

Saint Francis of Assisi, Fonder of the Friars Minor



We know more of St. Francis than of any other medieval saint. Not only have we his own words, his Rule, Testament, letters, poems, and liturgical writings, but also the intimate accounts of several of his disciples, written down within twenty years after his death. These first biographies, by Brothers Thomas of Celano, Leo, Angelo, and Rufino, were soon revised and added to by other friars who wanted to call attention to one phase or another of Francis' work and teachings. From this great store of authentic material a clear picture of the man emerges. St. Francis is one saint whom both Catholics and non-Catholics have united in honoring. Certainly no other has so appealed to Protestants and even to non-Christians. And the appeal is timeless: Francis captured the imagination of his contemporaries as well as that of modern men by his unique simplicity and a pure grace of spirit. A classic collection of popular legends, the <Little Flowers of St. Francis>, first printed in 1476, contains charming and beautiful stories of Francis' love of the poor, of animals, of all nature. In action he was original, in speech picturesque and poetic, yet he was a man utterly inspired by faith in and devotion to the risen Christ.

Francis was born in the stony hill-town of Assisi in Umbria, in the year 1181 or 1182. His father, Peter Bernadone, was a wealthy merchant. His mother, Pica, by some accounts was gently born and of Provençal blood. Much of Bernadone's trade was with France, and his son was born while he was absent in that country. Perhaps for this reason the child was called Francesco, "the French man," though his baptismal name was John. As a youth he was ardent in his amusements and seemed carried away by the mere joy of living, taking no interest at all in his father's business or in formal learning. Bernadone, proud to have his son finely dressed and associating with young noblemen, gave him plenty of money, which Francis spent carelessly. Though Francis was high-spirited, he was too fastidious to lead a dissolute life. It was the age of chivalry, and he was thrilled by the songs of the troubadours and the deeds of knights. At the age of twenty or thereabouts, during a petty war between the towns of Assisi and Perugia, he was taken prisoner. During a year of captivity he remained cheerful and kept up the spirits of his companions. Soon after his release he suffered a long illness. This he bore with patience.

After his recovery Francis joined the troop of a knight of Assisi who was riding south to fight under Walter de Brienne for the Pope against the Germans. Having equipped himself with sumptuous

apparel and fine armor, he fared forth. On the way he met a knight shabbily clad, and was so touched with compassion that he exchanged clothes with him. That night he dreamed he saw his father's house transformed into a castle, its walls hung with armor, all marked with the sign of the cross; and he heard a voice saying that the armor belonged to Francis and his soldiers. Confident now that he would win glory as a knight, he set out again, but on the first day fell ill. While lying helpless, a voice seemed to tell him to turn back, and "to serve the Master rather than the man." Francis obeyed. At home he began to take long rambles in the country and to spend many hours by himself; he felt contempt for a life wasted on trivial and transitory things. It was a time of spiritual crisis during which he was quietly searching for something worthy of his complete devotion. A deep compassion was growing within him. Riding one day in the plains below Assisi, he met a leper whose loathsome sores filled Francis with horror. Overcoming his revulsion, he leapt from his horse and pressed into the leper's hand all the money he had with him, then kissed the hand. This was a turning point in his life. He started visiting hospitals, especially the refuge for lepers, which most persons avoided. On a pilgrimage to Rome, he emptied his purse at St. Peter's tomb, then went out to the swarm of beggars at the door, gave his clothes to the one that looked poorest, dressed himself in the fellow's rags, and stood there all day with hand outstretched. The rich young man would experience for himself the bitterness and humiliation of poverty.

One day, after his return from Rome, as he prayed in the humble little church of St. Damian outside the walls of Assisi, he felt the eyes of the Christ on the crucifix gazing at him and heard a voice saying three times, "Francis, go and repair My house, which you see is falling down." The building, he observed, was old and ready to fall. Assured that he had now found the right path, Francis went home and in the singleness and simplicity of his heart took a horseload of cloth out of his father's warehouse and sold it, together with the horse that carried it, in the market at the neighboring town of Foligno. He then brought the money to the poor priest of St. Damian's church, and asked if he might stay there. Although the priest accepted Francis' companionship, he refused the money, which Francis left lying on a window sill. Bernadone, furious at his son's waywardness, came to St. Damian's to bring him home, but Francis hid himself and could not be found.

He spent some days in prayer, and then went bravely to see his father. He was now so thin and ill-clad that boys in the streets pelted him and called him mad. The exasperated Bernadone beat Francis, fettered his feet, and locked him up. A little later his mother set him free and Francis returned to St. Damian's. His father pursued him there and angrily declared that he must either return home or renounce his share in his inheritance-and pay the purchase price of the horse and the goods he had taken as well. Francis made no objection to being disinherited, but protested that the other money now belonged to God and the poor. Bernadone had him summoned for trial before Guido, the bishop of Assisi, who heard the story and told the young man to restore the money and trust in God. "He does not wish," the bishop said, "to have His church profit by goods which may have been unjustly acquired." Francis not only gave back the money but went even further. "My clothing is also his," he said, and stripped off his garments. "Hither to I have called Peter Bernadone father.... From now on I say only, 'Our Father, who art in Heaven.'" Bernadone left the court in sorrow and rage, while the bishop covered the young man with his own cloak until a gardener's smock was brought. Francis marked a cross on the shoulder of the garment with chalk, and put it on.

Henceforth he was completely cut off from his family, and began a strange new life. He roamed the highways, singing God's praise. In a wood some robbers stopped him and asked who he was. When he answered soberly, "I am the herald of the Great King," they jeered and threw him into a ditch. He picked himself up and continued on his way singing. At a monastery, Francis was given alms and a job of work, as a poor traveler. Trudging on to the town of Gubbio, he was recognized by a friend, who took him to his house and gave him a proper tunic, belt, and shoes. These he wore for nearly two years as he walked about the countryside. When he returned to St. Damian's the priest welcomed him, and Francis now began in earnest to repair the church, begging for building stones in the streets of Assisi and carrying off those that were given him. He labored with the masons in the actual reconstruction, and, by the spring of 1208, the church was once more in good condition. Next

he repaired an old chapel dedicated to St. Peter. By this time many people, impressed by his sincerity and enthusiasm, were willing to contribute to the work. Francis was now attracted to a tiny chapel known as St. Mary of the Portiuncula, belonging to a Benedictine monastery on Monte Subasio. It stood in the wooded plain, some two miles below Assisi, forsaken and in ruins. Francis rebuilt it as he had done the others, and seems to have thought of spending his life there as a hermit, in peace and seclusion. Here on the feast of St. Matthias, in 1209, the way of life he was to follow was revealed to him. The Gospel of the Mass for this day was Matthew X, 7-19: "And going, preach, saying The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.... Freely have you received, freely give. Take neither gold nor silver nor brass in your purses . . . nor two coats nor shoes nor a staff.... Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves...." These words suddenly became Christ's direct charge to him. His doubts over, he cast off shoes, staff, and leathern girdle, but kept his rough woolen coat, which he tied about him with a rope. This was the habit he gave his friars the following year. In this garb he went to Assisi the next morning and, with a moving warmth and sincerity, began to speak to the people he met on the shortness of life, the need of repentance, and the love of God. His salutation to those he passed on the road was, "Our Lord give you peace."

An early disciple was Bernard Quintavalle, a rich and prudent merchant of the city, who invited Francis to stay at his house. At night they had long talks, and there was no mistaking Francis' passionate dedication. Bernard soon informed Francis that he would sell all his goods and give the proceeds to the poor and join him. Shortly afterward, a canon of the cathedral, Peter de Cattaneo, asked to come with them. The three then went down to the Portiuncula, where, on April 16, Francis "gave his habit" to these two companions and they built themselves simple huts. Brother Giles, a man of great gentleness and purity of spirit, was the next to come, and others soon followed.

For a year Francis and his now numerous companions preached among the peasants and helped them in the fields. A brief rule which has not been preserved was drawn up. Apparently it consisted of little more than the passages from the Gospel which Francis had read to his first followers, with brief injunctions to manual labor, simplicity, and poverty. In the summer of 1210 he and some of the others carried it to Rome to obtain the Pope's approbation. Innocent III, the great ruler of Catholic Europe, listened but hesitated. Most of the cardinals he consulted thought that the existing orders should be reformed before their number was increased and that the proposed rule for the new organization, taken though it was from Christ's own command, was impractical. Cardinal John Colonna, who pleaded for Francis, was deputed to examine him as to his orthodoxy, while Innocent considered the matter. Later the Pope dreamed he saw Francis propping up the Lateran Church with his shoulder. He was to see Dominic in a similar position five years later. Summoning Francis and his companions, he orally approved their mission of preaching penitence, only requiring that they always get the consent of the local bishop; also they must choose a leader with whom the ecclesiastical authorities might communicate. Francis was thereupon elected head, and Cardinal Colonna gave them the monk's tonsure.

Francis and his little band returned to Umbria rejoicing. A temporary shelter was found near the foot of Monte Subasio, and from there they went out in all directions preaching repentance, and the blessedness of doing God's will. The cathedral of Assisi was the only church large enough to hold the crowds that flocked to hear them, especially after it was known that their rule had papal approval. Soon the abbot of the Benedictine monastery gave them in perpetuity their beloved Portiuncula chapel and the ground on which it stood. Francis would accept only the use of the property. The spirit of holy poverty must govern their order, if they were to be disciples of Him who had not where to lay His head. In token of this arrangement, the friars sent to the Benedictines every year as rent a basket of fish caught in a neighboring river. In return, the monks gave the friars a barrel of oil. This annual exchange of gifts still goes on between the Benedictines of St. Peter's in Assisi and the Franciscans of the Portiuncula. On the ground around the chapel the friars quickly built themselves some huts of wood and clay, enclosing them by a hedge. This was the first Franciscan monastery.

Because the body was meant to carry burdens, to eat scantily and coarsely, and to be beaten when sluggish or refractory, Francis called it Brother Ass. When, early in his new life, he was violently tempted, he threw himself naked into a ditch full of snow. Again when tempted like Benedict he plunged into a briar patch and rolled about until he was torn and bleeding. Yet before he died he asked pardon of his body for having treated it so cruelly; by that time he considered excessive austerities wrong, especially if they decreased the power to labor. He had no use for eccentricity for its own sake. Once when he was told that a friar so loved silence that he would confess only by signs, his comment was, "That is not the spirit of God but of the Devil, a temptation, not a virtue."

Francis was reverently in love with all natural phenomena—sun, moon, air, water, fire, flowers; his quick warm sympathies responded to all that lived. His tenderness for and his power over animals were noted again and again. From his companions we have the story of his rebuke to the noisy swallows who were disturbing his preaching at Alviano: "Little sister swallows, it is now my turn to speak; you have been talking enough all this time." We hear also of the birds that perched attentively around when he told them to sing their Creator's praises, of the rabbit that would not leave him at Lake Trasymene, and of the tamed wolf of Gubbio—all incidents that have inspired innumerable artists and story tellers.

The early years were a time of training in poverty, mutual help, and brotherly love. The friars worked at their various trades and in the fields of neighboring farmers to earn their bread. When work was lacking, they begged, though they were forbidden to take money. They were especially at the service of lepers, and those who were helpless and suffering. Among the recruits soon to present themselves were the "Three Companions," Angelo, Leo, and Rufino, who were in time to write of their beloved leader; and the "renowned jester of the Lord," Brother Juniper, of whom Francis said, "I would I had a forest of such junipers." It was he who, while a crowd was waiting to receive him at Rome, was found playing seesaw with some children outside the city.

In the spring of 1212, an eighteen-year-old girl of Assisi named Clara^[1] heard Francis preach in the cathedral and left her father's castle to take the vow of poverty and become a disciple. The monks of Monte Subasio again aided Francis by giving him a place where Clara and her earliest followers could be lodged; to them he gave the same rules as the brothers had. In the autumn of that year Francis resolved to go as a crusader of peace to the Mohammedans of the East. With a companion he embarked for Syria, only to suffer shipwreck off the Dalmatian coast. Having no money for the return passage, they got back to Ancona as stowaways. The following year Francis preached up and down central Italy. In 1214 he made another attempt to reach the Mohammedans, this time by the land route through Spain. So eager was he to arrive that his companion could scarcely keep up with him on the road. But once more Francis was disappointed, for in Spain he was taken ill and had to return to Italy.

There, on his recovery, he resumed direction of the order and his tours of preaching. To the order he gave the name of Friars Minor, Little Brothers, to express his wish that they should never be in positions above their fellows. Many cities were now anxious to have the brothers in their midst to act as peace-makers in periods of civil strife, and small communities of them sprang up rapidly throughout Umbria, Tuscany, and Lombardy. In 1215 Francis went to Rome for the great Council of the Lateran, which was also attended by the future St. Dominic, who had begun his missionary work in Languedoc while Francis was still a youth.

At Pentecost in 1217 a general chapter of all Friars Minor was held at Assisi. They had now become so numerous and so widely dispersed that some more systematic organization was necessary. Italy was divided into provinces, each in charge of a responsible minister provincial. "Should anyone be lost through the minister's fault and bad example, that minister will have to give an account before our Lord Jesus Christ." Missions were sent to Spain, Germany, and Hungary, and Francis himself made plans to go to France, of which he had heard so much in childhood from his father. He was

dissuaded by Cardinal Ugolino, who after the death of Cardinal John Colonna began to serve as advisor to the new convent. He sent instead Brother Pacifico and Brother Agnello; the latter was afterwards to establish the order in England.

Although still the head, Francis was prevailed on at times to submit to the prudent Ugolino. The cardinal actually presided at the general chapter of 1219, called, like its predecessor, a "mat chapter" because of the huts of wattles and straw hastily put up to shelter the five thousand friars present. The more learned and worldly-wise of the brothers were critical of the free and venturesome spirit of their founder, who, they claimed, was improvident and naive. They wanted more material security and a more elaborate rule, similar to that of the older orders. Francis defended his position with spirit: "My brothers, the Lord called me into the way of simplicity and humility, and this way He has pointed out to me for myself and for those who will believe and follow me.... The Lord told me he would have me poor and foolish in this world, . . . God will confound you by your own wisdom and learning, and, for all your fault-finding, bring you repentance whether you will or no."

From this chapter Francis sent some of his friars on missions to the infidels in Tunisia, Morocco, and Spain, while he himself undertook one to the Saracens of Egypt and Syria, embarking with eleven friars from Ancona in June, 1219. At the city of Damietta on the Nile Delta, which the crusaders were besieging, Francis was deeply shocked at the profligacy, the cynicism, and the lack of discipline of the soldiers of the cross. When in August the leaders prepared to attack, he predicted failure and tried to dissuade them from the attempt. The Christians were driven back with the slaughter of six thousand men, yet they continued the siege, and at last took the city. Meanwhile, a number of the soldiers had pledged themselves to live by Francis' rule. He also paid several visits to the Saracen leader, Melek-el-Kamil, Sultan of Egypt. There is a story to the effect that he first went among the enemy with only Brother Illuminato, calling out, "Sultan! Sultan!" When he was brought before the Sultan and asked his errand, Francis replied boldly, "I am sent by the Most High God, to show you and your people the way of salvation by announcing to you the truths of the Gospel." Discussion followed, and other audiences. The Sultan, somewhat moved, invited Francis to stay with him. "If you and your people," said Francis, "will accept the word of God, I will with joy stay with you. If you yet waver between Christ and Mohammed, order a fire kindled and I will go into it with your priests that you may see which is the true faith." The Sultan replied that he did not think any of his <imams> would dare to enter the fire, and he would not accept Francis' condition for fear of upsetting the people. He offered him many presents, which Francis refused. Fearing finally that some of his Moslems might desert to the Christians, he sent Francis, under guard, back to the camp.

Sickened by the senseless slaughter and brutality that marked the taking of the city, Francis went on to visit the Holy Places of Palestine. When he returned to Italy he found that in his absence his vicars, Matthew of Narni and Gregory of Naples, had held a general chapter and introduced certain innovations, tending to bring the Franciscans a little more into line with other orders and to confine them in a more rigid framework. At several of the women's convents, regular constitutions, drawn up on the Benedictine model, had been imposed by Cardinal Ugolino. In Bologna Francis found his brothers housed in a fine new monastery. He refused to enter it, and went for lodging to Dominic's Friars Preachers. Sending for his provincial minister, he upbraided him, and ordered the friars to leave the building. He felt that his fundamental idea was being betrayed. It was a serious crisis, but it ended in Francis' acceptance of some measure of change. Ugolino convinced him that he himself, not the order, was the owner of the new building; also that systematic supervision and regulation were necessary for such a far-flung organization. Francis' profound humility made him ready to blame himself for anything that went wrong. He would not give up his faith in the way of life that Christ had shown him, but he became less confident. He finally went to Pope Honorius III and asked that the cardinal be made official protector and counselor of the order. At the chapter meeting of 1220 he resigned his position as minister general; in May, 1221, he offered his draft for a revised rule, a long and confused document, containing a new requirement, a year's novitiate before a candidate could be admitted; there were long extracts from the New Testament, and passionate appeals to the brothers to preserve the old life of poverty and love. The jurists of the order, those who knew the

problems of administration, and the provincial ministers all wanted something more precise, a rule which could be understood and followed anywhere in the world by men who had never seen Francis, and which would also keep Franciscans from diverging too widely from the established usages of the historic Church.

Once at least during the two years that followed, Francis broke away to the solitude of a mountain near Rieti, and worked over the rule alone. The final result he delivered to Brother Elias of Cortona, then minister general, but the copy was somehow lost, and Francis patiently dictated the substance of it to Brother Leo. In the form in which it was at last presented to the chapter general in 1223 and solemnly approved by Pope Honorius it has remained ever since. The words of Christ which made up almost all of the original rule of 1210 are omitted. It is explicit on a number of points which in 1210 had been left indefinite—methods of admission, times of fasting, government by ministers and triennial general chapters, requirements for preaching, obedience to superiors; at the head of all is a cardinal governor appointed by the pope. The early simplicity is gone, though now and again the fervor of Franciscan idealism breaks through the sober text. The brothers are still to receive no money, to labor as far as they are able, to own no house "nor anything." They are not to be ashamed to beg, since "the Lord made himself poor for us in this world." They are not to trouble to educate illiterate brothers but to strive instead for pure hearts, humility, and patience. The contrast, however, between the old rule and the new shocked and pained some of the members. Yet it seemed true that such a great institution could not be run without a system of uniform control or let its members wander as they pleased over the earth, with no churches of their own where they could preach regularly, and no house where they could live together. To Brother Elias, the able and masterful friar who with Cardinal Ugolino became the directing force, there was still too much of the unworkable Franciscan dream in the new rule and in later years he refused to be bound by it. In 1230 the cardinal, then Pope Gregory IX, issued an official interpretation of it.

Somewhat earlier Francis and the cardinal had drawn up a rule for the fraternity of lay men and women who wished to associate themselves with the Friars Minor and followed as best they could the rules of humility, labor, charity, and voluntary poverty, without withdrawing from the world: the Franciscan tertiaries or Third Order of today.[2] These congregations of lay penitents became a power in the religious life of the late Middle Ages.

The Christmas season of 1223 Francis spent near the village of Greccio in the valley of Rieti, weary in mind and body. There he remarked to his friend, the knight, Giovanni di Vellita, "I would make a memorial of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, and in some sort behold with bodily eyes the hardships of His infant state, lying on hay in a manger, with the ox and the ass standing by." So a rude stable was set up at the hermitage, with a live ox and ass, and a child lying on straw, and the people crowded to the midnight Mass, at which Francis as deacon read the Gospel story and then preached. His use of the <creche> gave impetus to its later popularity. Having become extremely frail, he remained at Greccio for some months longer.

In June, 1224, Francis attended his last chapter meeting, at which the new rule was formally delivered to the provincial ministers. In August, with a few of the brothers closest to him, he made his way through the Apennine forest to the peak of Alvernia, a place of retreat put at his disposal years earlier by the lord of Chiusi. A hut of branches was built for him, a little way from his companions. Brother Leo daily brought him food. His fears for the future of the order now increased and reached a climax. And here it was, on or about Holy Cross Day, September 14, that at sunrise, after a night of prayer, he had a vision of a winged seraph, nailed to a cross, flying towards him; he also felt keen stabs of pain in hands, feet, and sides. The vision vanished, and he discovered on his body the stigmata of the crucified Christ. During his lifetime, few persons saw the stigmata, called by Dante, "the ultimate seal." Thenceforth he kept his hands covered with the sleeves of his habit, and wore shoes and stockings. To those who were there with him, he disclosed what had happened, and within a few days composed the poem, "Praise of the Most High God."

After celebrating the feast of St. Michael on September 29, the now enfeebled friar rode down the mountain on a borrowed horse, and healed several persons who were brought to him in the plain below. Weak as he was, he insisted on preaching, riding from village to village on an ass. Young and ambitious members of the order, already set on rivaling the Dominicans as brilliant and popular preachers in the towns, were eager to outshine them in the schools as well. Francis realized that learning had its uses, but to fulfill their special mission, he knew that his brothers needed much time for prayer, meditation, and helpful labor. He feared the prescribed scholastic training, thinking it tended to feed conceit and extinguish charity and piety. Above all, Lady Learning was dangerous as a rival to Lady Poverty. Yet under pressure he yielded so far as to consent to the appointment of Antony of Padua as reader and teacher.

Francis' health was growing worse, the stigmata were a source of pain, and his eyes were failing. In the summer of 1225 Cardinal Ugolino and the vicar-general, Elias, made him consent to put himself in the hands of the Pope's physician at Rieti. On his way there he stopped to pay a final visit to Abbess Clara and the nuns of St. Damian. He stayed for over a month, and seemed depressed by his apparent failure to accomplish his mission in life. For two weeks he lost his sight, but finally triumphed over suffering and gloom, and in a sudden ecstasy one day composed the beautiful, triumphant "Canticle of the Sun," and set it to music. The brothers might sing it as they went about their preaching. He went on to Rieti to undergo the agonizing treatment prescribed- cauterization of the forehead by white-hot iron, and plasters to keep the wound open. Strangely enough, he obtained some relief. During the winter he preached a little, and dictated a long letter to his brothers, which he hoped would be read at the opening of future general chapters. They were to love one another, to love and follow Lady Poverty, to love and reverence the Eucharist, and to love and honor the clergy. He also composed a still longer letter to all Christians, repeating his message of love and harmony.

Yearning to be at home, when spring came he was carried north to Assisi and lodged in the bishop's palace, but these fine surroundings depressed Francis, and he begged to be taken to the Portiuncula. As they bore him down the hill, he asked to have the stretcher set down, and turning back for a moment towards the city he blessed it and bade it farewell. At the Portiuncula he was able to dictate his Will, a final, firm defense of all he had been and done. No one coming after him must introduce glosses to explain away any part of the rule or of this Will, for he had written it "in a clear and simple manner" and it should be understood in the same way and practiced "until the end." Four years later Ugolino, then Pope Gregory IX, at the same time that he gave an official interpretation of the rule, announced that the brothers were not bound to observe the Will.

As the end drew near, Francis asked his brothers to send to Rome for the Lady Giacoma di Settesoli, who had often befriended him. Even before the messenger started, the lady arrived at his bedside. Francis also sent a last message to Clara and her nuns. While the brothers stood about him singing the "Canticle of the Sun," with the new stanza he had lately given them, in praise of Sister Death, he repeated the one hundred and forty-first Psalm, "I cried to the Lord with my voice; with my voice I made supplication to the Lord." At his request he was stripped of his clothing and laid for a while on the ground that dying he might rest in the arms of Lady Poverty. Back upon his pallet once more, he called for bread and broke it and to each one present gave a piece in token of their love. The Gospel for Holy Thursday, the story of the Lord's Passion as told by St. John, was read aloud. And as darkness fell on Saturday, October 3, 1226, Francis died.

He had asked to be buried in the criminals' cemetery in the Colle d'Inferno, but early the next morning a crowd of his fellow citizens came down and bore his body to the church of St. George in Assisi. Here it remained for two years, during which time a process of canonization was being carried through. In 1228 the first stone was laid for the beautiful basilica built in Francis' honor, under the direction of Brother Elias. In 1230 his body was secretly removed to it and, in fear that the Perugians might

send a raiding party to steal it, buried so deep that not until 1818, after a fifty-two days' search, was it discovered beneath the high altar of the lower church.

The order which Francis founded divided early into three branches, the Brothers Minor of the Observance, who follow the rule of 1223, preach, perform works of charity, and go as missionaries abroad, the Brothers Minor Conventual, who live by the later, less stringent rule, which permits the corporate holding of property, and the Brothers Minor Capuchin, for whom Francis' rule is not ascetic enough, and who live strictly cloistered, under a regimen of silence.

Canticle of the Sun

O most high, almighty, good Lord God, to Thee belong praise, glory, honor, and all blessing! By Thee alone, Most High, were all things made and no man is worthy to speak Thy name. Praised be my Lord with all his creatures, especially Messer Brother Sun, who brings us the day and brings us the light; fair is he and shining with a very great splendor; Most High, he signifies to us Thee! Praised be my Lord for Sister Moon, and for the stars, the which He has set in heaven clear and precious and lovely. Praised be my Lord for Brother Wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather, by the which Thou upholdest life in Thy creatures. Praised be my Lord for Sister Water, who is very serviceable unto us, and humble, and precious, and clean. Praised be my Lord for Brother Fire, through whom Thou givest us light in the night; and he is beautiful and joyous, and very mighty, and strong. Praised be my Lord for our Sister, Mother Earth, who doth sustain us and keep us, and bring forth divers fruits, and flowers of many colors, and grass. Praised be my Lord for those who pardon one another for His love's sake, and who endure weakness and tribulation; blessed are they who peaceably endure, for by Thee, Most Highest, shall they be crowned. Praised be my Lord for our sister the death of the body, from whom no man living can escape. Woe unto them who die in mortal sin. Blessed are they who are found walking by Thy most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm. Praise ye and bless my Lord, and give thanks unto Him and serve Him with great humility.

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