

If you are interested in learning more about our brother, Francis of Assisi, we recommend the following reading material:

Francis and Clare: The Complete Works
By: Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap.

The Journey and the Dream
By: Murray Bodo, O.F.M.

*Saint Francis:
A Model for Human Liberation*
By: Leonardo Boff

*Saint Francis of Assisi
Performing the Gospel Life*
By: Lawrence S. Cunningham

*God's Fool: The Life and Times
of St. Francis of Assisi*
By: Julian Green

*Francis of Assisi:
A Revolutionary Life*
By: Adrian House

*Reluctant Saint:
The Life of Francis of Assisi*
By: Donald Spoto



'I Have Done What Is
Mine to Do;
May Christ Teach You
Yours'



The Life of: St. Francis of Assisi A Brief Biography



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Text with minor adaptation from:
Francis -- The Journey and the Dream
By Murray Bodo, OFM
St. Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati, 1972
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There is a large plain in the center of Italy in the Province of Umbria that breathes the peace of one man, a perfectly free and unfettered spirit that was born in the small town of Assisi in the year 1182. The world knows him as a saint, poet and poor little man, Francis of Assisi. Even today as you walk through the Umbrian countryside, the peace of St. Francis seeps into your soul and you begin to believe again that perfect joy is possible even for modern men and women on the same terms that Francis won it. These terms most would consider too high, for Francis won peace and joy through perfect detachment.

When he looked back at the city from the top of Mount Subasio, he was still young enough at twenty-two to believe that some destiny was waiting for him that would make that lovely city proud of him. Where and when the call to destiny waited for him, he did not know, but his deepest suspicion was that he would finally respond to the call of chivalry that plagued him night and day and become a knight. That had to be where his future lay.

That night, Francis tossed in his bed, straining his mind, begging it to relax, asking it to sleep, coaxing his body to drop off into slumber. Finally, when the first rays of morning were streaking across his back, Francis dozed off. And then it was that he had the dream.

He was led into the great hall of a dazzling palace, where a radiant princess-bride held court. The walls were covered with shields and trophies of battles won. And when he asked aloud who the Lord of the castle was, a voice rang out: *"It is the high court of Francis Bernadone and his followers."*

When Francis awoke, he was determined to make his dream come true, knowing that it was the setting out that mattered. He left Assisi soon after with a light heart to join the papal armies of Walter of Brienne, the Norman captain who was winning battles in the service of Pope Innocent III.

But Francis' life took another twist. Not a day's journey from Assisi, at Spoleto, he had another dream. "Francis, is it not better to serve the Lord than the servant?" The voice continues, "Go home, Francis, and think about your first vision."

Francis' unexpected return from Spoleto was the most terrible experience of his early life. The utter scorn of Assisi's citizens drove him into himself as nothing ever before had ever done. The rumor of his supposed cowardice swept through the city like a wind-fanned fire. His father, Pietro, was crestfallen. His mother, Lady Pica, grieved terribly for him and longed to soothe the secret spot

After that, only a short time remained for Francis in this world. He tried to remain cheerful through the final days of his agony. Almost blind and broken by sickness, weakened by his fasting and penance, he nonetheless intoned for the last time the hymn he had prayed for the Lord:

Most High, Almighty and Good Lord.
Yours is the Praise, the Glory,
the Honor, the Blessings...All.
To you alone, Most High, are they suited;
And no one is worthy of saying your name.
Be you praised, my Lord, with all our creatures,
Especially Brother Sun who brings us the day,
And through whom you give us light.
Beautiful is he, a gleam with mighty splendor;
of you, Most High, he gives indication.
Be you praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon and the stars;
You have formed them fair in the Sky.
Be you praised, my Lord, for Brother Wind and for Air and Clouds,
Calm and all kinds of Weather.
Be you praised, my Lord, for Sister Water,
who is humble and dear,
precious and pure.
Be you praised, my Lord, for Brother Fire,
through whom you illumine The Night.
He is beautiful and strong and merry.
Be you praised, my Lord, for our Sister, Mother Earth,
Who sustains and holds us to her breast;
Who produces abundant Fruit, tinted Flowers,
and Trees and Grass.
Be you praised, my Lord, with all your creatures especially Brother Sun
who brings us the Day, who brings us the Day,
who brings us the Day, who brings us the Day.*

As he lay on his deathbed, Francis was suddenly shaken from his reverie. He scanned the blurred faces of his brothers, one by one, loving them with his blindness as he had with his eyes. Now, as he lay on the cold ground, the final joy shot through his whole body. He would die like Jesus: poor, and clothed only in a borrowed habit.

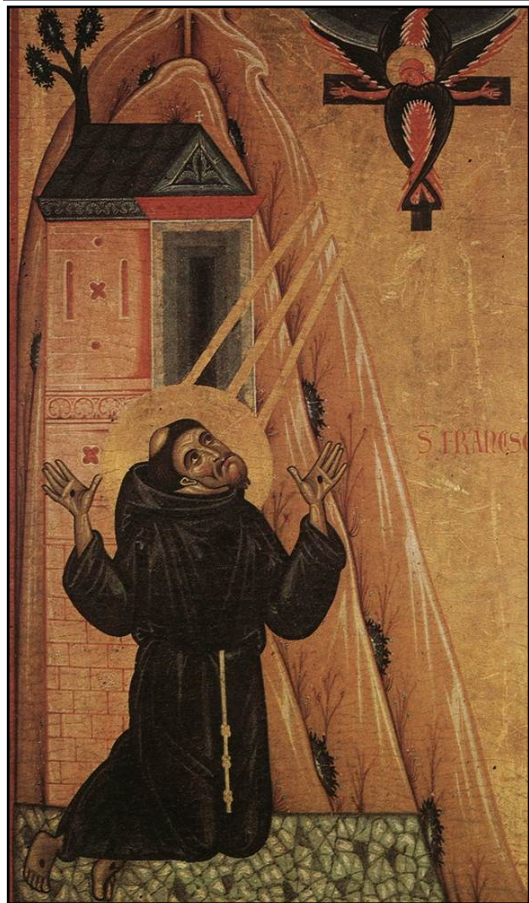
The brothers were all weeping now and praying aloud, but Francis neither saw nor heard. His blind eyes were transfixed, watching the man of the dream approach. And the Lord bent down to Francis and he died, a radiant smile on his face.



on earth, to preach the Good News of Jesus. And it was this journey ever onward which, over the years, had been their chief source of unity.

The call of the mission to spread the Gospel was the marrow of the Lesser Brothers' vocation. Francis himself begged Jesus to accept his own suffering as a part of the martyrdom of his brother, for the martyr's crown was part of the dream in Francis' mind. But Lady Poverty had stripped him even of that pride. He would be the Little Poor Man, even among the saints of God.

The tenderness of the Christ Child had led Francis to build the crib at Greccio on that Christmas night of 1223. Now the next year, the suffering face of Christ, which had been deeply imprinted on his mind ever since that day in San Damiano, led him on the journey to La Verna. Francis had asked in fear and trembling that Christ would let him experience and share some of his suffering on the cross. His wish was answered in an unimaginable way as the Lord impressed in his hands, feet and sides the traces of His holy Passion. An almost unbearable feeling of peace had overwhelmed him, as his whole life had begun and ended.



of his hurt, but she did not know how.

To listen to one's own heart when others are saying something else is the hardest test of man's spirit. Francis thought that he would not survive it. He prayed as he had never prayed before. During these long months Francis used to go to a little cave in the hill opposite Mount Subasio and try to think out what was happening to him. It was there, in the womb of the mountain, that he finally found peace of heart and courage to stand up like a man. It was there that he was born again.

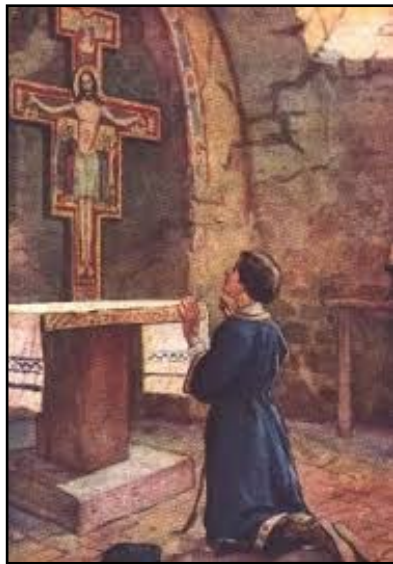
Then came the first victory of his new heart. All his life long he had panicked when he met lepers. And then one day on the road below Assisi he did one of those surprising things that only the power of Jesus' Spirit could explain. He reached out and touched a leper, a man the very sight of whom nauseated him. He felt his knees playing tricks on him and he was afraid he would not make it to the leper standing before him. Trembling, he threw his arms around the leper's neck and kissed his cheek. Then, like the feeling he remembered when he first began to walk, he was happy and confident. He dropped his arms and smiled at the leper and the man's eyes smiled back. In the silence of the gazing, neither man dropped his eyes and Francis marveled that the leper's eyes were hypnotically beautiful.

He knew that a far greater test was coming, an invitation into something he both feared and revered. As Francis mused on these thoughts, he approached the ramshackled little church of San Damiano. He hesitated a moment, then went in.

Above the altar he saw the large Byzantine crucifix of Christ. As though driven by an inner force, he fell on his knees and began to pray intensely. Suddenly, the whole face of the Christ seemed to move and Francis was afraid. Then, as from some far-away place and yet coming surely from the crucifix, a voice pierced Francis' soul.



“Go now, and repair my house, which as you can see is falling down.”



It never occurred to Francis at the time that Christ was asking anything other than to actually repair the churches that were falling into ruin. So he ran from San Damiano and set about collecting stone to repair the crumbling churches.

The hardest test of all was soon to come. It would be to stand up to his strong-willed father. They were two of a kind, in a way, each bent stubbornly upon what he thought mattered most in life. For Pietro it was power and influence and the satisfactions of accomplishment in the world of business and trade. For Francis it had become weakness and littleness and poverty of spirit that paradoxically gave him power and influence and satisfaction of spirit.

One day, Francis was begging in the streets and the crowd was unusually loud in its insults. Pietro ran from his shop and dragged his son before the bishop. It was then that Jesus gave Francis the courage to confront his father. Calmly, Francis stripped himself of his clothes and, placing them reverently at the feet of his father, he declared in a strong voice: *“I have called Pietro Bernadone my father...Now I will say, ‘Our Father, who art in heaven.’”*

It was April of 1207 that Francis had abandoned his father. Leaving Assisi in a workman’s tunic, he set his face toward Gubbio.

The April sky was clear and the sun shone brightly; there was still snow in the mountain clefts and the air was crisp and invigorating. He felt completely free and all of nature seemed to belong to him once again. And so full was he of this joy that he broke out into song, a song of the troubadours of Provence: *“I am the herald of the Great King!”*

And then came the temptations. The greatest temptation was to feel sorry for himself, and to ask himself why no one else really cared what he was doing. When Bernard of Quintavalle and the others came to him, Francis rejoiced that his journey had not ended once the Spirit took over his life, but that a new and more exciting journey had begun.

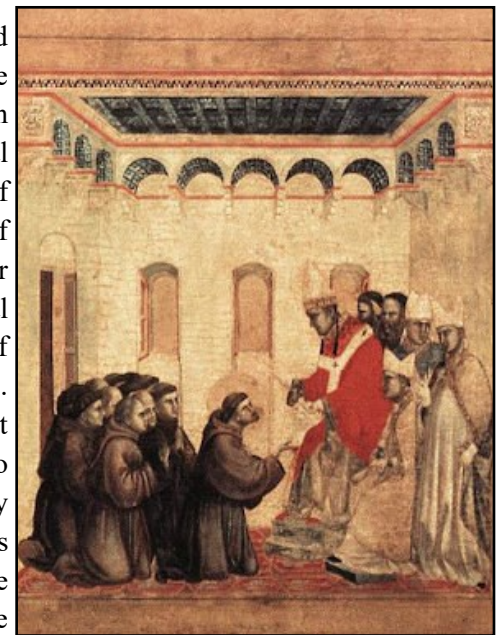
Three times this band of followers consulted the Gospel book. Three times they were advised to give up all things and follow Christ. It was with great joy that they followed their Master.

Francis always looked back nostalgically at the early days of the brotherhood. In those days the brothers all huddled together in a single sty through the heat of summer into the cold and wet autumn.

Those were happy times. It was so crowded in the shed that Francis had to chalk little boundaries on the ceiling. That was the honeymoon of their marriage to Lady Poverty. The brotherhood never again captured the rapture of those days.

They all realized that honeymoons don’t last forever. It was not that he felt the need for some structure around him, but Francis did want some kind of official sanction for his way of poverty and some ecclesiastical protection for his brothers.

There were bands of reformers and fanatics roaming the countryside at the time who were leading the common fold down blind alleys of heretical enthusiasm. The only source of certainty for Francis was the Church of Christ as personified in the Pope. For Francis, the papal word of approval would be Christ’s own approval of Francis’ interpretation of the Gospel. So Francis and a few of his brothers set out from Rivotorto on the long walk to Rome. Innocent III sensed the sincerity and fidelity of Francis. As Francis slowly and deliberately explained the dream the Pope’s eyes grew moist. The Pope rose from his throne and embraced Francis. Simply and humbly he proclaimed for all to hear:



“Go with God, little brothers, and announce salvation for all as the Lord reveals it to you. And when the Almighty has multiplied your number, then come back to me and I will charge you with a great inheritance.”

To be an apostle is to be a pilgrim and stranger in this world. Of that, Francis was sure. He and his brothers had been sent by Christ and by Innocent, his vicar