

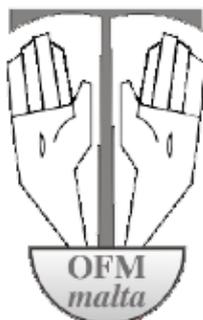


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## *Editorial*

# FRANCISCANS ON A WATERSHED

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The celebration of the general chapter of the Order of Friars Minor, scheduled for the month of July 2021, brings with it a reflection upon what the future holds in store for us Franciscans. It is as if we are sitting on a watershed, and what we decide now will determine our significance and role in the near future. If we produce clean water we are bound to irrigate our future with clear streams of thought and action.

We have been accustomed during these last decades to celebrate many glorious memories of historical events in our Franciscan family. We are still in the same process. This year, 1221, marks the 800 years since the *Regula non bullata*, in 1223 we will celebrate 800 years of the *Regula bullata*, in 1224 of Francis' receiving of the Stigmata on La Verna, in 1226 of Francis' death, in 1228 of his canonisation. We can continue on and on. Indeed, it has become a fashion to celebrate these historical dates, organising splendid ceremonies, seminars, study days, congresses, etc. This is obviously important. If we think of the great results of the 1926 celebration of the 700 anniversary of Francis' death, or of the anniversaries of the birth of Francis (1982), Clare (1993), Anthony of Padua (1995), we have many happy memories to cherish, monuments to visit, books to read.

Unfortunately we have tended to be too much inclined to concentrate on the past. It is as if we are standing on the summit of a ridge of mountains, and we continually look back down on the mountain face we have just climbed, and forget to look ahead of us to see where the clear streams we

produce will eventually end up irrigating below us, in front of us. That is why it is important to feel that we are living on a watershed and that we should stop for a moment to reflect upon what the future holds in store for us.

The history of our Order teaches us that there were a good number of far-sighted brothers who paved the way forward through reforms and new initiatives of evangelisation. Theirs was an uphill climb. They were often misunderstood by the majority of the brothers who preferred to continue living a more “comfortable” life, as well as by the ecclesiastical institution that wanted the mendicant religious Orders as a bulwark of Catholicism in its endeavour to spread Christian influence and control heretical movements in Christian Europe. On the whole these reforms were successful, and in turn needed to be reformed anew once the religious family became entrenched in a new “comfortable” life-style.

This fact teaches us not to be surprised that we are also standing on a watershed. We also need to look ahead and see the way open in front of us. To do so we need two important things: we need a prophet and we need a vision. A prophet in the biblical sense is not necessarily one who has the gift of foretelling future events. Rather, he is God’s spokesman who reads the present in the light of God’s revelation and projects it in the future by indicating the way to his followers. That is why a prophet necessarily needs a vision in order to be such.

In the history of salvation, the moments of crisis of the people of Israel were always marked by an evident lack of prophets and by a lack of vision. And they always coincided with periods of relative stability and with a comfortable way of life. It was then that God intervened by despoiling his people of their security and leading them back to the “desert” of bondage, where they could find him anew in poverty and absolute trust in his provident goodness.

In our Franciscan history we need to keep in mind this fact. The general chapter is one of the important moments that can help us reflect on this need. Our general chapters in the beginning of the Order were centred mainly upon a new vision promoted by a prophet. That prophet was certainly Francis himself, but he was not alone. Indeed, we tend to forget that the initial successes of the Order were also the result of the concerted effort of the brothers who worked together.

Together we can be prophets and we can have a vision. It is true that the aim of the general chapter is that of choosing a minister general who can be a prophet and who has a vision for the Order. We pray the Holy Spirit for such a person. Our experience has shown us that we have been blessed by such leaders at particular moments of our recent history, and we also have felt “abandoned” to ourselves in other moments when there were no prophets at the helm. We can judge each situation in light, and maybe also pinpoint those leaders who were truly prophets and the others who left much to be desired. Yet we tend to forget that it is up to each and every one of us to be a prophet and have a vision for our Order. If this vision is shared in a truly fraternal way, then it becomes the vision of an entire brotherhood.

John of Parma is said to have uttered, when he became minister general: “Let us not add any more laws and statutes, but observe the ones we already have.” He was a prophet in these words. Novelty does not always smack of a prophetic vision. Indeed, prophetic vision is a re-reading of our charism in the light of what God is asking of us in the *hic et nunc* of the brotherhood.

True prophets were not innovators in the sense that they came up with new ideas every day. They were, above all, experts at perseverance and faithfulness. It is this that can draw us to have a vision for what lies ahead of us, without fear and with the courage of faith.

Noel Muscat ofm

# SAINT BONAVENTURE: TWO SERMONS ON THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

## English Translation of the *Sermo I in Pentecoste*

S. BONAVENTURA, *Sermo I in Pentecoste*, in *Doctoris Seraphici Sanctæ Bonaventuræ Opera Omnia*. Tomus IX. *Sermones de Tempore, de Sanctis, de B. Virgine Maria et de Diversis*, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi) prope Florentiam 1901, 330-333 [abbreviated as *Sermo I Pent.*, in *Opera Omnia IX*, 330-333].

*The Spirit of the Lord adorned the heavens*, chapter twenty-six of Job (cfr. Job 26:13).

Protheme. *For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of the Father that speaks in you* (Matthew 10:20). - The words of the second citation that we propose are taken from the Gospel of Matthew in chapter ten and are words of the Lord our Saviour which show *the insufficiency of human littleness*, so that we may not presume to trust upon our powers; they also indicate *the influence of divine generosity*, so that we may trust in his gifts. Neither does the preaching of divine words depend upon human powers, but rather upon divine gifts. Therefore we shall touch upon the lack in human indigence or *insufficiency*, as we have seen before: *For it is not you who speak*; but we shall note the *influence* of divine generosity, when we add: *but the Spirit of the Father that speaks in you*. Dear brothers, we are not among those of whom it is written: *We will magnify our tongue: our lips are our own* (Psalm 11:5); let us therefore unanimously pray the Lord, who

is a generous bestower of all good, that through his grace and piety he will take away from us the *insufficiency* of our human littleness, and that we may understand, according to what the Apostle writes in the first letter to the Corinthians in chapter twelve: *No man can say: the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Spirit* (1Corinthians 12:3), so that he will confer upon us the *influence* of divine generosity, through which we can similarly say and hear all that is for the praise and glory of the Almighty, and for the consolation and grace of each and every one of those who listen. Amen.

*The Spirit of the Lord* etc. - The highest artist, the Holy Spirit, wants to hide in the vases of the apostles the heavenly manna and the divine fragrance of the name of Christ. That is why on the day of Pentecost he adorned the apostles with a plurality of forms of heavenly rays of light. On this radiant day the mother Church also gathers this beneficial gift, among other things proposed in the words: *The Spirit of the Lord adorned the heavens*. In these words, in fact, are described the beneficial gifts of this day according to three manners of comparison: the first one regarding the *effective principle* in personal nomination; the second regarding the *receiving subject* in convenient representation; the third regarding the *intermediate action* in singular operation.

The first one therefore describes today's beneficial grace regarding the *effective principle* in personal nomination, when it

says: *The Spirit of the Lord*; the second regards the *receptive subject* in convenient representation, when it adds: *the heavens*; with heavens are conveniently indicated or represented the Apostles in reason of their certain noble properties. Thirdly, regarding the *intermediate action* in singular operation, when it adds: *adorned*; in fact the Apostles were singularly and excellently adorned with virtues and with heavenly gifts.

I. It therefore says: *The Spirit of the Lord*, where it describes today's beneficial grace regarding the *effective principle*. In fact the Holy Spirit has three properties in itself, according to whether they are the principle and cause of three gifts, of which consists the entire beneficial grace of this day radically and essentially. Indeed, the first consists in the *truth* of the infallibility of the Holy Spirit; the second, consists of liberal *charity*; the third consists of *power* that cannot be exceeded by any other power. The first one, since in itself is the highest *truth*, from it proceeds the splendour of faithful intelligence, the cognition that enlightens; the second one, since the Holy Spirit is the highest *charity*, from it proceeds useful love of benevolence, which rectifies affections; the third one, since in the Holy Spirit there is the highest *power*, therefore from it proceeds the virile power of constancy, which effectively strengthens. These three are necessary for the health of every condition, sex or age. Indeed no adult is in the state of health, if he does not have faithful intelligence in intellect, charitable benevolence in affection and final constancy in effect. And these three, by which man is assimilated to the blessed Trinity, flow down from the same fountain-source and principle in the apostolic vase that received it on this primeval day. To these are opposed three evils, in which we fall as a result of the first sin, namely the darkness of ignorance, the malignity of envy and the weakness of impotency.

Firstly, since in the Holy Spirit there is infallible *truth*, therefore it operates on the *clarity of truth* of understanding against the *darkness* of ignorance; that is why John says in chapter sixteen: *But when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will teach you all truth* (John 16:13). On this day, in fact, the highest and most faithful doctor as a fountain-source [of truth], namely the Holy Spirit, came down upon the Apostles according to the promise of Christ. He enlightened them with the perfect and excellent ray of primeval truth, so that their intellect could be informed by every image and similitude and intelligible light, and helped by divine grace, with the most pure appearance, as it was possible for them to arrive at the elevation to knowledge and speculation with Divine help. Indeed, on this day the intelligence of the clear word of preaching announced Christ as Son of God and as having been raised from the dead, whereas the Prophets had foreseen these events with obscure words and expressed them with metaphoric parables and enigmatic figures. Who, I therefore ask, has taught them this way of speech, so clear and evident? Was it their work as fishermen, or *flesh and blood*? (cfr. Matthew 16:17). No certainly; but *the Spirit of the heavenly Father who spoke in them* (cfr. Matthew 10:20). These things on the certitude of truth of the Holy Spirit are to be believed without any doubt, since they are not old wives tales, neither are they delicate reasonings of philosophers or great illusions. This doctor is an able expert and an approved authority in every ancient faculty of experience, and nothing can contradict him in any doctrine, neither can he be repulsed by anybody or be reduced to human reasoning, since he cannot err or make others fall into error.

Secondly, since in the Holy Spirit we find the most liberal *charity*, therefore he works *by spreading out benevolence* in a useful way against *malignant* envy; that is why it is written in chapter five of Romans: *The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit who is given to us*

(Romans 5:5). - *Charity is poured in our hearts* when love does not proceed only from the surface, but from the innermost intimacy of our hearts, it widens the affections and moves all the faculties of the soul to love all those who are elected. O how widely across the entire world was the charity of the Apostles spread, since for the salvation of all the chosen ones they gave up their lives in death with so great a desire! *And because iniquity has abounded, the charity of many has grown cold* (Matthew 24:12); therefore the Apostle admonishes us to have the fervour of love, when he writes to the Romans in chapter twelve: *Loving one another with the charity of brotherhood: with honour preventing one another in carefulness not slothful, in spirit fervent, serving the Lord* (Romans 12:10). Thirdly, since in the Holy Spirit there is an insuperable *power*, therefore he works through *the faculty of vigour* and insuperable effective constancy against the weakness of impotency; as we read in chapter one of the Acts: *You shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth* (Acts 1:8). Our Lord Jesus Christ sent the Apostles in order to fight against the violence of tyrants and the astuteness of the devils, and he wanted them to arm themselves first with the spiritual gifts or weapons and to be strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit; and for this reason it is written in the Psalm: *and all the power of them by the spirit of his mouth* (cfr. Psalm 32:7). And Gregory writes: «The powers of heaven come from the Spirit, since the powers of this world cannot presume to contradict him, unless the power of the Holy Spirit does not strengthen them» (*Libr. II. Homil. in Evangel. Homil. 30, n. 7*).

II. Secondly, that beneficial effect is described regarding the *receiving subject*, when he adds, *heavens*. By heavens, in fact, speaking metaphorically, is indicated the

reason of convenience and the similitude of effect of the Apostles. Indeed, first of all the heavens have the influence of a *reverberating effect*; secondly they have the light of a *singular splendour*; thirdly, they have the *terrible resonation* of sings and thunder. In this way, on this day the Apostles received first the effective *reverberation* of the divine documents in their preaching; secondly, the *shining light* of their way of life and examples in speaking; thirdly, the *terrible resonation* of signs and wonders in their works.

The Apostles first had the *reverberating effect* of the divine documents in their preaching, and this was shown in the clear signs of the intelligence; hence in the Psalm: *The earth was moved, and the heavens dropped at the presence of the God of Sinai* (Psalm 67:9). - Indeed on this day the *earth*, that is, the earthly and sinful persons, *was moved* to penance, since the *heavens*, that is, the Apostles, *dropped* the dew of divine utterances, and this *in the presence of God*, since it was not from themselves, but from God that they received the power from which all good comes; this exposition is clearly evident in the Glossa. Similarly in another place in the Psalms it is said: *The heavens show forth the glory of God* (Psalm 18:2), the eternal glory, since it began and terminated in the incarnation; the great glory, without any diminution, in the passion; and the most sweet glory, without any obstruction, in the mission of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, [the Apostles] had a *singular splendour* by their way of life and the examples of their words, and this was evident in the signs of charity and benevolence; that is why chapter twenty-four of Ecclesiasticus says: *I made that in the heavens there should rise a light that never fails* (Ecclesiasticus 24:6). The honest way of speaking of the Apostles is called by the name of a shining heavenly *light*, because as the heavenly light is not mixed with any impurity and is separated from anything earthly, so that by this light the whole universe is clearly illuminated; so

the heavenly words of the Apostles had the effect of inflaming desires and vanquished the bad smell of carnal desires. For this reason it is easy for sinners and those who dwell in the darkness to be attracted to the love of God and to the light of faith, since «examples moves more than just words». Indeed from the custom of visions of holy people, men can take the use of the tongue and the example of good works, so that the love for goodness is inflamed and the light of truth can shine forth. For this reason in chapter fifteen of Genesis these words are said of them: *Look up to heaven and number the stars, if you can* (Genesis 15:5), as if he said: it is impossible for mortal man to look up to heaven, that is, to the community of the Apostles, and to count the stars, that is, the sevenfold grace, the gifts and the beatitudes, since *they shine as stars in the world*, by the example of their chaste life, and you see in a reasonable way, that it is insufficient for any mortal man to count them.

Thirdly, [the heavens] have the *terrible resonation* of the miracles and prodigies in operation, and this as a sign of power and constancy; as is written in the Psalm: *Lord, bow down your heavens and descend: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. Send forth lightning, and shou shall scatter them* (Psalm 143:5-6). - *Lord, bow down your heavens*, that is, the contemplative and celestial powers towards men through preaching; *and descend*, through the cohabitating illuminating grace; *touch the mountains*, that is the haughty, compelling them to filial fear of reverence; *and they shall smoke*, by shedding tears of contrition, in order that all vicious vapours come out; and immediately *send forth lightning* of signs and wonders with the confirmation of apostolic preaching, so that whatever is moved by the power of the word is confirmed by miracles, and whatever preaching does not move to faith may at least be aroused by signs and prodigies; since through this *you may scatter* their spiritual and happy dissipations regarding

vices and sin, so that they may not be lost, but may find anew the life of grace.

III. Thirdly the present beneficial gift is described as to the *intermediate action* in singular operation, when he adds: *adorned*. The Apostles in fact were signed and adorned with a triple ornament: first, the ornament of *copious grace* as regards the indeficiency of suffrages; secondly, the ornament of *dignity of prelacy* in presiding the subjects; thirdly, the ornament of *glory of deiformity* as regards to the excellency of reward.

Firstly he adorned them with the ornament of *copious grace* as regards the indeficiency of suffrages; chapter sixteen of Ecclesiasticus: *He adorned their works forever, they have neither hungered, nor laboured, and they have not ceased from their works* (Ecclesiasticus 16:27). - He says that God *adorned their work forever*, namely the virtuous work of the Apostles, because of the indeficiency and continual influence that the militant Church received through their intercession, through the merit of great honour and reverence towards them shown by the Christian people; *they have neither hungered*, because they were filled with such an abundance of grace, that it not only sanctified and filled them, but also reverberated in others. For this reason the mother Church can supply whatever lacks in her children by the paternal treasure of merits, since *they*, the fathers and Apostles, *have not ceased from their virtuous work* as regards the excellency of their intercession.

Secondly he adorned them with the ornament of *dignity of prelacy* regarding their act of presiding over their subjects; from which are accomplished in each one of them these words: *Have they made you ruler? Be not lifted up; be among them as one of them*; and then follows: *That you may rejoice for them, and receive a crown as an ornament of grace, and get the honour of the contribution* (Ecclesiasticus 32:1.3). Since the Apostles did not extol themselves in pride, it is just that they the

Holy Spirit placed them as leaders of the whole world, in such a way that each one of them behaved *as if he were* one of those who are subjected; therefore *they accepted the ornament of grace* that renders them favourable, and after their promotion and spiritual health *they have gained the crown, the principality, and the honour of contribution*; such a dignity and principality come down from the heights of heaven unto the profound abyss of hell; they also have the power to close the heavens and *to bind and loose* (cfr. Matthew 18:18) the souls of men, *treading upon serpents and scorpions* (Luke 10:19) and binding in chains the impure spirit; their tongues are like heavenly keys that can close and open the heavens, and at their command they give health to all those who are sick and languish, and drive away the same evil spirit, which is an indication of their maximum power and dignity. These expressions are taken from the liturgical hymn *Exsultet cælum laudibus*, of the Common of Apostles: *Qui cælum verbo clauditis / serásque eius sólvitis, / nos a peccatis omnibus / sólvite iussu quæumus. // Quorum præcepto súbditur / salus et languor omnium, / sanáte ægros móribus, / nos reddéntes virtutibus.*

Thirdly, he adorned them with the ornament of *God-like glory* regarding the excellency of their reward; for this reason it is convenient to apply to them the words of chapter forty-five of Ecclesiasticus: *A crown of gold upon his mitre wherein was engraved holiness, an ornament of honour: a work of power, and delightful to the eyes for its beauty* (Ecclesiasticus 45:14). - By *crown of gold* placed upon the head of each one of the Apostles, in the sense that it expresses a sign of holiness, glory and honour of the reward, one understands the ornament or the *first stole* of the soul; but in the sense of *desire adorning the eyes*, one understands the ornament or the *second stole* of the body. The first stole or ornament of the soul consists in a triple gift, namely clear vision, secure tension and quiet fruition; the second stole or ornament

of the body consists in a fourfold gift, namely agility, clarity, subtlety and impassibility. Augustine writes in *de Civitate Dei*: «From the bodies of the elect is removed all deformity, all dullness, all infirmity, all corruption», since when the crown of our humanity is surrounded by glory, and *the desire of the eyes is adorned*, given that the eyes of those who intuit can enjoy what has been accomplished. The Apostles possessed all these gifts in an excellent and singular manner. Therefore, let us pray etc.

### English Translation of the *Sermo II in Pentecoste*

S. BONAVENTURA, *Sermo II in Pentecoste*, in *Doctoris Seraphici Sanctæ Bonaventuræ Opera Omnia*. Tomus IX. *Sermones de Tempore, de Sanctis, de B. Virgine Maria et de Diversis*, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi) prope Florentiam 1901, 333-334 [abbreviated as *Sermo II Pent.*, in *Opera Omnia IX*, 333-334].

*Sermon by brother Bonaventure on the day of Pentecost, which he delivered in Paris, in the house of the Friars Minor, in front of many listeners.*

*I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication, and they will look on me, the one they have pierced* (Zechariah 12:10).

My brothers, listen to me with attention and devotion desiring the influence of the Holy Spirit that on this special day has been poured so generously and so powerfully on those who believe, and which is prefigured in many ways in the Holy Scripture, namely by *a river watering the garden of paradise* (cfr. Genesis 2:10), *a river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb* (Revelation 22:1), by *a well* (Genesis 16:14) *of living water* (Song of Songs 4:15), by *a mighty*

wind (Job 1:19), by a wind blowing from the south (Luke 12:55), by a refreshing breeze (cfr. Genesis 3:8), like a valley with pools of water (2Kings 3:16), like the waters of Gideon (Judges 7:5), like the wine-cellar (Song of Songs 2:4), the fragrant cellar. It seems to me that we should venerate this singular solemnity with so greater an affection by striving to embrace and meditate upon the fact that it is marked by such profound mysteries. Therefore, we dare to say something about it for the honour of God and for our consolation. But before beginning to do so, let us pray the Lord Jesus Christ to bestow upon us the fountain of eternal life and love, the fountain-source of beauty and of strength, etc., in order to, etc.

*I will pour out* etc. These words written by the sacred Prophet, who was inspired from on high by divine illumination from the person of God, namely from the same Lord Jesus Christ, declare for us Religious the desirable influence of the Holy Spirit in four ways, namely that it is *freely bestowed*, since he says *I will pour out*; that it is *significantly distributed*, since he says *on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem*; that it is *rich* in a Godlike way, since he says *spirit of grace*; that it is *fruitful* in its configuration, regarding its *supplication*; and that it is the price of the world, since *they will look at me, the one they have pierced*.

I. First of all [the prophet] declares that it is marvellously *diffusive*, when he says: *I will pour out*. This refers to a blessed *fourfold* diffusive influence to which we should be disposed to it on the example of the Apostles. *It cleanses* through the renewing power of purity; as Ezekiel states in chapter thirty-six: *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean, and I will cleanse you from all your impurities etc. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will give you a heart of flesh*. The effect of this infusion consists in the fortitude of chastity where one should stay and long only for invisible beauty. One

should blush because of irrational desires of man just like a man of position and dignity. «The Lord accepts the ones who treat themselves harshly from among those who are pure». One should however know that those who have access to the Sacrament of the altar or those who are flesh; as Dionysius explains all this in his *Caelesti* and *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia* when he answers to an archimandrite. - It *clarifies* through revealing wisdom; second chapter of Joel: *I will pour out my spirit on all people, and your sons and daughters will prophesy* etc. He says *I will pour out*, since the effect of this diffusion is the reception of the principal light and of the divine super-essential, chaste and incomprehensible rays, according to what Dionysius states in *de Caelesti Hierarchia*. - Thirdly it *restores*, through active condescendence, as we find in the first chapter of Ecclesiasticus: *The Lord himself created wisdom in the Holy Spirit* (cfr. Ecclesiasticus 1:9), that is, in the flesh.

II. Secondly he states that it is *significantly distributed*, when he adds: *on the house of David*. By *house of David* we understand the holy Religious life; by the *inhabitants of Jerusalem* we understand the brothers who are most worthy of receiving the influence of the Holy Spirit. Our Religious order is called *house of David*, because just like his holy house it is *promoted* in grace, *spread out* in fame, *direct* in wisdom, *magnificent* in power and *amplified* in frequency. - *It is promoted in grace*; first book of Chronicles in chapter seventeen: *King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said: Who am I, Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me this far?* (cfr. 1Chronicles 17:16). - *It is promoted in grace*; third chapter of the second book of Kings: *David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker* (cfr. 2Samuel 3,1). - *It is direct in wisdom*; second book of Kings, chapter seven: *The house of your servant David will be established before the Lord, because you, Lord of hosts, God of Israel, have*

revealed yourself to your servant (cfr. 2Samuel 7:26). - *It is magnificent in power, and amplified in frequency*; according to the second book of Kings, chapter seven: *Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, sovereign Lord, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever* (2Samuel 7:29).

He adds: *and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem*. We also say that we are *inhabitants of Jerusalem*, upon whom this infusion shall be poured out because of *clarity of intelligence*; as it says in the second book of Chronicles in chapter thirty-four: *They were sent to the prophetess Hulda, who lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter* (2Chronicles 34:22); and Tobias chapter thirteen: *I will be blessed, if there shall remain of my seed, to see the glory of Jerusalem* (Tobias 13:20). - Because of *placid tranquillity of affections*: Zechariah chapter thirteen: *In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: for the washing of the sinner, and of the unclean woman* (Zechariah 13:1). For Moses the ones who are sacred are those who love their souls (?). - Because of the *joyful unanimity of senses*; chapter four of Isaiah: *If the Lord shall wash away the filth of the daughters of Sion* (Isaiah 4:4) etc.; the peace of Christ is therefore goodness. - Because of the *uniformity of devout actions*; second chapter of Acts: *You men of Judea, and all you who dwell in Jerusalem, be this known to you and with your ears receive my words* (Acts 2:14). - Because of *uniformity and piety of cult or customs*; second chapter of Acts: *Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven* (Acts 2:5). - According to this they were inhabitants etc.

III. In the third place he declares it to be *rich in a Godlike way*, when he says: *spirit of grace*. Therefore, on this solemnity, upon our brothers who are well-disposed is

poured forth the Spirit of fourfold grace, namely the *inflaming* [grace] of seraphic desires; chapter four of Galatians: *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father. Therefore, now he is not a servant, but a son. And if a son, an heir also through God* (Galatians 4:6). - The *beautifying* [grace] through enlightening examples; chapter twenty-six of Job: *His spirit has adorned the heavens* (Job 26:13). - It is an *elevating* [grace] above the spectacles of the highest heavens; chapter forty-eight of Ecclesiasticus: *With a great spirit he saw the things that are to come and pass at last, and comforted the mourners in Sion* (Ecclesiasticus 48:27). - It is a *regulating* [grace] through evangelical perfection: *Your good Spirit shall lead me into the right land* (Psalm 42:10).

IV. Fourthly he declares that it is *fruitful in a figurative manner*, when he says: *and prayer*. The fourfold Spirit of prayer is poured out upon us, namely the [grace] of *bitterness* when deploring our sins; as in Psalm: *And he heard my prayers, and brought me out of the lake of misery and of the mire of feces* (Psalm 39:3). - It is a *transforming* prayer through compassion for Christ; chapter nine of Daniel: *From the beginning of your prayers the word came forth: and I am come to show it to you, because you are a man of desires* (Daniel 9:23); and it is followed by the revelation of the passion of Christ. - It is a prayer of *bowing down* in condescension towards one's neighbour; chapter nine of Daniel: *Now while I was yet speaking, and praying, and confessing my sins, and the sins of my people of Israel, and presenting my supplication in the sight of my God* etc. (Daniel 9:20), *behold the man, Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning* (Daniel 9:21). - It is a prayer *lifting up to good works* through devotion of the soul; chapter sixteen of Job: *When I offered pure prayers to God* (Job 16:18).

# THE VIRTUE OF A SINGLE HOLY PERSON. A GREAT CROWD OF THE IMPERFECT: REFLECTIONS DURING THE GENERAL OFM CHAPTER

Noel Muscat ofm

The General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor should be a moment of deep reflection upon the faithfulness of us, Franciscans, to the calling we have received in relation to ourselves, to our fraternity, to the Church and to the world at large.

It will be history to judge our actions in the recent past. Yet it is important to stop for a moment and reflect upon what we have achieved and where we stand at the present. More importantly, it is necessary to know where we are going in the future. This effort is not just a question of looking at numbers and statistics. It has nothing to do with bemoaning the lack of vocations, with the preoccupation of closing down houses and apostolates and uniting provinces into mega entities. It is not about producing inspirational documents that are then left to gather dust upon library shelves, or about writing letters that no one ever reads. It is something that goes deep into our own identity as Franciscans, namely, into the very core of our calling and mission as envisaged by Francis of Assisi. We have to let him speak first, and then draw our conclusions.

## The words of Saint Francis regarding the Order

Thomas of Celano often quotes sayings by Saint Francis, particularly in *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*. When we meet these sayings we often tend to attribute them to a Francis who is re-interpreted by Celano in the light of the history of the Franciscan Order two decades after the death of the founder, that is, at the time in which Celano was composing the *Memoriale* from the memoirs of the companions of the Saint who were still alive. This could very well be true, but since the

memories of the brothers - *nos, qui cum eo fuimus* - in 1246 was still fresh, we must be wary before discarding these *ipsissima verba* as a pure interpretation of the *intentio* of a dead man.

I have chosen to reflect upon two paragraphs of the *Memoriale* in order to read them in the light of what is happening today in our Order, particularly at this moment in time when we are called to pause and see whether we are capable of making some courageous decisions to move forward. The first text is taken from 2C 157 (FAED II, 348-349):

“[Francis] used to say: ‘The best brothers are confounded by the deeds of the bad ones; they bear being judged by the example of the wicked, although they themselves have not sinned. They are stabbing me with a sharp sword, twisting it in my bowels all day long.’ It was principally because of this that he withdrew from the company of the brothers, so that he would not happen to hear some evil report about any of them, and so renew his pain.

He also said: ‘A time will come when the religion loved by God will have such a bad reputation because of bad examples that it will be embarrassing to go out in public. Whoever comes to enter the Order at that time will be led only by the working of the Holy Spirit; flesh and blood will put no blot on them; they will be truly blessed by the Lord. Although they will not do works of merit, the love which makes saints work fervently will have grown cold, still they will undergo temptations: and whoever passes the tests of that time will be better than those who came before. But woe to those who congratulate themselves over the appearance of a religious way of living, those numbed by idleness, those who do not firmly resist the temptations which are permitted to test the chosen! Only those who are tested will receive the crown of life, those

who, in the meantime, are disturbed by the malice of the wicked.”

The context of these words supposedly uttered by Francis seems to refer to the events that occurred in 1220, shortly after Francis' return from the East. It was an intense moment of crisis for him and for the Order, so much so, that Francis made the courageous decision to relinquish the leadership of the Order during the general chapter of 29 September 1220 in favour of Peter Cattani and later on, after the death of Cattani on 10 March 1221, to leave the Order in the competent hands of Brother Elias, as Francis knew him at that time. The last years of his life were for Francis an intense moment of crisis, and yet they were also marked by a sense of hope and trust in faith and in the power of God working in the brothers (P. MARANESI, *La morte di un uomo cristiano. Gli ultimi anni di vita di Francesco di Assisi*, in *Miscellanea Francescana* 112 (2012), 581-599).

Although the brothers were still not fully immersed in the apocalyptic controversies that shaped the history of the Order during the latter part of the 13<sup>th</sup> and the first quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is evident from Francis' words that the Order was already entering a phase in which it began to effect a theological reading of its own history. Let us not forget that the moment in which Celano was composing the *Memoriale* was also marked by tension in the Order, which had experienced the turbulent years of Elias as minister general (1232-1239), only to find itself, after just a short span of some years under Alberto da Pisa and Haymo of Faversham, once again in the same political logic that it had practically condemned in 1239. With the accession of Crescenzo da Iesi to the generalate in 1244 the brothers who knew Francis and were still alive found themselves once more face to face with a logic of intolerance to the prophetic dimension of the Franciscan calling, with a minister general who seemed unable to distance himself from the recent past. To be fair with Crescenzo, we must admit that it was he who promoted the companions of the Saint to hand in their memoirs, which he then entrusted to Thomas of Celano's expert pen. However, we still do not know precisely what were his intentions in doing so. He might sincerely have asked for information regarding an experience of which he had not been part, but at the same time he might also have wanted the memoirs to guide

Celano into the arduous task of producing yet another biography that would complement the *Vita beati Francisci* ordered by Pope Gregory IX in 1228. This time, however, it would be a biography coming from the will of a minister general. Elias had, in fact, done a similar thing when he asked Celano to produce the rediscovered *Vita brevior*, but that had been a biography that enriched the *Vita beati Francisci* in many details, but not in substance. This time, Crescenzo seems to have wanted Celano to provide an interpretation of Francis' words and actions, as seen in the background of what the Order had gone through, and that would bring calm and peace to an otherwise turbulent situation in which the course of history seemed to be running on a parallel but divergent course from the intentions of the founder as handed down by his companions.

Celano certainly played the diplomat in the whole affair. His *Memoriale* is not a biography at all, but a reflection on the virtues held dear by Franciscans at large, both those who had been companions of the Saint and the second generation brothers. Whether Celano succeeded in accomplishing this task remains open to discussion. Judging by the fact that in just three years, in 1247, the brothers elected not a prelate but a prophet as minister general, in the person of Giovanni Buralli da Parma (1247-1257), indicated that Celano's *Memoriale* was also being read in the light of prophecy, if not also of apocalyptic prophecy.

According to Celano's description, Francis was going through a period of psychological suffering and retreated to a kind of solitary life. This experience was a direct result of the unfaithfulness of a section of the brothers to the ideals that Francis considered to be sacrosanct (N. MUSCAT, "Lord, I give back to you the family you gave me" (*CA* 112): *Francis, the Brothers, and the anguish of solitude*, in *Spirit+Life* 101 (Jul-Sep 2012), 19-22; 102 (Oct-Dec 2012), 3-8; 103 (Jan-Mar 2013), 14-20; 104 (Apr-Jun 2013). Celano describes a situation in the Order in which the general idea about the brothers was that they were giving a bad example, and as a result it was embarrassing for them to appear in public. Such a description of the Order hardly agrees with the true state of affairs in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, when the Order was becoming famous for its contribution in the field of studies, preaching and missionary endeavour. The words of Saint Francis are projected into an unforeseeable

future - “a time will come” - which is a typical way of describing a reality in apocalyptic terminology. Moreover, Francis hints at the new arrivals during this mysterious future as being led to the Order only “by the working of the Holy Spirit.” In this way he is foretelling the arrival of a new generation of brothers who would be very different from the majority of the brothers who preceded them, and who were causing Francis so much pain because of their unfaithfulness. Francis also refers to the fact that the initial fervour would by then have grown cold, and that the brothers would also succumb to idleness and become unable to face up to temptations.

It is certainly difficult for us to attribute this description to any particular moment of the history of the Order, even during the first decades of its existence. The Order was always made up of sincere and faithful brothers, and of others who did not live up to the expectations of their religious calling and who therefore gave bad example and became a source of embarrassment to their other brothers. At the same time, we notice the importance given to the image of the brothers in front of the world. In other words, Francis is presenting the life of the brothers as an open experience of the Gospel life that all can see and therefore judge according to the concrete deeds of the same brothers.

We are not in a position to know exactly to what brothers Francis is referring, but we can certainly conclude that, if these words come from the description given by the same companions of the Saint, then they assume a profound significance in denoting what was the essence of the faithfulness of the same brothers to Francis’ intentions, when compared to the rank and file of the other brothers of the Order who had not been part of the initial fraternity. Francis’ anguish and solitude is not just a question of a particularly difficult moment of his life. It can very well be a sign of a Francis who is transcending his own life-story and projecting himself in a prophetic way in the future of his brotherhood. If this is the case, then we are part and parcel of this projection and our present history is also read in this apocalyptic light. Indeed, according to my way of seeing things, this is the road that is open before us at a particular moment of our history. The general chapter, as I shall conclude later on, is a moment in which we are called to make a theological reading of our present within the

prophetic dimension of our past and the apocalyptic revelation of our future. Failure to do so means unfaithfulness and idleness in front of the constant need to keep ourselves in check.

There is, however, the other side of the story, which is uplifting and gives us hope. In the next paragraph of the same *Memoriale* Francis is comforted and assured of God’s love for the Order and especially of God’s methodology of calling his chosen ones. It is the theology of the remnant of Israel, which is so evident in Holy Scripture.

### **The religion (Order) will remain unshaken**

The positive attitude of Francis regarding his brothers is also part and parcel of his life-story. His inner anguish was not just an expression of despair and hopelessness, but it was also a sign of hope and faith in the power of God. Celano speaks about this in the *Memoriale* 158 (FAED II, 349):

“He was greatly consoled, however, by God’s visitations which reassured him that the foundation of the religion would always remain unshaken. He was also promised that the number of those being lost would undoubtedly be replaced by those being chosen. One time he was disturbed by some bad examples. In his disturbance he turned to prayer and received a scolding from the Lord: ‘Why are you so upset, little man? Have I set you up as a shepherd over my religion so that you can forget that I am its main protector? I have entrusted this to you, a simple man, so that the things that I work in you for others to imitate may be followed by those who want to follow. I have called; I will preserve, and I will pasture; and I will raise up others to make up for the fall of some, so that, even if they have not been born, I will have them born! So do not be upset, but work out your salvation, for even if the religion should come to number only three, by my gift it will still remain forever unshaken.’

From that time on he used to say that the virtue of a single holy person overwhelms a great crowd of the imperfect, just as the deepest darkness disappears at a single ray of light.”

Francis’ consolation was rooted in the fact that it was Christ himself who founded the Order. The logic behind such a foundation was not human but divine. The history of salvation often portrays God who chooses his own people not because they were numerous, or strong, or

even faithful. It is the history of God who saves his people in spite of their unfaithfulness and betrayals to his covenant. Holy Scripture insists upon this providential economy of salvation that is aimed at those who remain faithful to God, namely the poor ones of Israel. Francis is called by Christ as a “little and poor man”. Aware of his limitations Francis can entrust the brothers to the Lord’s care as if they were truly the “remnant of Israel.”

The result of this strong faith and confidence on Francis’ part is the promise of Christ to take care of the Order always and everywhere, to the end of time, even though the number of brothers might dwindle to just three! In this way, Celano foresees a bright future for the Order, even when he reads its history in the light of the many problems that were already visible on the horizon. Indeed, the years following Celano’s demise and Bonaventure’s generalate were the beginning of a very difficult period in the Order’s history, a period which saw the Order in grave crisis within its own rank and file and then with the same authority of the Church. The period 1274 - 1325 marks one of the darkest periods of the Order’s history, and yet it is also one of the most interesting, because it was precisely during that period that the greatest scandals in the Order gave birth to the greatest reforms that were to last for centuries. And when I am speaking of reforms I am not referring to any particular family of the Order, even though during that period the Spirituals and Fraticelli, considered as heretics, were truly a family of reform, and even though they were “destroyed” by John XXII they gave birth to the first shoots of the Observant reform. It was not just a question of allegiance to one or the other reformed groups of the Order, as seen against the majority of “unreformed” brothers. It was rather a crisis of identity that was placing the Order in front of a great dilemma. Was it still the Order that Francis had founded a century earlier? What was to become of the intentions of the founder? It seems to me that Celano is echoing these fundamental questions that were to shape the history of the Order for many centuries.

Indeed, as long as the Order continued to ask questions about its identity, it remained very much alive and kicking. It was a tragedy when the Order stalled and gloried in its achievements and its role in the Church. It was precisely during those moments that the Order lost its prophetic dimension. And by prophetic

dimension I do not mean that the Order was inventing new ways of being in order to save numbers or reputation. More often than not we tend to forget that prophetism has to do with the past as much as with the future. Indeed, true prophecy consists in reading one’s memory in the light of God’s will and within the experience of history. Only then can one move forward towards the future with hope.

Francis did precisely this in his life. He did not “invent” a new way of life in the Church as we often hear. He did not introduce the Gospel to the Church, he was not the first layman to go out and preach penance, he was not the only person who vowed to live evangelical poverty as a sign of conversion, he did not look at creation as a slogan for his message of peace and reconciliation among men and women, and he certainly did not have any idea that the world in which he lived needed his brothers to help it live a way of life in sustainable development. The only point of reference for Francis was Jesus Christ and his historical significance in the salvation of mankind. The rest was a logical conclusion of this deep commitment of this little poor man of Assisi.

### **Where are we going as a Franciscan brotherhood?**

The occasion of the general chapter prompts us to reflect upon our calling, our identity and our mission in view of what lies before us. Let us begin with a realistic view of our shortcomings as a brotherhood. I insist that this is important, because without a *mea culpa* on our part we will never be able to focus our attention on the beauty of our life and on what lies ahead for our brotherhood.

The Order has gone through turbulent and glorious times since the end of Vatican II. If one takes into account the sincere effort at reform and *aggiornamento* that followed the Council, especially as a result of *Perfectæ Caritatis*, one cannot stop admiring the efforts made by our Order. We have been able to update our General Constitutions more than once, trying to produce a faithful picture of who we are and what is our mission. The Order has produced countless inspirational documents. It has celebrated extraordinary general chapters and plenary councils. It has offered guidelines for initial and ongoing formation, for missionary evangelisation, for the care of the “common home” (an expression which is now popular

among us, after the style of Pope Francis). We have even arrived at speaking about taking care of our “garden” in the Biblical sense of the term. Our ability to produce terminology based on symbolism knows no bounds.

At the same time we have experienced a drastic drop in numbers. Since I became a friar in 1976 the Order has halved in the number of brothers. The problem has not only been that of a lack of vocations. The true problem is that of a good number of brothers who left religious life either during the first years of ministry or during mid-life crisis. One might very well say that the object of this paper is to underline that numbers are not important, but quality of religious life is what matters. It is true that the logic of the remnant of Israel can be applied also to our religious family. Yet we cannot help noticing that, during all these years, we have tried to come to grips with the problem of dwindling numbers without giving a satisfactory explanation of why it happened. Placing sociological and cultural reasons aside, although they are also a contributing factor, we must admit that the diminishing numbers of brothers should be a source of concern for us all. I say this, because these numbers, as we have seen, are not the result of the fact that we get less vocations or because 50% of our candidates leave during novitiate or temporary profession. The real problem is the number of brothers who opt to leave during the first years of ministry and those who leave during mid-life crisis. Maybe the Order needed to take more care of these brothers. It is true that genuine efforts at accompanying brothers during their first years of ministry have been undertaken in various entities of the Order, but they have produced scant results. The reason is simple: the efforts were aimed at creating a structure in which these brothers would be welcome to stay together for some time and attend to their ongoing formation. But this is not enough. When life in fraternity becomes meaningless because of a lack of sincere dedication of time and energy to our fraternal dimension, when ministerial duties take the lead in such a way that there is no time to live and pray together every single day, when young friars feel abandoned to a kind of autonomy that makes them independent of any need to confront their lives with other brothers, it is inevitable that they opt to leave or make other choices. Sadly some have been forced to make decisions not because of their own free will but because of

circumstances in which they found themselves. At a certain point there was no turning back. The lack of orientation and meaning to our life led to the undoing of their vocation.

In the case of older brothers the situation can be seen as being even more dramatic. Mid-life crisis is a problem that can only be tackled by those who have lived responsible and meaningful lives. In the case of persons who have lived in a spirit of frustration at their lack of commitment, or because of a lack of support, or even because of the suffering they endured when they saw their efforts crumble in the face of divisions and jealousies in the fraternity, it is no wonder that the end product is abandonment of religious life. Maybe the Order should have done much more to address this problem. Genuine brothers who worked towards ideals have ended up discouraged and dejected because of lack of support from the very persons who should have known better, namely, the ministers and servants of the brothers. The idea that the ministers and servants should visit and listen to the brothers is certainly in line with what Francis envisaged in the Rule, but we must ask how such visitations are carried out. Visiting the brothers and listening to them does not always mean a sincere commitment to delve into their real problems. Most of the time it has resulted in a self-gratifying belief that one has done his duty as a minister and that the brothers are not immature beings who cannot take care of themselves. The sad truth is that many brothers are not capable of taking care of themselves or their vocation. They need help and direction.

This brings us to the crux of the question. Direction implies knowing exactly where we are heading to. The enthusiasm brought about by Vatican II in religious life has also been felt in our Order. And yet, at no other moment of our history have we been so disorientated as to where we are heading. With all due respect to the sincere efforts made by various general administrations from the 1970s to this day, I can only pinpoint on two or three fingers those brothers who have been true leaders, and who enlightened the brothers and gave them direction. Most of the time we have taken refuge in producing erudite documents and organising international venues that have addressed problems or issues in such an open-ended manner that we have concluded nothing in substance. It is true that we are an international fraternity and that it is difficult to

arrive at consensus among so many diverse sensibilities, but how come that we have continued to live up to our only identity, namely that of being a confederation of provinces, and not a unified religious Order?

On the one hand we have spoken of decentralisation and the principle of subsidiarity. But has this worked? Or was it rather an excuse to cover our interests in keeping a kind of *status quo* regarding fair representation of interests of various groups and tendencies within the same family, playing a kind of musical chairs game in which we look not at the merits of the persons for what they can offer to the fraternity but rather at their influence on decision making because of cultural or economic backgrounds? Can we speak about the “politicization” of our fraternity?

The issues we have faced are important from the point of view of our Franciscan identity. I am speaking about social justice, peace, the care of our “common home”, evangelisation, and other issues. My fear, however, is that these issues have come to the forefront in such a way that they have made us forget the very essence of our existence as Friars Minor. I know I might sound old-fashioned for the sensibilities of some, but I insist that, as long as we do not rediscover the “conventual” dimension of our calling we will have missed the mark and strayed from our course. This is lack of direction. How can we know where we are going to if we are not capable of finding time to live together, to pray together according to the form handed down to us by the Church, to work together for the benefit of our fraternities, to find in our environment that serene atmosphere of a “conventual” setting in which we can feel that we are Friars Minor? This does not mean that we close ourselves in a kind of defensive fortress in which we feel secure. It does not mean abandoning our ministries, our parishes, or the care of the poor, or our missionary endeavours. But I ask: why is it that, when our Order was faithful to its “conventual” identity it was fruitful in so many missionary endeavours entrusted to individual provinces, and now that it is stating that we have to “open up” to new forms of international presence, our missions are in crisis of personnel and initiatives? Opening up is important of course. The prophetic calls for such a renewal have been heard more than once. But what were their results?

I can think of just one experience of insertion of our life in the reality of contemporary poverty, which was the result of a genius of a brother who understood the need to preserve the “conventual” dimension in new forms of presence in the Church and in society. Unfortunately it foundered because of the lack of understanding of its intrinsic *raison d'être*. As long as we do not form the brothers to the logic of living together and working together as a fraternity, to the logic of sharing ideals and values in concrete terms, to the logic of finding a balance between “conventual” commitments and apostolic endeavours, we can never build true fraternity. What we need to do first is not just to take care of our “common home” by concentrating on ecological issues, but to take care of our “common home” by concentrating on the foundational values that make up our life as Franciscans. All the other issues that we bring up during our chapter meetings to make us look like experts of a new world order are dependent solely upon this kind of commitment that underlies our existence. It has shaped our history along many centuries and it will continue to do so in the future, that is, if we truly want to remain alive and kicking.

## Conclusion

We have to admit that we are “a great crowd of imperfect” who “need the virtues of a single holy person.” It is not a sin to be imperfect. It is a sin when we do not succeed in winning over our imperfections by striving to attain the virtues of holy persons. The quality of our life matters above all else. If Francis were among us during our chapters, he would be able to show us new ways of persevering in our faithfulness. But he never intended to come back. He told us that he has done his part and that it is the Lord who will help us discover how we are to act in the *hic et nunc* of our existence as Friars Minor. If the chapter will provide us with an opportunity to do so we might be on the right track. We are accustomed to take heed of what experts are telling us regarding the effects of global warming on our “common home”. Their message is an apocalyptic prophecy. Why cannot we use the same methodology to discover where our true “common home”, namely, our Order, is going.

# PLACES VISITED BY SAINT FRANCIS. HISTORICAL WITNESS OF THE SOURCES

All the eminent figures of history are linked to specific places in which they were born or where they stopped during their journeys. If we take the example of Paul of Tarsus, we find a very detailed documentation in the Acts of the Apostles and also many clues in his Letters. Yet there are some places which claim the presence of the Apostle, for which scholars cannot provide convincing answers from historical documents. A case in point is the tradition that Paul visited Spain following his release from Rome circa the year 62. The Acts conclude with the phrase: “Paul spent the whole of the two years in his own rented lodging. He welcomed all who came to visit him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete freedom and without hindrance from anyone” (Acts 28:30-31). The historical account says nothing about what happened after. In Romans 15:28, Paul writes that he wanted to go to Jerusalem in order to hand over the collection organised by the Churches in Macedonia and Achaia, and he adds: “So when I have done this and officially handed over what has been raised, I shall set out for Spain, and visit you [the Romans] in the way.” Again, this is just an expression of a desire on the part of the Apostle. It is Clement of Rome who, in the year 96, wrote to the Corinthians that Paul, “having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having reached the farthest bounds of the West.” This expression could be taken to refer to Spain as the “farthest bounds of the West.”

The references to places visited by famous personages and saints have given rise to local traditions of cult that have given fame to such places as Santiago de

Compostella in Galicia and made of them centres of pilgrimage during the Middle Ages and even to this very day. Local tradition is a key element in judging the relevance of these centres of cult, and in many instances it does not lack a historical substratum that can be proved by documentary evidence or even archaeological or architectural elements.

In this paper we shall be examining some of the relevant traditions of cult and historical memory linked with the presence of Saint Francis of Assisi in various parts of central Italy and beyond. This theme has been studied with sufficient depth by Alfonso Marini, *I viaggi di Francesco. Storia e “memorie”, leggende e metafore*, in *Ricerca come incontro. Archeologi, paleografi e storici per Paolo Delogu*, a cura di Giulia Barine, Anna Esposito e Carla Frova, Viella libreria editrice, Roma 2013, 279-291 (Sapienza - Università di Roma, Studi del Dipartimento di Storia, Culture, Religioni, 10).

## The “Franciscan” places of Assisi

We are normally inclined to concentrate upon Assisi as the birthplace of Francis and of the Order of friars Minor. Indeed, the town of Assisi remains central to the study of the Franciscan medieval sources. The historical documentation of the Assisi archives has been analysed and published by the famous Assisi historian Arnaldo Fortini in his 4 volumes of *Nova Vita di San Francesco*, Assisi 1959. These volumes still remain a solid foundation to this very day for a documentary evidence regarding places, customs, personages, institutions, that shaped the life of Francis and of the

early brothers. Assisi can be considered a Franciscan sanctuary in its own right. Although the medieval town that Francis knew and was brought up in was smaller than the present extent of the town, many of the buildings that made up the nucleus of the urban fabric have remained intact.

The very birthplace of Francis has often been associated with different places, particularly with the medieval oratory of *San Francesco piccolino*, the stable in which, according to a late tradition, Francis was born, in true conformity to Jesus Christ, the *Chiesa Nuova* medieval *fondaco*, indicating the place in which Pietro di Bernardone had his storehouses for his business and where Francis probably would have worked, and especially the Oratory adjacent to the crypt of San Niccolò *ad pedem plateam*, behind the priory of San Paolo, which belongs to the Third Order Regular friars, and where Fortini places the historical spot of the house of the Bernardone family where Francis was born and where he grew up. This is a typical example of a cult towards a saint that developed according to the various legends and interpretations that accompanied his *legenda* both in the more official documents and in the later traditions that were the fruit of popular devotion.

Indeed, the significance of a place of cult cannot be judged solely by historical documentation, but one needs to keep in mind the importance of local traditions and popular devotions. This is more important in the case of places that speak of a presence of a saint which could just have been a fleeting passage and not a stable presence. In the case of Francis such an element is of paramount importance.

But let us return to the importance of Assisi as the prime historical place linked with Francis. The town still presents to us the typical places that have seen the young Francis during the years of his youth and conversion. We recall the ancient cathedral church of Santa Maria Maggiore, above Porta Moiano, with the *Vescovado*, the

scene of Francis' renunciation his his father's property. The church of San Rufino, nowadays the Cathedral church of Assisi, was the place where Francis was baptised. The church of San Giorgio, alongside what was to become the Basilica and *Protomonastero di Santa Chiara*, was the place where Francis learned the rudiments of Latin as a young boy. The Rocca Maggiore fortress above the town, although not the same one that existed during Francis' time, speaks volumes about the bitter hatred among the *maiores* of the feudal nobility and the *minores* of the emerging class of merchants who claimed independence for their commune and fought battles against rival cities like Perugia, bringing into armed combat the interests of the papal *Guelf* party and the imperial *Ghibelline* party.

Outside the town other important sanctuaries speak of Francis and his brothers. The church of San Damiano, the Portiuncula, the *Eremo delle Carceri* on Mount Subasio, the church at Rivortorto need no comment regarding their importance in the development of the cult towards Saint Francis, upon the basis of historical fact. But there are many other places that are equally important, although they are less known: the chapel of *Santa Maria Maddalena*, indicating the leper colony familiar with Francis' early experience of conversion; the crypt of *San Masseo*, indicated as the probable place where the young Francis would come to meditate with an unknown friend according to Thomas of Celano's *Vita beati Francisci*, 6 (FAED I, 187); the remains of the abbey of *San Benedetto al Subasio*, where Francis went to ask the abbot to give him and the brothers the chapel of the Portiuncula (*Legenda trium sociorum*, 56, in FAED II, 200); the *recluserium* of *Sant'Angelo di Panzo*, where Clare and her sister Agnes lived for some time before being transferred to San Damiano. These places are an eloquent testimony to the presence of Francis in his hometown and in its whereabouts, not only during the early

years of his life, but also whenever we find him back in Assisi, to the very moment of his death when, being taken down from the Bishop's palace to the Portiuncula he asked to stop for a moment to bless the town which he described as a holy place in which many souls would be saved (*Compilatio Assisiensis* 5, in FAED II, 120).

### The "Franciscan" places of central Italy: the case of Poggio Bustone

One of the most "Franciscan" holy places of the Italian peninsula is the Valle Santa Reatina, or the plain extending below Rieti. In this amphitheatre of rolling low hills and lakes, surrounded by the higher Sabine Appennines and particularly dominated by Monte Terminillo, we find four hermitages which are closely associated with Francis and the brothers, particularly commemorating Francis' stops in this area whenever he would take the Salaria road to go to Rome or return to Assisi from this road, turning on to Terni and Foligno. The four hermitages are well-known, particularly Greccio, the place where Francis created the first crib during Christmas Mass in 1223, and Fonte Colombo, where he wrote the *Regula bullata* of the friars Minor also in 1223. The other two hermitages lie on the opposite side of the valley, namely the hermitage of Santa Maria della Foresta and the hermitage above Poggiobustone. The Franciscan sources normally are fairly clear in documenting the two former hermitages, less so in the case of the two latter ones. Of particular interest is the hermitage or *speco* above Poggiobustone, since it is only mentioned once, namely in the *Memoriale* of Celano, 131:

"Once at the hermitage of Poggio about the time of the Lord's Nativity a large crowd assembled for the sermon, which he began with this opening: 'You all believe me to be a holy man, and this is why you came to make with great devotion. But I declare to you that this whole Lent I have eaten food flavoured with lard.' In

this way he often blamed pleasure for what was, in fact, a concession to illness" (FAED II, 333).

There are no chronological details regarding this visit to Poggio Bustone. The episode is probably the same as that found in the *Assisi Compilation* 81 (FAED II, 182-183), which is more detailed and specifies that the "Lent" to which Francis refers was the "Lent of Saint Martin" (from All Saints to Christmas). It does not, however, indicate the place of Poggio Bustone.

It seems that Francis was staying at the hermitage of Poggio Bustone during the early years of his conversion, together with some of the first brothers. This is the thesis of Goffredo Antonio Liori, *Santuario di Poggio Bustone. Luogo del perdono*, Rieti 2000. He believes that Francis and the first brothers took refuge at Poggio Bustone in a hermitage that belonged to the Benedictines of Farfa Abbey, after they had been rejected by their townsfolk in Assisi. This state of affairs corresponds to 1208, and Francis travelled with Bernardo, Pietro (Cattanio?), Egidio, Sabatino, Morico and Giovanni della Cappella.

According to a pious tradition which is kept alive at Poggio Bustone, it was at the *Speco* above the friary of San Giacomo that Francis received from Christ the assurance that all his past sins were forgiven and prophesied regarding the future of the Order. The episode is presented by Celano in the *Vita beati Francisci*, 26-27:

"One day [Francis] was marvelling at the Lord's mercy in the kindness shown to him. He wished that the Lord would show him the course of life for him and his brothers, and he went to a place of prayer, as he so often did. He remained there a long time with fear and trembling before the Ruler of the whole earth. He recalled in the bitterness of his soul the years he spent badly, frequently repeating the phrase: 'Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.' Gradually, an indescribable joy and tremendous sweetness began to well up deep in his heart. [...] Certainty of the forgiveness of all his sins poured in, and the assurance of being revived in grace was given to him. Then he was caught up above himself and totally engulfed in light, and, with

his inmost soul opened wide, he clearly saw the future. [...] He returned and said to the brothers with joy: 'Be strong, dear brothers, and do not let my simplicity or yours discourage you. The Lord has shown me that God will make us grow into a great multitude, and will spread us to the ends of the earth.'" (FAED I, 205).

The reference to Poggio Bustone can be considered as pure hypothesis. The sources are silent about it, and sometimes even contradict this tradition. The *Legend of the Three Companions* 33 (FAED II, 87-88) places at the Portiuncula the ending of the first brothers in mission. It is only the *Actus beati Francisci in Valle Reatina* (ed. A. Cadderi, S. Maria degli Angeli 1999, VIII, 18, 228-230), a late source written some years before 1320, that places this tradition at Poggio Bustone. But it does not add the popular salutation that Francis is said to have given to the citizens of the tiny mountain fortified village: "Buon giorno, buona gente", which is still proudly displayed to this day to visitors who go up to the Franciscan hermitage (cfr. A. Terzi, *Memorie francescane*, Rieti 1955, 207-208).

### Francis' travels outside Italy

The Franciscan Sources speak about various journeys accomplished by Francis and the brothers outside the limits of the Italian peninsula. One of these places where Francis is supposed to have gone is Santiago de Compostella, a famous pilgrimage venue during the Middle Ages. However, we do not possess any historical certainty regarding a supposed visit by Francis to Compostella. Indeed, the *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius*, c. 3 speak of this visit when they state: "In the beginning of the Order, when there were few brothers, and places had not yet been taken, Saint Francis went to visit Santiago, taking some companions with him, one of whom was Brother Bernard" (FAED III, 440-441). However, the *Actus* and also the *Fioretti* are mid and late 14<sup>th</sup> century

sources, and therefore cannot be considered as recording events as faithfully as the early sources. Indeed Thomas of Celano, in the *Vita beati Francisci*, 30 (FAED I, 207) mentions Bernard and Giles (Egidio) who went to Santiago, and in the case of Francis he states that the Saint went to Spain with the intention of crossing over to Morocco (1C 56: FAED I, 230). But it seems that this journey became confused with later traditions regarding the passage of Francis from Compostella. What we do know is that the journey in Spain in 1213 was cut short because Francis became ill and had to return to Italy.

Some time before, probably in 1212, Francis had already embarked upon a first attempt to go to the Holy Land. It is again Celano, in the *Vita beati Francisci*, 55, who gives us the account: "In the sixth year of his conversion, burning with the desire for holy martyrdom, [Francis] wished to take a ship to the region of Syria to preach the Christian faith and repentance to the Saracens and other unbelievers" (FAED I, 229-230). After leaving Ancona a storm drove the ship to the opposite coast of Dalmatia, in Zadar, where Francis could only find a way back to Italy as a stowaway. Francis never gave up on his desire to preach Christ to Saracens and non-believers. The general chapter of 1217 was instrumental in sending forth the first missionaries *beyond the mountains* and *beyond the sea*, in western and central Europe, North Africa and the Holy Land. Francis chose for himself to travel to France. In that year Brother Pacifico, one of Francis' companions, established the first Franciscan presence in France at Vézelay, and later on at St. Denis in Paris. Francis himself embarked on a journey to France in 1217, but had to cut it short in Florence, where Cardinal Ugo di Segni prohibited him from going, according to the *Assisi Compilation* 108: "Brother, I do not want you to go beyond the mountains, because there are many prelates and others who would willingly block the religion's interests in the Roman Church" (FAED II,

216). These words convey the preoccupation of Cardinal Ugo regarding the difficulty of accepting the new Order within the juridical framework of the Church as it was structured by the Roman Curia at the time. Again, Francis had to resign himself to go back to Assisi, but the brothers continued on their journeys, spreading the Order far and wide.

The most important among the journeys accomplished by Francis during his life was certainly his visit to Egypt during the Fifth Crusade. Francis left Italy in June 1219 bound for Acre, the last remaining Crusader stronghold on the Palestinian coast. There he was welcomed by Brother Elias, who was *minister Syriae*, or provincial of the Ultramarine province, and then continued his journey by sea to the Nile Delta, to Damietta, which was being besieged by the Crusaders.

The pilgrimage, or *passagium*, to the Holy Land, was one of the most sought for ideals among Christians during the Middle Ages. Although the concept of a just war against the Infidels was common among Christians, and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux had himself preached the Second Crusade (1147-1150), stating that martyrdom in the hands of the Infidels and Saracens was a gateway to holiness and that killing the enemies of Christ was meritorious (BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *Liber ad milites Templi de laude novae militiae*), many went to the Holy Land with sincere and genuine intentions to go on pilgrimage.

The history of the Fifth Crusade is well documented (Steven RUNCIMAN, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 volumes, London 1951-1954, especially Vol. III, 159-160), and even Francis' meeting with the Egyptian Sultan al-Malek al-Kamel is the subject of an abundant bibliography. So it is not our intention at this point to dwell on the events as they happened, since this analysis has been the object of multiple studies and papers during the 8<sup>th</sup> centenary celebrations of the event in 2019.

In spite of many discussions regarding the significance of this journey of Francis

in Outremer, historians are in agreement that it was authentic and actually did happen. We are not in a position to know whether Francis was driven by the same crusading spirit of his time, or whether he was in agreement with the military expedition that had been organised by Pope Innocent III and then by Pope Honorius III. What is most probable is that Francis went out of the mindset of his times regarding the Crusades, and he certainly did not interpret obedience to the Pope as a passive acceptance of all papal decisions, even those regarding warfare. In his writings we never encounter any expressions extolling holy war, and Francis never refers to his brothers as *milites Christi*, which was common among monks and chivalric Orders. He does, however, speak of the brothers as *knights of the round table*, but only within the context of their role as knights of prayer who chose remote places to be united to Christ. The expression is found in the *Assisi Compilation*, 103: "The brothers of mine are my knights of the round table, the brothers who hide in deserted and remote places, to devote themselves more diligently to prayer and meditation, weeping over their sins and those of others, whose holiness is known to God, and is sometimes ignored by the brothers and people" (FAED II, 208).

The time that Francis spent in Outremer was probably the longest period of his absence from Italy and from the Portiuncula. Historians are not in agreement as regards the length of time that Francis remained in Egypt. This argument also has been the object of many studies. To summarise their views we can just state that the majority opt for a brief period in Egypt, namely from July to September 1219, when Francis is supposed to have met al-Kamel during a truce that was stipulated with the Crusader army. Troubled by the sad news regarding his Order in Italy Francis hastened to go back to put things in order. However, other historians are of the opinion that Francis remained in Egypt longer, and witnessed the taking of

Damietta by the Crusades on 5 November 1219 and the solemn entrance of the Christian army in the city on 2 February 1220. Armed with a *signaculum* given to him by the Sultan himself, Francis could also have travelled to Jerusalem and prayed at the Holy Sepulchre, at least according to the witness of Angelo Clareno, which is not always accepted because it dates to 1325, nearly 100 years after Francis' death. Francis returned by way of the Adriatic, where many places claim his presence (Lezhë in Albania, Zadar in Croatia), and arrived in Venice on an island in the hermitage of San Francesco al Deserto. This would have happened around spring or early summer of 1220, thus giving Francis nearly one year of presence in Egypt and the Holy Land. These conjectures, however, are far from being proved as historically true, and only local traditions keep them alive.

### Francis' travels during his last years

The movements of Francis during the last five years of his life are not always easy to document. The Sources are not always precise regarding exact dates. What we do know is that, after his return from the East, Francis was becoming increasingly ill, and could not travel as much as he would have liked to. When he returned to Italy in 1220 Francis travelled from Venice to Rome, where he requested Pope Honorius III to grant the Order a protector in the person of Cardinal Ugo dei Segni of Ostia. He was certainly in Assisi on 29 September 1220, during the general chapter on the feast of Saint Michael, when he relinquished the leadership of the Order in favour of Pietro Cattani. We are not sure of Francis' whereabouts during the autumn of 1220 and first months of 1221. According to tradition he went on a preaching tour in central and southern Italy. What is certain is that he was present for the general chapter of Pentecost on 30 May 1221, during which the *Regula non bullata* was approved and Brother Elias

was chosen to lead the Order after the death of Pietro Cattani.

We have an important witness by archdeacon Thomas of Split, a chronicler from Dalmatia, in his *Historia Salonitana*, who states that on 15 August 1222, feast of the Assumption, he happened to be in Piazza Maggiore in Bologna, where he heard Francis preach: "In the same year (1222) on the feast of the Assumption of the Mother of God, when I residing at the Studium in Bologna, I saw Saint Francis preaching in the square in front of the town hall, where almost all the inhabitants of the city had assembled. The theme of his sermon was: 'Angels, People, Demons.' He spoke so well and so clearly about these three kinds of rational creatures that this unlettered man's sermon became the source of not a little amazement for the many educated people who were present" (FAED II, 808).

The year 1223 is well documented regarding Francis' travels. It is marked especially by two episodes that occurred during the last months, namely the confirmation of the *Regula bullata* by Pope Honorius III on 29 November, and the celebration of Christmas in Greccio. It is highly probable that the first part of that year was spent in the preparation of the definitive text of the Rule. According to the Sources, Francis retreated to the hermitage of Fonte Colombo, in the company of some brothers, among whom the canon lawyer Bonizio of Bologna, in order to present the final draft of the Rule that was then taken to the Pope for confirmation. Given that the *Regula bullata* had to be approved first by the general chapter of Pentecost, it could well be that Francis retreated to Fonte Colombo during the spring months of 1223. It was probably Cardinal Ugo who prompted Francis to compose a more "juridical" document to present to the Roman Curia. Indeed, Cardinal Ugo himself had a say in the drafting of the *Regula bullata*, as is evident in the Bulla *Quo elongati*, in which he, as Pope Gregory IX, interpreted some points of the Rule on

28 September 1230, and stated: “While we held a lesser rank (cardinal protector), we stood by him both as he composed the aforesaid Rule and obtained its confirmation from the Apostolic See” (FAED I, 571). After the chapter Francis would have travelled to Rome to present the final document to Pope Honorius III, who confirmed it, as we said, on 29 November.

The Christmas scene of Greccio was evidently enacted on 25 December 1223 according to the *Vita beati Francisci* of Thomas of Celano 84: “We should note then, as matter worthy of memory and something to be recalled with reverence, what he did, three years prior to his death, at the town of Greccio, on the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ” (FAED I, 254).

The year 1224 was marked by Francis’ retreat on Mount La Verna from 15 August to 29 September. Although it was customary for Francis to retreat on La Verna during the summer for the “Lent of Saint Michael”, that year was to mark the receiving of the stigmata, and therefore it was highly significant. From that moment onwards Francis was practically unable to move and walk independently, and therefore his movements became more restricted and he was obliged to depend upon others to move about, and had to ride a donkey. However, this does not mean that Francis was stuck in one place. His return to the Portiuncula after the stigmatisation is well documented in the Sources, and is presented as a journey of triumph during which God was working wonders through the living icon of Christ crucified present in the body of Francis. The places where he stayed or passed from became signs of God’s wonders: Borgo San Sepolcro, Città di Castello, the hermitage of Celle di Cortona and other places visited by Francis. Even though wearied by the stigmata and unable to walk, Francis made a preaching tour of Umbria and Marche in 1224-1225. In the *Vita beati Francisci*, 98, Celano writes: “He so desired the salvation of souls and longed to benefit his neighbours that, even though he could no longer walk on his

own, he went through the towns riding on a little donkey” (FAED I, 266-267).

In spring of 1225 Francis stayed for some time at San Damiano, under the maternal care of Clare and the Poor Ladies. It was there that he composed the first part of the *Canticle of Brother Sun* (*Assisi Compilation* 83: FAED II, 185). His eye disease prompted Elias to call him to come over to Rieti, where the papal physicians could operate on his eye. The painful operation took place in the hermitage of Fonte Colombo (*Assisi Compilation* 86: FAED II, 190) and in the hermitage of San Fabiano alla Foresta Francis also renewed the fertility of the vineyard of the poor priest of the church, after visitors trampled over the vines and destroyed them (*Assisi Compilation* 67: FAED II, 170).

The 1226, the last year of Francis’ life, saw him go other places in central Italy. In April he was at Siena, where he dictated what is known as the *Testament of Siena*. Again it is Thomas of Celano, in the *Vita beati Francisci*, 165, who writes: “Six months before the day of his death, he was staying in Siena for treatment of his eye disease. But then all the rest of his body started to show signs of serious illness. His stomach had been destroyed, and his liver was failing. He was vomiting a lot of blood, so much that he seemed close to death. On hearing of this in a place far away, brother Elias rushed to his side. At his arrival the holy father had recovered so much that they left that area and went together to Le Celle near Cortona” (FAED I, 274). The *Assisi Compilation* 96, gives us a similar account, adding the *Testament* that Francis dictated in Siena (FAED II, 162. Marco GUIDA, *Il «Testamento di Siena»: frate Francesco, in poche battute*, in *Studi Francescani* 107 (2010) 534-562).

During the summer months of 1226 Francis returned from Le Celle at Cortona to the Portiuncula, but “he went to stay at Bagnara, north of Nocera, where the brothers were staying in a house that had recently been constructed for them” (*Assisi Compilation* 96: FAED II, 198) in order to

avoid the intense heat of the Umbrian valley. Back in Assisi he was taken for some weeks to the Vescovado, or bishop's residence, where he composed the second part of the *Canticle of Creatures* (*Assisi Compilation* 99: FAED II, 202-203), and where he received the news that he would soon die. That was the moment when he decided to go to the Portiuncula and die in the same place where he had received the call to follow Christ according to the form of life of the apostles.

On 3 October 1226 after vespers Francis made his last journey. It is Celano who gives us the first account of the *transitus* in his *Vita beati Francisci*, 110: "And then that most holy soul was released from the flesh, and as it was absorbed into the abyss of light, his body fell asleep on the Lord. One of the brothers and followers, a man of some fame, whose name I will conceal for now since he does not wish to glory in such fame while still living in the flesh, saw the soul of the most holy father rise straight to heaven over many waters. It was like a star, but as big as the moon, with the brilliance of the sun, and carried up upon a small white cloud" (FAED I, 278).

## Latin Abbreviations

### Writings of St. Francis

Adm	Admonitiones
CantAudPov	Canticle Audite Poverelle
CantSol	Canticum fratris Solis
LaudDei	Laudes Dei Altissimi
BenLeo	Benedictio fratri Leoni data
EpAnt	Epistola ad S. Antonium
EpClerI	Epistola ad Clericos
EpCust	Epistola ad Custodes
EpFid	Epistola ad Fideles
EpLeo	Epistola ad fratrem Leonem
EpMin	Epistola ad Ministrum
EpOrd	Epistola toti Ordini missa
EpRect	Epistola ad rectores
ExhLD	Exhortatio ad Laudem Dei
ExpPat	Expositio in Pater noster
FormViv	Forma vivendi S. Claræ
Fragm	Fragmenta alterius Regulæ
LaudHor	Laudes ad omnes horas
OffPass	Officium Passionis Domini
OrCruc	Oratio ante Crucifixum
RegB	Regula bullata
RegNB	Regula non bullata
RegEr	Regula pro eremotoriis
SalBVM	Salutatio Beatæ Mariæ Virg
SalVirt	Salutatio Virtutum
Test	Testamentum
UltVol	Ultima voluntas S. Claræ

### Sources for the Life of St. Francis

1C	Celano, <i>Vita beati Francisci</i>
LCh	Celano, <i>Legenda ad usum chori</i>
VB	Celano, <i>Vita brevior S. Francisci</i>
2C	Celano, <i>Memoriale in desiderio animæ</i>
3C	Celano, <i>Tractatus miraculorum</i>
LJS	Julian of Speyer, <i>Vita S. Francisci</i>
OR	<i>Officium Rhythmicum</i>
AP	<i>Anonymus Perusinus (De Inceptione)</i>
L3C	<i>Legenda trium sociorum</i>
CA	<i>Compilatio Assisiensis</i>
LMj	S. Bonaventura, <i>Legenda Maior</i>
LMn	S. Bonaventura, <i>Legenda Minor</i>
SPMaj	<i>Speculum Perfectionis</i> (Sabatier)
SPMin	<i>Speculum Perfectionis</i> (Lemmens)
ABF	<i>Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius</i>
Fior	<i>Fioretti di San Francesco</i>



Cover page: *Portiuncula Indulgence*. Basrelief in the pulpit of St. Francis Church, Hamrun, Malta