

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEACONS

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI



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DEACON NICK KERR

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Francis, his ministry and his spirituality

Jesus Christ became like us, for our sake. Francis of Assisi tried to be like Jesus Christ, for Christ's sake. Francis is known as the poor man of Assisi. His image, his ideal of Jesus Christ is of the man who became poor that we might become rich (2 Cor 8:9).

As Pope Francisⁱ reminded us recently, St Francis' encounter with lepers was the turning point in his life. Pope Francis was writing in his message for the First World Day for the Poor.ⁱⁱ He quoted from The Testament of Francisⁱⁱⁱ. In the Testament St Francis wrote:

When I was in sin, the sight of lepers nauseated me beyond measure; but then God himself led me into their company, and I had pity on them.^{iv} When I had once become acquainted with them, what had previously nauseated me became a source of spiritual and physical consolation for me. After that I did not wait long before leaving the world.^v

One very early account tells that the episode with the leper followed a period of intense prayer. It adds that the leper he met gave Francis the kiss of peace and “from that day onwards he mortified himself increasingly until, through God’s grace, he won a complete victory ... He became such a friend to the lepers that, as he himself declared in his Testament, he lived with them and served them with loving eagerness.”^{vi}

As Pope Francis says, this encounter with lepers turned his life around. In their faces, which had been repugnant to him, he saw the face of the suffering Christ. I believe this may have prepared him for the extraordinary event where the crucifix spoke those famous words: “Francis, go, repair my house, which, as you see, is falling completely to ruin.” According to the Legend, it was “a tender, compassionate voice”. Francis was “trembling and amazed”.^{vii} Thomas of Celano gives a more dramatic account. “Something unheard of before happened to him (Francis): the painted image of Christ crucified moved its lips and spoke ... What a wonderful thing and a thing unheard of in our times. Who is not astonished at these things? Who has ever heard like things?”^{viii} Francis certainly had a great love for the crucified Christ. Thomas of Celano says that “from then on he could never keep himself from weeping, even bewailing in a loud voice, the passion of Christ which was always, as it were, before his mind”.^{ix}

This event has captured people’s imagination. The crucifix that spoke to Francis is still venerated today. But Francis does not mention it in his Testament. This may have been out of modesty. Francis himself said in another context, “Blessed the religious who keeps God’s marvellous doings to himself”.^x Later he tried to hide his stigmata; or perhaps it was because finding Christ in others was even more important to him than the crucifix that spoke. His Testament begins, “This is how God inspired me, Brother Francis, to embark upon a life of penance.” He tells the story of his how he met and came to love lepers. In other words, he gives his reaction to the suffering Christ he saw in others as the reason for his change from a rich young man about town to the Poor Little Man of Assisi. I am stressing this point because I feel it is essential to an understanding of his spirituality. Because I’m writing about Francis’ spirituality. I won’t go into the history of how the words from the crucifix were interpreted, except to say that Francis was always extraordinarily loyal to the Church, to repairing God’s house, even in the face of wealth and corruption in the Church.

Poverty was an essential part of Francis’ spirituality. On 16 April 1208 Francis and two companions went to his family’s parish church, San Nicolo di Piazza, and asked the parish priest to perform a *sortes biblicae* – opening the Bible at random to reveal God’s will.^{xi} They used the Gospel book. The book opened at three passages with the quotes:

“Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: and come follow me” (Mark 10:21).

“Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic” (Luke 9:3).

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).^{xii}

He loved the poor. St Bonaventure writes of him: “Francis saw Christ’s image in every poor person he met and he was prepared to give them everything he had, even if he himself had urgent need of it. He even believed that they had the right to ask such alms, as if they belonged to them.”^{xiii}

Bonaventure tells the story of the time Francis was wearing a short cloak over his habit because he was not well. He told his companion, “We’ll have to give this cloak back to that poor beggar, because it belongs to him. We only got it on loan until we found someone in greater need of it ... God the Almighty will regard it as a theft on my part if I do not give what I have to someone who needs it more”.^{xiv}

This was at a time when some were protesting against the Church's support of the wealthy and powerful, like the Patarines in Italy and those behind the peace procession of the Capuciati in Le Puy in France. Some longed for a purely spiritual Church, and genuine concern for the poor and a greater emphasis on the Beatitudes. Groups of penitents, living lives of prayer and poverty were springing up.^{xv} It was a time of social tension, of political and social transformation. People of his parents' class knew new freedom. Serfs were dominated by lay and ecclesiastical lords. New masters of land, the bourgeoisie of Assisi, who were taking their place alongside the aristocracy, were as greedy as the nobles. The mass of country people had no real rights. They were despised by the citizens. At first Francis was associated in their eyes with the rich city people.^{xvi}

Francis wanted to follow the poor and crucified Christ. This led him from the comfort of Assisi's communal life to the margins of society of his time, to be with the poor, the lepers, the outcasts.^{xvii} He wrote in his first rule of life for the brothers:

The friars should be delighted to follow the lowliness and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ, remembering that of the whole world we must own nothing ... They should be glad to live among social outcasts, among the poor and helpless, the sick and the lepers and those who beg alms by the wayside. If they are in want, they should not be ashamed to beg alms."^{xviii}

A modern writer who has tried to capture Francis' spirit and spirituality, Carlo Carretto, has written, *I Francis*, - what he imagines Francis might say to our atheistic world. In it "Francis" says of poverty:

Poverty did not consist in helping the poor, it consisted in being poor ...

Jesus had been poor.

I, Francis, wished to be poor.

What it meant to be poor I began to see very clearly. All I had to do was look at the poor or look at Jesus ...

True poverty went to the bottom of things and touched the spirit. For Jesus had said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven."^{xix}

Francis had a great respect for priests, no matter how sinful and corrupt they were. This was linked to his love of the Blessed Sacrament. He wrote in the *Testament* that he was determined to love and reverence priests. He could "see the Son of God in them ... because in this world I cannot see the most high Son of God with my own eyes, except for his most holy Body and Blood which they receive and they alone administer to others. Above everything else, I want this most holy Sacrament to be honoured and venerated and reserved in places which are richly ornamented."^{xx} He liked Brother Sylvester, the first priest to join the brotherhood, to be with him when he travelled so he would never be without the Eucharist. It was central to his spirituality that his direct contact with God was in the Mass, then in service to the poor and in nature.

As a deacon he was close to priests at the altar. He was scandalised when the consecrated host was treated casually or indifferently or reserved in poor conditions. He tried to get his friars, in their poor habits, to have precious pyxes to give to parish clergy for the reservation of the Sacrament. Francis' concerns were shared by others of his times. On 22 November 1219 Pope Honorius III in two decrees, required what Francis was calling for – proper vessels and vestments for Mass and the reservation of the Host in a precious, locked container.^{xxi} At this time people received Holy Communion infrequently. Earlier, in 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council, the Council which affirmed transubstantiation, made annual confession and Communion mandatory for all Christians.^{xxii} Francis warned careless clergy: "We clerics cannot overlook the sinful neglect and ignorance some people are guilty of with regard to the holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ ... In his love, God gives himself into our hands; we touch him and receive him daily into our mouths. Have we forgotten that we must fall into his hands?"

Francis' *Canticle of the Sun* captures his insight that all our fellow creatures, animate or inanimate, reflect the face of Christ. He saw that each element of creation comes from the same source, the Trinity which is revealed in the Incarnate Jesus. Therefore each is a revelation of God.^{xxv}

All creation spoke to him of God,^{xxvi} just as the Eucharist spoke to him of Christ and God.^{xxvii} Verses eight and nine were written to reconcile the bishop and mayor of Assisi. The canticle is not just about a beautiful world that should praise God.^{xxviii} It calls for a reconciled world^{xxix} – which reflects the message at the beginning of this essay: seeing the face of Christ in others.^{xxx} Just before his final agony he wrote, “Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Bodily Death,” which he and his companions sang in his final moments.^{xxxi}

Francis' love of animals is legendary. Giotto especially has made his preaching to the birds famous. For all his insights into the beauty of creation he was no animal liberation fanatic. He especially loved lambs, which reminded him of the Lamb of God. He associated the horse with wealth and power. He certainly did not like the mice and flies that plagued him near the end of his life. He ate fish and meat at a time when established religious orders abstained from meat.^{xxxii} Francis' approach was the opposite of the monastic spirituality of the time, especially Cistercian spirituality, which called for withdrawal from the world. Vauchez says Francis “does not flee the world but plunges himself into it”.^{xxxiii}

It was this spirit that prompted Pope John Paul II to name Francis as patron saint of ecology in 1979.^{xxxiv} It seems probable that, when Francis set out to Damietta to convert the sultan Saladin he hoped to become a martyr.^{xxxv} This wish for martyrdom was part of his spirituality.^{xxxvi}

Vauchez points out that the stigmata is an extremely delicate and complex matter. It must be seen in the context of Francis' overall spiritual journey. Vauchez says:

“From the beginning of his conversion he had not ceased praying before crucifixes – especially the one at San Damiano – and to meditate on the mystery of the passion of Christ ... It thus seems possible that he might have understood, once confronted with this strange apparition, that he could be united to Christ Crucified through his own personal passion: that, in the perspective of the life he had been living for several years, his suffering and disappointments had taken on a meaning which in his eyes they previously had not had.”^{xxxvii}

The Passion of Christ, which had been so present in Francis' heart and mind became present in his body.^{xxxviii}

The Admonitions were probably collected after Francis' death. Here is an example:

Where there is Love and Wisdom,
there is neither Fear or Ignorance.
Where there is Patience and Humility,
there is neither Anger or Annoyance.
Where there is Poverty and Joy,
there is neither Cupidity nor Avarice.
Where there is Peace and Contemplation,
there is neither Care nor Restlessness.
Where there is the Fear of God to guard the dwelling,
there no enemy can enter.
Where there is Mercy and Prudence,
there is neither Excess nor Hardness.^{xxxix}

In modern times we make a clear connection between the Eucharist and charity. The Eucharist is the “source and summit” or “fount and apex” of Christian life.^{xi} Benedict XVI speaks movingly about God as love in his encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est, God is Love* (2005). He mentions Francis as one of several “models of social charity for all people of good will” (#40).^{xii} Francis had a great devotion to the Eucharist and worked for the poor. In his apostolic exhortation on the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis, The Sacrament of charity*, Pope Benedict named him in a list of those whose holiness “found its centre in the sacrament of the Eucharist”.^{xlii}

Joy was central to Francis’ spirituality. Thomas of Celano says “he accepted death singing”.^{xliii} That may have been an exaggeration; but he wrote the second to last verse of *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, which brought about the reconciliation of Assisi’s bishop and mayor, and then the final verse, beginning, “Be praised, my Lord, for our Sister Bodily Death”.^{xliiv} Francis asked two brothers to sing the canticle to him – which they did all night. Minister General, Brother Elias objected. People who heard the singing might be scandalised; this was not the edifying way a saint should die. Francis was not swayed by the argument. Up to the end he would not stop singing the praises of God, or having them sung.^{xliv}

Pope Francis opens his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si*, by quoting St Francis’ *Canticle*: “Praise be to you”. In it Pope Francis condemns consumerism, irresponsible development and degradation of the environment and urges everyone to take action on global warming.^{xlvi} Some see similarities with the crisis in the Church in St Francis’ time – with opulence of popes and the worldliness of bishops and clergy in general – and the crisis in the Church in our time – with sexual abuse, Vatican Bank scandals and what Leonardo Boff calls a “closed and suffocating spiritual autarchy”. The crisis then and the present crisis both led to a lack of the Church’s credibility and moral authority^{xlvii}. Boff believes that Pope Francis’ mission is like that heard from the crucifix – a commission to rebuild Christ’s Church.^{xlviii}

My ministry

In one way, to rebuild Christ’s Church is the role of every committed Christian. St Francis is probably the most loved and most celebrated deacon in the history of the Church. He surpasses even Laurence in popularity. He is a model for all deacons. He was a loveable personality. With all his eccentricities he attracted people to him. People flocked to see him and to hear him preach and men, young and old, flocked to follow him in his difficult and austere way of life.

My ministry in Adelaide today is very different from Francis’ in Assisi in his time. Francis of Assisi could be called a spiritual genius. He was a mystic. He worked miracles. I could never compare my spiritual life and my spirituality to his. But there are similarities. Both our spiritualities are based on love of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and in the poor.

Francis’ encounter with lepers was a turning point in his life. The turning point for me was realising the plight of Australian Aborigines living in Adelaide slums and the wrecks of cars on the edges of country towns. My reaction was to get to befriend them and to use my journalistic skills to help them to make their voices heard in the Church and in politics. Their spirituality and their love of creation affected me profoundly. Today I work mainly with African refugees, many of them living in extreme poverty. Many young ones are getting into trouble with the police. Next to Indigenous people, the next biggest group in our gaols is made up of young Africans. Many of these people have deep spiritual needs. I also work with asylum seekers. Our country treats them with callous injustice.

Francis had great joy in creation and was inspired to love God more deeply by its beauty. His writing shows a love of words, which he set to music. I have a great fellow feeling for him there. I do not sympathise with the way his love for poverty itself led to his suspicion of learning nor with his extreme penances and self-discipline. I like his sense of fun in preaching.^{xlix} His idea of teaching about the nativity of Christ by inventing the Christmas crib^l was inspired.

Francis of Assisi is credited with the saying, “Preach always; sometimes use words.” I cannot trace the saying back to Francis. He did say in the Rule of 1221, his first rule for his friars, that not all friars should preach. “All the friars, however, should preach by their example.”^{li} The principle is an important one.

Francis of Assisi saw Christ present in the Eucharist and in the poor. Pope Francis spoke about the link between Christ in the Eucharist and Christ in the poor, especially for deacons like me, when he spoke at a Jubilee Mass for deacons in the Year of Mercy in 2016. He said:

When you serve at the table of the Eucharist, there you will find the presence of Jesus, who gives himself to you so that you can give yourselves to others. In this way, available in life, meek of heart and in constant dialogue with Jesus, you will not be afraid to be servants of

Christ, and to encounter and caress the flesh of the Lord in the poor of our time.^{liii}

Francis of Assisi tried to be like Jesus Christ, for Christ’s sake. He caressed the flesh of lepers. Pope Francis is calling us to be like Saint Francis – close to Jesus, servants of Christ, caressing the flesh of the poor of our time.

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FOOTNOTES

ⁱ St Francis has been a major influence on Pope Francis, who took his name as Pope after the saint of Assisi. I said in my last assignment how the newly-elected Pope explained to journalists why, as new Pope, he had chosen the name Francis:

I will tell you the story. During the election, I was seated next to the Archbishop Emeritus of São Paulo and Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Claudio Hummes: a good friend, a good friend! When things were looking dangerous, he encouraged me. And when the votes reached two thirds, there was the usual applause, because the Pope had been elected. And he gave me a hug and a kiss, and said: 'Don't forget the poor!' And those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. Then I thought of all the wars, as the votes were still being counted, till the end. Francis is also the man of peace. That is how the name came into my heart: Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation; these days we do not have a very good relationship with creation, do we? He is the man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man ... How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor! Pope Francis, "Audience with media representatives," 16 March 2013, accessed 21 October 2017. https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco_20130316_rappresentanti-media.html.

ⁱⁱ Pope Francis asked that the First World Day of the Poor be observed on 19 November 2017. He said :
Over these two thousand years, how many pages of history have been written by Christians who, in utter simplicity and humility, and with generous and creative charity, have served their poorest brothers and sisters! The most outstanding example is that of Francis of Assisi, followed by many other holy men and women over the centuries. He was not satisfied to *embrace* lepers and give them *alms*, but chose to go to Gubbio to *stay* with them (his emphasis). He saw this meeting as the turning point of his conversion. He went on to quote from "The Testament of St Francis". Pope Francis, "Message of Pope Francis, First World Day of the Poor," 13 June, 2017, accessed 3 December 2017. https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/poveri/documents/papa-francesco_20170613_messaggio-i-giornatamondiale-poveri-2017.html.

Pope Francis also referred to the incident of St Francis and the leper in his first encyclical letter, *Lumen Fidei*, *The Light of Faith*. He wrote:

How many men and women of faith have found mediators of light in those who suffer! So it was with Saint Francis of Assisi and the leper, or with Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her poor. They understood the mystery at work in them. In drawing near to the suffering, they were certainly not able to eliminate all their pain or to explain every evil. Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey.

Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, The Light of Faith, # 57, 29 June, 2013, accessed 3 December 2017.

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html.

Pope Francis gives both St Francis and Mother Teresa as examples of Christians whose love for the world and people could not be contained. In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (The Joy of the Gospel), he wrote on the right of Christians to speak on the social order and the common good: .

Who would claim to lock up in a church and silence the message of Saint Francis of Assisi or Blessed Teresa of Calcutta? They themselves would have found this unacceptable. An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better that we found it. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses.

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations.index.html#apost_exhortations.

ⁱⁱⁱ S Francis dictated the *Testament* just before he died on 3 October 1226. It may have been dictated in late September or even on 1 or 2 October. Benen Fahy and Placid Hermann, "The Writings of St Francis of Assisi". Translations by Benen Fahy, Introduction and Notes by Placid Herman (London: Burns & Oates, 1964), 67. Francis Thompson notes that Francis had no worldly goods to leave in a testament, apart from his breviary, which he had already given to Brothers Leo and Angelo so they could read it to him, but he had "important spiritual gifts to bestow on his brothers". Francis Thompson O.P., "Francis of Assisi: A New Biography," (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012), 133.

Gianmaria Polidoro paints an imaginative and rather touching picture of the dying Francis dictating the *Testament*: "While thinking in his little hut among the trees of the Porziuncula, he decided to leave them a last will and testament ..." Gianmaria Polidoro, "Francis of Assisi," trans. Benet A. Fonk (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2017 reprint), 235. No original publication date is given.

^{iv} This may be a reference to the beatitude, "Blessed are the merciful" (Matt 5:7).

Francis had been distressed and confused before the encounter with the lepers. Thompson says that, as Francis showed mercy to these outcasts, he experienced God's own gift of mercy to himself. As he cleaned their bodies, his perceptions changed. God's power remade him into a different man. Thompson, "Francis of Assisi," 17. Andre Vauchez makes the point that Francis showed heroism in going among the lepers. He also found God in the person of Christ who identified himself with the misery of the world and the marginalised. Penance, peace and mercy were to become the watchwords of Franciscan preaching. Francis did not found any leprosaria. He did not commit himself in any permanent way to service of these "lowly ones" (Vauchez's phrase). In fact, in 1220 he prohibited his brothers from devoting themselves to them. But "doing mercy" to lepers was the turning point of his conversion. Andre Vauchez, "Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint," trans. Michael F. Cusato (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 88-94.

^v The first formal life of Francis, written by Thomas of Celano says that, "in the days of his vanity", Francis would not go closer than two miles to lepers' houses and then would "hold his nostrils with his hands". But, "when he was beginning to think of holy and useful things "... he met a leper one day and, made stronger than himself, he kissed him. From then on he began to despise himself more and more until, by the mercy of the Redeemer, he came to perfect victory over himself". Thomas of Celano, "First Life of St Francis", 17, c. 1229, in *St Francis of Assisi: Writing and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St Francis* (hereafter *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*), ed. Marion A. Habig, fourth edition (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 243. The second life, by the same author, goes into more detail:

For among all the unhappy spectacle of the world Francis naturally abhorred lepers; but one day he met a leper while he was riding near Assisi. Though the leper caused him no small disgust and horror, nevertheless, lest like a transgressor of a commandment he should break his given word, he got off the horse and prepared to kiss the leper. But when the leper put out his hand as though to receive something he received money along with a kiss.

A few days later, it adds, "filled with wonder and joy" he went to where the lepers lived, gave them money, and kissed them on the hand and mouth". Thomas of Celano, "Second Life of St Francis", 9, 10, in *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 369, 370.

^{vi} Author uncertain, "Legend of the Three Companions", c. 1246, 11, in *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 901. Theophile Desbonnets in his introduction to the *Legend* devotes pages to the question of authorship. The "Introduction" is translated by Paul Oligny, *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 873-880.

^{vii} Author uncertain, "Legend," 13. *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 903.

^{viii} Celano, "Second Life", 10, 11, *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 370-371.

^{ix} Celano, "Second Life," 11, *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 171.

^x This was in "The Admonitions", a series of short exhortations which seems to have been collected after his death. This one is headed: "Virtue should be concealed or it will be lost". It reads: "Blessed the religious who treasures up for heaven (Cf. Mt. 6:20) the favours God has given him and does not want to show them off for what he can get out of them. God himself will reveal his works to whomsoever he pleases. Blessed the religious who keeps God's marvellous doings to himself." See "The Admonitions" in Fahy and Hermann, *The Writings of St Francis*, 87.

^{xi} This practice sounds very superstitious to us and was being called into question in Francis' time. But it was certainly known in the Church. St Augustine, for example, tells how he heard what he took to be the voice of a child saying, "Take it and read, take it and read." He took up the scriptures and read from Romans 13:13-14, "let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." As he finished the sentence "it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the

darkness of doubt was dispelled". St Augustine, "Confessions," trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, (London: Penguin, 1961), 177-178.

xii Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 22, 23.

xiii St Bonaventure, "Major Life of St Francis," VIII, 5, 1263, trans. Benen Fahy, in *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 619.

xiv Ibid," VIII, 5, 691, 692.

xv Vauchez, "Francis of Assisi," 130-134.

xvi Ibid, 61-65.

xvii Michael Blastic, "Franciscan Spirituality," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1993), 408.

xviii Francis, "The Rule of 1221," 9, in Fahy and Hermann, *The Writings of St Francis of Assisi*, 39.

xix Carlo Carretto, "I, Francis: The Spirit of St Francis of Assisi" (London: Collins, 1982), 37, 38.

xx Francis, "Testament", Fahy and Hermann, "The Writings of St Francis," 67.

xxi Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 59-62.

xxii William J. Dohan, "Lateran Councils," in *The HarperCollins Encyclopaedia of Catholicism*, Richard P. McBrien, gen. ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 753.

xxiii Francis, "Letter to all clerics," date uncertain, but probably written in his last illness, in Fahy and Hermann, *The Writing of St Francis*, 100-101. This letter, and the *Testament*, also insisted, in the words of the *Testament*, that any writings containing God's words found in an "improper place" should be picked up and "put aside in a suitable place".

xxiv Francis, "The Rule of the Third Order," V, 15, 1221, in Fahy and Hermann, *The Writing of St Francis*, 171.

xxv Chesterton points out that Francis' approach is nothing like nature-worship or pantheistic optimism. He adds: "When we say that a poet praises the whole of creation we commonly mean only that he praises the whole cosmos. But this sort of poet does really praise creation, in the sense of the act of creation ... He not only appreciates everything but the nothing of which everything was made". G. K. Chesterton, "St Francis of Assisi" (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923, 1954 impression), 91.

xxvi We can say the same of other religious poets. Gerard Manley Hopkins is just one, with lines like, "Glory be to God for dappled things," from *Pied Piper*, or "The World is charged with the grandeur of God", from *God's Grandeur*. "A Hopkins Reader," ed. John Pick (Oxford: Oxford, 1953), 14, 4.

xxvii Gianmaria Polidoro, "Francis of Assisi," 219.

xxviii It struck me in Assisi when we were given a copy of "The Canticle of Brother Sun" that it resembled the canticle from Daniel 3:57-88, 56, which we had said at Morning Prayer that morning. It begins, "O all you works of the Lord, O bless the Lord." Thomas of Celano said of Francis: "For as of old the three youths in the fiery furnace invited all the elements to praise and glorify the Creator of the universe, so also this man, filled with the spirit of God, never ceased to glorify, praise and bless the Creator and Ruler of all things in all the elements and creatures." Celano, "First life", 80, *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 296.

There are also similarities with some of the psalms, for example, Psalm 148. Here is verse 2:

Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, shining stars.
Praise him, highest heavens
and the waters above the heavens.

xxix Pope John Paul II held the first of what became a series of Interreligious World Days of Peace, days of prayer for peace with leaders of world religions, in Assisi in 1986. He drew inspiration for this peace movement from the figure of "the humble and joyful Saint Francis of Assisi". John Paul II, "Address to representatives of Christian Churches, Ecclesial Communities and World Religions," Assisi, 27 October 1986, accessed 20 December 2017. https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861027_prayer-peace-assisi-final.html.

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The Community of Sant'Egidio organises inter-faith assemblies “in the spirit of Assisi” every year. John L. Allen, “Pope’s inter-faith summit in Assisi belongs to an ongoing revolution,” in *Crux*, 14 September 2016, accessed 20 December 2017.

<https://cruxnow.com/analysis/2016/09/14/popes-inter-faith-summit-assisi-belongs-ongoing-revolution/>,

Pope Francis came to the 2016 assembly, which was also held in Assisi. “In war, everyone loses, including the victors,” he said. accessed 20 December 2017. “The Pope in Assisi for the World Day of Prayer for Peace,” 20 September 2016, accessed 20 December 2017.

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/09/20/160920a.html>.

^{xxx} Philip Sheldrake, “Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology and Social Practice” (New York: Paulist, 2010), 48-49.

^{xxxi} Vauchez, “Francis of Assisi,” 801

^{xxxii} *Ibid*, 785-787

^{xxxiii} *Ibid*, 812.

^{xxxiv} In his World Day of Peace message for 1990 John Paul II said:

In 1979, I proclaimed Saint Francis of Assisi as the heavenly Patron of those who promote ecology. He offers Christians an example of genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation. As a friend of the poor who was loved by God’s creatures, Saint Francis invited all of creation – animals, plants, natural forces, even Brother Sun and Sister Moon – to give honour and praise to the Lord. The poor man of Assisi gives us striking witness that when we are at peace with God we are better able to devote ourselves to building up that peace with all creation which is inseparable from peace among all peoples. It is my hope that the inspiration of Saint Francis will help us to keep ever alive a sense of “fraternity” with all those good and beautiful things which Almighty God has created. And may he remind us of our serious obligation to respect and watch over them with care, in light of that greater and higher fraternity that exists within the human family.

John Paul II, “Message for World Peace Day.” 1990, 8 December, 1989, accessed 4 December, 2017.

https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html.

^{xxxv} Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, 274

^{xxxvi} In one version of the legend, Francis did convert Saladin, but the sultan feared that, if he were to be baptised, the repercussions would be terrible. Francis promised that Saladin would be baptised on his deathbed. True to his word, Francis, who had himself died, appeared to two of his friars and sent them to Saladin in time to baptise him before he died “and his soul was saved through the prayers of St Francis”. “The Little Flowers of St Francis,” date uncertain, late 14th century, trans. L. Shirley-Price (London: Penguin, 1959), 77-78.

On Francis’ desire for martyrdom, Thomas of Celano says that his “desire for martyrdom” led to his trip first to Spain, then to Syria. Celano, “First Life”, 55-57, *Francis of Assisi, Omnibus of Sources*, 274-277

^{xxxvii} Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, 403.

^{xxxviii} Chesterton wrote of Francis’ stigmata that it was artistically appropriate that Francis, a man presented as a Mirror of Christ, should receive “in a cloud of mystery and isolation, inflicted by no human hand, the unhealing everlasting wounds that heal the world”. Chesterton, “St Francis of Assisi,” 15.

Thomas of Celano, writing of Francis’ devotion to the Cross, speaks of “a certain hidden mystery”. Francis, he writes, glorified in nothing but the cross of the Lord. Words could not express “such wonderful things”. “Perhaps it had therefore to appear in the flesh, because it could not be explained in words. Therefore let silence speak where words are wanting, for the thing itself cries out where the word fails.” Celano, “Second Life,” 208, *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 524, 525.

^{xxxix} Francis, “The Admonitions”, date uncertain, Fahy and Hermann, *The Writing of St Francis of Assisi*, 86.

^{xl} Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), 11, 21 November 1964, accessed 13 December 2017.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html,

^{xli} Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), 2005, #40. accessed 12 December 2017.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html,

^{xlii} Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis (The Sacrament of Charity)*, 2007, # 94, accessed 12 December 2017.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html,

^{xliii} Celano, “Second Life”, 214, *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 534.

^{xliv} Vauchez, “Francis of Assisi,” 1106.

^{xlv} Ibid, 1107.

^{xlvi} Pope Francis says: “In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us ... This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.” Pope Francis, *Laudato Si (Praise be to you)*, 24 May, 2015, # 1, 2, accessed 3 December 2017.

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Pope Francis refers to St Francis more than a dozen times in the encyclical letter.

Pope Francis also said: “Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast.” *Laudato Si*, # 10.

Again, he said that St Francis refused “to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled”, *Laudato Si*, # 11.

^{xlvii} Leonardo Boff, “Francis of Rome & Francis of Assisi: A New Springtime for the Church,” trans. Dinah Livingstone (New York: Maryknoll, 2014), 96, 97. Boff writes:

Pope Francis’ dream is to make the historical Jesus’ dream come true, the kingdom of justice, love and peace ... to form a people who love one another, live in solidarity with others, show pity, and feel all other human beings are their brothers and sisters because they are all sons and daughters of the Father in the Son.

This kind of Christianity does not proselytize. It wins people over by attracting them to its beauty and deep humanity. These are the values that will save humanity.

Boff, “Francis of Rome & Francis of Assisi,” 126, 127.

^{xlviii} Ibid, 35.

^{xlix} We are told he would sometimes dance while preaching or break into song – in French. Sometimes he would take up a stick to use as a make believe violin and bow it with his right hand as he sang. Thompson, “Francis of Assisi,” 42.

^l Thomas of Celano devotes Chapter XXX of the “First Life” to the story of the crib at Greccio. Francis had the crib made to explain the mystery of the nativity “People were filled with joy over the new mystery,” Thomas says. “Mass was celebrated over the manger ... The saint of God was clothed in the vestments of the deacon, for he was a deacon, and he sang the holy Gospel in a sonorous voice,” 85, 86. Thomas stresses how Francis savoured words as he preached, words like “Child of Bethlehem”, or “Jesus”, 86. Celano, “First Life,” *St Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, 300, 301.

^{li} Francis, “The Rule of 1221,” in *The Writing of St Francis of Assisi*, 44.

Paul VI may have had something similar in mind when he famously said, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers and, if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” *Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelisation in the Modern World)* 41, 1975, accessed 13 December 2017

http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html

^{lii} *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy: Jubilee of Deacons: Homily of Pope Francis*, 29 May 2016, accessed 4 December 2017.

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/05/29/pope_to_deacons_%E2%80%98you_are_called_to_serve,_not_to_be_self-se/1233321.