest as something useless it dries up from a sentence of divine cursing and is put for eternity to the fires below. This vine bears fruit by good works pleasing and acceptable to God, to angels and to the Church, according to the text: *Let us go out early to the vineyards, and see*

*whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened* [Song 7:12]. This text could be spoken by the Trinity or by angels or by prelates of the Church. God is delighted, angels delight, the whole Church delights in the good works of the saints. This vine bears fruit also by abounding devotion and the foretaste of divine sweetness. For the *wine* produced by a spiritual vine, *gladdens* and *inebriates the human heart*, as stated in Psalm 104:15, this is *the wine springing forth virgins* [Zech 9:17]. And it is said of Noah that he planted a vine, drank the wine and became drunk [Gen 9:21].

But, unfortunately, many who should produce like vines the fruit of good works and spiritual consolations, produce rather thorns that puncture and afflict. The Lord complained of this: *He expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes* [Isa 5:2]. They produce the bitterness of indignation, hatred, anger and disturbances of which is said: *Their grapes are grapes of poison, their clusters are bitter; their wine is the poison of serpents, the cruel venom of asps* [Deut 32:32-33].

Blessed Francis was not like this but like a fertile vine he abounded in good works and overflowed with divine consolations. Of Francis it can be said: *Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit* [Hos 10:1]. Let us ask the Lord to enable us to imitate blessed Francis in this life, in the conditions of a spiritual vine, so that we may be able to follow him into heaven, free of this world, coming out of Egypt and being transferred into the kingdom of eternal glory, which to us etc.

## NOTES

- 1 Isidore, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum*, in Exodum, c. 1, n. 2 (PL 83, 287).
- 2 The text in Matthew has *wisdom* but the DRB has *repentance*.
- 3 See Matthew of Aquasparta, *Quaestiones de gratia*, q. 2, Resp. (ed. V. Doucet in BFS IX, Quaracchi 1935, 42).
- 4 Using the alternative reading in the footnote in the Bible; the reading in the footnote is the same as the reading in Matthew's text.
- 5 Julian of Speyer, *Officium S. Francisci*, ad Laudes, antiphona 5 (p. 383).
- 6 C. 7, n. 4 (PG 3, 871); from the texts of Scotus Erigena and Ioannis Sarraceni, in Dionysiaca, I, 409s.
- 7 Bonaventure, LMj 9, 7 (FA:ED II 601).

- 8 Julian of Speyer, *Officium S. Francisci*, Antiphona ad Benedictus (p. 385).  
9 Supra, p. 64, note 3.  
10 See *Libri moralium*, l. 20, c. 25, nn. 53-54; l. 21, c. 2 (PL 76, 169 and 189).  
11 *The City of God*, book 19, ch. 4, FOTC, vol. 24, 197.  
12 Book 3, ch. 17, n. 48, FOTC, vol. 59, 209.  
13 LR 6 (FA:ED I 103).  
14 According to Ps.-Dionysius, *De coelesti hierarchia*, c. 4, n. 1; *De divinis nominibus*, c. 4, n.1 (PG 3, 178 and 694).  
15 Bonaventure, LMj 8, 6 (FA:ED II 590).  
16 See *Glossa interlinearis*, on Mk 11:13, in Lyranus (V, 110v).  
17 Bonaventure, LMj 3, 2 (FA:ED II 543).  
18 This text of NRSV in Sir 24:17 is considerably different from the DRB in Sir 24:23.  
19 *Pastoral Rule*, part 1, ch. 2, ACW, vol. 11, 24.  
20 The same statement is found in Bonaventure, in a sermon for the Monday after Easter (*Opera omnia*, IX, Quaracchi 1901, 285).