

**BERNARD**  
**of Quintavalle**

(c1180 – 1241/42)

*The First Companion of St Francis of Assisi*

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## THE FIRST COMPANION

### Francis of Assisi by Arnaldo Fortini – 1959

No one knows the name of Francis' first companion. The biographers limit themselves to saying that he was a simple and pious man who followed Francis with great devotion. He made a declaration of faith, knelt at Francis' feet, and at an instant later he was gone, caught up in the vortex of worldly affairs.

He never appears again in the early biographies. And yet this mysterious figure, whose face we cannot see, is to be counted among the personages of the Franciscan drama. He is a symbol of the anonymous human beings who, at a call, stop for an instant and open their hearts to the great sorrow in the world and then turn away.

Therefore, all the historians recognise as Francis' first companion another man of Assisi, one from the contrada of San Gregorio – Bernard, son of Quintavalle di Berardello.

Records in the cathedral archives prove that the name Quintavalle is a family name, not a place name, as many biographers have thought. There is no doubt that the Quintavalle di Berardello mentioned above was Bernard's father, given the medieval practice of giving a son the name of his paternal grandfather. The family must have continued to be a prominent one in Assisi for a long time; the tomb of a Nicolo Roscio di Quintavalle in the Basilica di San Francesco is mentioned in a list made in 1509.

Bernard was, one of the most respected men of the maggiori, not only for his nobility and wealth, but, above all, for his learning. Since he held degrees in both civil and canon law, his advice was held in great esteem by all the people of the city in both public and private matters. The family (records show two brothers, Giovanni and Marzio) owned land in Colderba (a little hill overlooking the Tescio River a short distance above the bridge of San Vittorino), bordering that of the powerful signore of the contrada of San Rufino, Ugo di Tebalduccio. They also had olive groves in Mululla, the present hill of Viole, beside the cathedral close. One of his nephews was the podesta's judge in the first half of the thirteenth century.

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The first to attach himself permanently to Francis was Bernard of Quintavalle. A man of considerable standing and described by the chroniclers as 'of the noblest, richest and wisest' in the city. Probably some years older than Francis, he was a magistrate and the owner of a handsome *palazzo*. Impressed by the austerity of Francis' life and by his energy in restoring the ruined churches, he wanted to know more about him. Was he genuine? Did all these sudden changes and dramatic experiments issue from love, or did they all contain some element of self love, or pride, or display? Bernard decided to put this to the test, and invited Francis for the evening for supper and lodging.

What took place within the walls of that house during that night has deeply affected the history of the Christian Church, for it was during those hours that the Order of Friars Minor was born. Bernard appears to have begun by asking a number of questions, and no doubt was impressed by Francis' replies. Then Bernard decided in his heart to examine Francis' holiness. He had a bed prepared in his own chamber, in which a lamp always burned at night. And Francis, to conceal his holiness, as soon as he entered the chamber jumped into bed and gave the appearance of sleeping. And Bernard also, after a little while, lay down and began to snore loudly, as if he were sleeping very deeply. The Francis, truly believing that Bernard was sleeping, during the first time of sleep, got up from the bed and set himself to praying, lifting his eyes and his hands to heaven, and with great devotion and fervour said: "My God, My God." Saying this and sobbing, he remained like this until early morning, constantly repeating: "My God, My God," and nothing else.

Bernard had invited Francis simply to find out more about his ideas and ideals; but the effect of what he saw during the night was to make him offer to be taken on as a disciple. He began in a

roundabout way, 'If any one had been for a long time in possession of some lord's goods', he said, 'and did not wish to keep them any longer, how should he dispose of them most perfectly?' To which Francis replied that the only thing would be to give them back to the lord from whom he had received them. Bernard then said: 'I acknowledge that all my possessions were given to me by God, and now here I stand ready to give them back to him according to your advice.'

Francis was obviously somewhat taken aback by this. Bernard was a rich man with many responsibilities. Did he really mean to dispossess himself of all that he had, and to come and share in the hardships and privations which Francis had undertaken? Francis did not feel qualified to give an answer until they had sought guidance from the Scriptures; so, as soon as it was light, the two men set out for the church of S. Nicholas, which was probably the church of the parish in which Bernard lived.

They did not go alone, for at this point a third figure appears on the scene, a man called Peter who accompanied them to the church where, after some moments of prayer, Francis reverently opened the Gospel-book. The first words which met him were: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt find treasure in heaven.' The second opening revealed the words: 'Take nothing with you on your journey'; and the third: 'He that will come after me let him deny himself.' After this there could not be much doubt as to what was the will of God, and Francis declared joyfully: 'This, my brothers, is our life and rule and that of all those who shall wish to join our society.' The date was probably 16 April 1209. The Order had begun.

Then Bernard who was very rich, after selling all he had and acquiring a large sum of money, went and distributed it all to the city's poor. Peter likewise followed the divine counsel according to his means.

After getting rid of everything, they both received the habit which Francis had adopted after he put aside the habit of a hermit; and, from that hour, they lived with him according to the form of the holy Gospel as the Lord had shown them.

*Bernard's conversion to God stood out as a model for those being converted in the way he sold his possessions and distributed them to the poor. The holy man Francis rejoiced with very great joy over the arrival and conversion of such a man, because the Lord seemed to be caring for him, giving him a needed companion and a faithful friend. (1Cel 24)*

### **BERNARD LOOKS AFTER A SICK MAN**

#### *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions- c1328-1337*

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 them whom was Brother Bernard. As they were going along together in a certain town they came upon a sick man. Having compassion on him, Saint Francis said to Brother Bernard: "Son, I want you to remain here and serve this sick man." Brother Bernard immediately knelt down and bowed his head, reverently accepting the obedience of the holy father. Then leaving Brother Bernard with the sick man, Saint Francis went on to Santiago with the other companions. While they were staying and praying in Santiago, it was revealed to him by the Lord in that Church that he would take places throughout the world, because his Order was to expand into a great multitude. From that time on because of the divine command he began to take places all round.

As Saint Francis was returning by the same road as before, he found Brother Bernard and the sick man, who was now perfectly healthy. Therefore, Saint Francis allowed Brother Bernard to go to Santiago during the following year. In the mean time Saint Francis returned to the Valley of Spoleto.

## **SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA c1209/10**

### *The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano- c1229*

At that same time, another good man entered their religion, and they increased their number to eight. Then the blessed Francis called them all to himself and told them many things about the kingdom of God, contempt of the world, denial of their own will, and subjection of the body. He separated them into four groups of two each.....

Accepting the command of holy obedience with much joy and gladness, they humbly prostrated themselves on the ground before Saint Francis. Embracing them, he spoke sweetly and devotedly to each one: "Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will sustain you." He used to say this phrase whenever he transferred brothers by obedience.

The Brother Bernard with Brother Giles hastened on the way to Santiago; Saint Francis with one companion chose another part of the world. The other four, two by two, went to other regions.....

## **AN ANGEL CROSSES A RIVER WITH BROTHER BERNARD**

### *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions- c1328-1337*

On the same day and at the same hour when that angel left that Brother mentioned previously, that angel appeared in the same form to Brother Bernard who was returning from Santiago and was standing by the side of a large river that he could not cross. The angel greeted Brother Bernard in his native dialect: "The Lord give you peace, good brother." Brother Bernard was surprised at his beauty, at the way he knew his tongue, at his greeting of peace, and his smiling face; so he asked him: "Where do you come from, good young man?" The young man replied: "I come from such and such a place, where Saint Francis is staying. I went to speak with him, but I could not because he was in the woods contemplating the things of God. With him in that place were Brother Masseo, Brother Giles, and Brother Elias. Brother Masseo taught me how to knock at your door. But Brother Elias would not bother to listen to me about a question I asked him; later he was sorry and wished to see me and hear me but could not." After saying this, the angel said to Brother Bernard: "Dear Brother, why are you waiting to cross the river?" He answered: "Because I'm afraid of that dangerous depth of the water I see." Then the angel said: "Let's cross together; don't be afraid!" Taking hold of Brother Bernard's hand, in the blink of an eye the angel put him down safely on the other side of the river. Realising that this was an angel of the Lord, Brother Bernard said with great devotion, reverence and joy: "O blessed angel of God, will you tell me your name?" He replied: "Why are you asking my name which is 'wonderful'?" Having said this, he disappeared and left Brother Bernard so greatly consoled that he walked all the rest of the way home in joy.

Brother Bernard noted the day and the hour when the angel appeared to him. Then after he reached the place where Saint Francis was staying with his companions, he told them everything in detail. From his they realised clearly that the same angel had appeared to them at the same hour on the same day.

## **ROME c1210**

As he realised that the Saviours grace was increasing his brothers in number and merit, blessed Francis told them: "Brothers, I see that the Lord intends to make of us a large congregation. Therefore, let us go to our mother, the Roman Church, and inform the Supreme Pontiff about what the Lord is doing through us so we may continue doing what we have begun by his will and command." Since what Francis said pleased the rest of the brothers, he took the twelve with him, and they went to Rome."

While they were on the way, he told them: "Let us make one of us the leader and consider him the vicar of Jesus Christ for us. Wherever he wants to go, we will go; when he wants to rest, we will rest." They chose Brother Bernard, who was the first to be received by the blessed Francis, and they did as he said.....

### **BERNARD GOES TO BOLOGNA c1211**

#### *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions- c1328-1337*

From the Cross and to the Cross, God had called both our blessed Father Francis and his companions. Therefore he and his blessed first companions were rightly seen as men of the Crucified, which they really were. Carry the cross in habit and in all their deeds, preferring the insults of Christ to the empty and deceitful compliments of the world, they were happy when insulted and, for this reason, were saddened when honoured. They went through the world as pilgrims and strangers carrying with them nothing but Christ. As a result, because they were living branches of the true vine, wherever they went, they produced the greatest fruit of souls.

Once it happened at the beginning of the Order that Saint Francis sent Brother Bernard to Bologna to produce fruit for God there according to the grace given to him by the Lord. So, equipping himself with the cross of Christ, and with the virtue of obedience as his companion, Brother Bernard went to Bologna.

When children saw him clothed in an odd, disreputable habit, they began to shower him with insults. But Brother Bernard, a real saint, endured these not just patiently, but quite happily. As a true disciple of Christ who became the scorn of men, despised by the people, he deliberately positioned himself in the city where people could more easily make fun of him. While he was sitting there, many gathered around him, both children and adults. Some pulled his capuche back and forth, some threw dirt at him, and others threw stones; some climbed on him, rocking him violently back and forth. Through all these insults, Brother Bernard remained patient and cheerful and at no time did he ever resist or complain. And there is something even greater, he deliberately kept returning to that piazza over several days to be insulted in the same way. No matter how many insults he suffered from these people, his smiling face always showed his spirit unperturbed. And because it is patience that takes a work and approves it as perfect, a wise judge waited and carefully watched a consistent virtue thoroughly undisturbed over so many days. He said to himself: "It's impossible for that not to be a holy man!" Approaching Brother Bernard, he asked: "Who are you? Why did you come here?" Brother Bernard put his hand into his breast pocket and brought out the evangelical Rule of Saint Francis which he carried in his heart and showed by his deeds. When the judge had read the very high standard of this Rule, being an intelligent man, he was completely dumbstruck. Then turning to his companions, he said with the greatest admiration: "This state of life is higher than any I've ever heard of, and, for that reason, this man and his companions are some of the holiest men in this world. So whoever heaps insults on them commits a grave sin. He should be singled out for the highest honours, not insults since he is truly a friend of the Most High." Then he said to Brother Bernard: "Dear Brother, if someone were to offer you a place that suits you, where you could better serve God and you were willing to accept it, I would most willingly give it to you for the salvation of my soul." Brother Bernard responded: "My very dear sir, I believe that our Lord Jesus Christ has inspired you to do this."

Then the judge took Brother Bernard to his home and there received him with great love and joy. He later showed him the place he had promised and at his own expense he fully and devoutly took care of everything. This judge became the defender and special father of Brother Bernard and his companions. Because of his holy life among them Brother Bernard began to be honoured so much by the people that whoever was able to touch, hear, or see him considered himself blessed.

But Brother Bernard, like the truly humble disciple of Christ that he was, feared that the honour shown him might at the same time impede his tranquillity and salvation. So he left and returned to Saint Francis. "A place to live has been accepted in Bologna. Therefore, Father, send brothers who will live there. I am not gaining anything there anymore. In fact, due to the great honour shown to me there, I fear that I will lose more than I gain." Saint Francis listened one after another to all the things which had been done through Brother Bernard, and rejoicing and exulting in spirit he began to praise the Most High who for the salvation of the people was thus spreading out these poor little disciples of the Cross. From that time on he selected some of his companions and sent them into Lombardy, and with the devotion of the faithful increasing, he accepted very many places all around for living quarters.

### **CLARE AND SANT'ANGELO DI PANZO c1212**

Francis found a new refuge for Clare at the monastery of Sant'Angelo di Panzo, located on the slope of Mount Subasio. He himself came one morning some days later to accompany his pilgrim sister there. With him were two of his first companions, Bernard and Filippo.

### **BEGGING FOR ALMS**

#### **2 Celano 85**

Begging for alms itself must not be done to accumulate supplies or put something aside. One day Brother Bernard went begging for alms but brought back nothing. Worried, he cast himself at Francis' feet and confessed that he had eaten what he had received because he was dying of hunger. Francis embraced him and exclaimed, "Oh, my dearest son, you are more blessed than I. You are a perfect observer of the Gospel, because you have accumulated nothing and nothing have you put aside for tomorrow, and all your thoughts you have been directing to God.

### **CITY OF FLORENCE c1217**

#### **The Anonymous of Perugia- c1241**

About this time two brothers (*according to the Vita S. Bernardi 3, these brothers were Bernard & Giles*) were in the city of Florence, going throughout the city in search of a place to stay, but were unable to find any. When they found a house with a portico containing a bread-oven, they said to each other: "We can stay here." They therefore asked the lady of the house if she would please welcome them into her home. When she instantly refused, they begged her at least to let them spend that night near the oven.

She let them do this. However, when her husband came home, and saw the brothers on the porch near the oven, he said to her: "Why did you offer lodging to these two rogues?" She answered: "I didn't want to offer them hospitality in the house, but gave them permission to stay on the porch where they couldn't steal anything from us except the firewood." On account of this distrust, they did not want to give the brothers anything to cover themselves, although the weather was severely cold.

During the night the brothers got up for matins and went to the nearest church.

When morning came, the lady went to church to hear Mass and saw them remaining devoutly and humbly in prayer. She said to herself: "If these men were evildoers, as my husband claimed, they would not be praying so reverently."

While she was thinking these things, a man named Guido was going around the church distributing alms to the poor. When he approached the brothers, he attempted to give each one a coin, as he had done to the others, but they refused to take it. He told them: "Why don't you accept coins like the other poor people, for I see that you are just as poor and needy?" One of them, Bernard, answered him: "While it is true that we are poor, our poverty is not as

burdensome for us at it is for the other poor, for we have become poor by the grace of God and in fulfilment of His counsel.”

Astonished, the man asked them if they had ever possessed anything in the world. They told him that they in fact had, but for the love of God had given their belongings to the poor.

When that women considered that the brothers had refused the coins, she approached them and said: “Christians, if you want to come back to my hospitality, I will gladly receive you into my home.” The brothers answered her with humility: “May the Lord reward you.” When that man realised that the brothers were unable to find lodging, he took them to his own house and told them: “Look, this is the lodging that the Lord has prepared for you. Stay here as long as you want.” The brothers thanked God for showing them His mercy and for hearing the cries of the poor. They stayed with him several days. Because of their words and good example, he was afterwards very generous to the poor.

### **GIFT OF CONTEMPLATION**

#### *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions- c1328-1337*

How much grace the Most High Father showed toward the evangelical poor who voluntarily left all things for Christ, is apparent in that same Brother Bernard whose mind, after he took on the habit of the holy Father, was very frequently rapt into God.

It happened one time that he was present to hear Mass in a church, and his whole mind was suspended in things divine. He was so absorbed in God that, when the Body of Christ was being elevated he noticed nothing, nor did he kneel when the others knelt, nor did he pull back his capuche. His eyes remained unblinking and he stayed in this condition completely senseless from morning until after nones. Returning to himself after nones, he came out calling in a surprised voice: “Oh Brothers! Oh Brothers! Oh Brothers! No one in this country so great and so noble that if he were promised a palace full of gold, it wouldn’t be easy for him to carry a sack filled with the most vile manure in order to merit so noble a treasure.”

Brother Bernard was lifted up in mind to this heavenly treasure reserved for the lovers of God. For fifteen years he often went about with his mind and face turned toward heaven. Because of the elevation of his intellect to the supercelestial lights and the great absorption of his afflictions to divine charisms, never during these fifteen years did he satisfy his bodily hunger at table. He ate a little of everything that was placed before him, and he said that we cannot say we are abstaining from food that we do not even taste, because true abstinence consists in struggling against the things that taste good. He had also reached such clarity of understanding that even great clerics came to him, and he untangled obscure questions in any passage of the Bible he was asked to explain. Because his mind was entirely released from earthly things, he flew like a swallow to the heights, and sometimes for twenty days, sometimes for thirty, he would fly alone among mountain peaks, contemplating only heavenly things. For this reason holy Brother Giles used to say that God did not give everyone this gift, which had been given to Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, that like a swallow he could feed himself while flying. Because of this outstanding gift given to him by the Lord, Saint Francis often and gladly conversed with him for whole days and nights. Sometimes both together were found rapt into the Lord for the whole night in the woods where they met to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever.

#### *The Chronicle of the 24 Generals-44 adds:*

“Bernard gained such clarity of intellect from the light of contemplation that important clerics came hurrying to him with difficult questions in theology. Once when he had not experienced divine consolation for eight days, he was extremely distressed and, remaining secluded, he fervently prayed to God for relief. Suddenly in the air there appeared to him a hand holding a violin. Another made one downward draw of the bow and the music of that violin filled him

with such consolation that he believed that he would have expired if the hand had made an upward thrust of the bow.”

## SPAIN

### *The Treatise on the Miracles of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano, c1250-1252*

Saint Francis became gravely ill while returning from Spain after failing to reach Morocco as he had wished. Suffering from want and weariness, he was expelled from his lodging by a rude host and lost his speech for three days. When he had recovered his strength a bit, while walking along the road he said to Brother Bernard that he would have eaten a bird if he had one. Just then a horseman came riding across the field carrying an exquisite bird. He said to blessed Francis, “Here, servant of God, take gladly what divine mercy sends you.” He accepted this gift and, seeing how Christ cared for him, he blessed Him for everything.

## THE HUMILITY & OBEDIENCE OF FRANCIS AND BERNARD

### *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions- c1328-1337*

Blessed Francis, that most devout servant of the Crucified Christ, became almost entirely blind. Because of the rigor of his penance and continuous weeping, he could see very little.

Once he left the place where he was and went to the place where Brother Bernard was staying, so that they could talk to each other about divine things. Bernard was standing in the woods totally withdrawn and joined to the Lord in divine contemplation. The Saint Francis went into the woods and called to Brother Bernard: “Come and talk to this blind man.” Since Brother Bernard was a man of great contemplation and his spirit at that time was clinging to God, he did not answer Saint Francis nor did he go to him. Brother Bernard had a unique gift of speaking about God, as Saint Francis had already experienced many times, and that is why he wanted to speak with him. Therefore, after a short interval, he called him a second and third time, repeating the same words: “Come and talk to this blind man.” Brother Bernard paid no attention either time; he neither came nor spoke to Saint Francis. The Saint Francis left, feeling a little abandoned, surprised, and almost complaining to himself because even though being called three times Brother Bernard had refused to move.

Saint Francis was thinking about this as he was leaving and, as he walked along the road, he said to his companion: “Wait for me a moment!” Then, while giving himself to prayer in a solitary place, an answer suddenly came to him from God: “You poor little man, why are you disturbed? Should a man leave God for some creature? When you called Brother Bernard, he was joined to me, and therefore could not come to you nor answer. You should not be surprised if he could not speak to you, for he was so far beyond himself that he did not hear a word you said.” As soon as he heard this, Saint Francis hurried back to accuse himself humbly before Brother Bernard for his earlier thoughts. But Brother Bernard, a truly holy man, immediately came toward Saint Francis and threw himself at his feet. The humility of Saint Francis and the love and reverence of Brother Bernard met each other. After recounting the divine reproof he had received, Saint Francis ordered Brother Bernard under obedience to do whatever he would order. However, Brother Bernard feared that Saint Francis would impose something excessive upon himself as he usually did. Therefore, wishing to submit with a pious obedience, he said: “Father, I am prepared to carry out your obedience as long as you also promise me obedience in what I will say.” Saint Francis said: “I agree.” Brother Bernard then said: “Tell me what you wish me to do, Father.” Then Saint Francis said: “I order you under holy obedience to punish me for my boldness and audacity of heart. I will lie on the ground. You will then press the heel of one of your feet on my throat and the other on my mouth. With you feet thus placed on my throat and mouth, you will walk over me three times from one side to the other. And while you are walking over me, you will insult me, saying: ‘Lie down, you peasant sone of Pietro di Bernardone.’ You



will inflict me with many other greater insults, such as: ‘Where did you get such pride, you worthless creature?’”

Brother Bernard heard this, but found it hard to do. Nevertheless, because of obedience, he carried it out as courteously as he could. When he was finished, Saint Francis said to him: “Now, Brother Bernard, command me to do what you wish because I promised obedience to you.” Brother Bernard said; “I command you under holy obedience that, whenever we are together, you correct me and rebuke me sharply for my failings.” When Francis heard this, he was very surprised, because Brother Bernard was so holy that Saint Francis held him in great reverence. From that time on Saint Francis avoided staying with him for any length of time so that he might not happen to disturb such a holy and godly soul by some correction because of that obedience. But when he wanted to see Brother Bernard or hear him speak about God, he would quickly leave him after a short time. This was wonderful to see: how in the venerable father and in the first born son, Brother Bernard, the obedience and the love, the patience and the humility of both met each other and vied with each other in real contest.

### **BROTHER ELIAS**

What gave rise to most criticism of Elias was his private life. When he was elected Minister General he had told the friars that his health was not good and that he would not be able to live a life of poverty and hardship such as John Parenti had done. His supporters were so anxious to secure his election that they had declared that he might have a horse to ride if he so wished and might eat gold if it would do him any good. But they can hardly have been prepared for the self indulgence which he showed. Salimbene gives us a vivid picture of the worldly Minister General living *splendide, delitiose et pompaticae*. He went about very little except to the houses of the great. In his own quarters he was surrounded by valets in livery and kept his own cook. He went everywhere on horseback with a small retinue of chosen companions, all mounted on sleek horses.

This is borne out by the *Chronicle of the XXIV Generals* which tells us how Bernard once chaffed Elias about the size and condition of his horse, and how on another occasion, knowing that Elias was dining in his own room, Bernard took his plate and knife with him and went and sat down by Elias’ side saying ‘I think I would like some of this good food.’

### **PROPHECY**

#### **A Mirror of Perfection**

Considering the outstanding perfection of Brother Bernard, blessed Francis prophesied about him in the presence of some of the brothers: “I tell you, some of the greatest and most cunning devils have been sent to test Brother Bernard. They will send him many trials and temptations. The merciful Lord, however, will deliver him toward the end of his life from all troubles and temptations, internal and external. And He will place his spirit and body in such peace, quiet, and consolation that all the brothers who see or hear of this will be greatly astonished, and consider it a great miracle. In peace, quiet, and consolation of both body and soul he will pass from this world to the Lord.”

### **THE BLESSING OF BERNARD**

#### **A Mirror of Perfection**

The day Lady Jacoba prepared that confection for Blessed Francis, the father remembered Bernard. “Brother Bernard likes this confection,” he said to his companions. Calling one of his companions, he told him “Go, tell Brother Bernard to come to me immediately.” The brother went at once and brought him to blessed Francis. Sitting next to the bed where blessed Francis

was lying, Brother Bernard said: “Father! I beg you, bless me and show me your love. I believe that, if you show me your love with fatherly affection, God Himself and the other brothers of the religion will love me more.”

Blessed Francis was not able to see him, since for many days he had lost his sight. Extending his right hand, he placed it on the head of Brother Giles, the third of the first brothers, who at that moment was sitting next to Brother Bernard. Feeling the head of Brother Giles, like a person going blind, he immediately recognized him by the Holy Spirit, and said, “This is not the head of my Brother Bernard.”

Brother Bernard immediately drew himself closer to him. Blessed Francis, placing his hand on his head, blessed him. “Write what I tell you,” he then said to one of his companions. “Brother Bernard was the first brother the Lord gave me. He began first and most perfectly fulfilled the perfection of the holy Gospel, distributing all his goods to the poor. Because of this and his many other prerogatives, I am bound to love him more than any other brother in the whole religion. As much as I am able, it is my will and command that whoever becomes general minister should love and honour him as he would me. Let the other provincial ministers and the brothers of the whole religion hold him in my place. Because of this, Brother Bernard was greatly consoled as were the other brothers who saw this.

### **BROTHER PELEGRINO**

*The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions, c1328-1337*

Brother Bernard, the first born of his most holy Father Francis, had this one remarkable thing to say about this Brother Pelegrino: that Brother Pelegrino was one of the most perfect brothers of this world.

### **LATER LIFE**

*Vita Fratis Bernardi*

Bernard of Quintavalle, the first disciple, had been much with Saint Francis in his life, had made many journeys with him, and at the end had received his special blessing. But when Elias came into power Bernard retired to a lonely part of the country at Monte Sefro, where he built himself a little hut and lived the life of a solitary. This was no hardship to him, for he had always loved contemplation and had often spent whole nights with Saint Francis in silent prayer. After the deposition of Elias, Bernard was able to mix again with the friars; and he lived for a time at Siena, where Salimbene found him in the winter of 1241-42, teaching the younger friars ‘many wonderful things about Saint Francis’.

### **DEATH c1242**

*A Mirror of Perfection 17*

In his last illness Brother Bernard was in such great peace and quiet of spirit that he did not want to lie down. And if he lay down, he lay in a sitting position so that not even the lightest mist of humours would reach his head, inducing fantasies or dreams, rather than thoughts of God. And if this happened, he would immediately get up and strike himself, saying “What was that? Why was I thinking that way?” For relief, he gladly used to smell rose water, but as he drew closer to death, he refused to do even this, for the sake of constant meditation on God. He would say to anyone offering it: “Don’t distract me.”

In order to die more freely, peacefully, and quietly, he had by now let go of the care of his body, putting himself in the hands of one of the brothers who was a doctor and who was taking care of him. “I do not wish to be concerned with eating or drinking,” he would say, “but I entrust myself to you. If you give me something, I’ll take it. If you don’t, then I won’t.”

He requested that holy anointing be given him, and when the brothers came prepared and began to do the anointing, suddenly the vessel containing the holy oil broke apart. The Brother Peregrino from the Marches, a spiritual and holy man who was then his companion, said laughing under his breath: "Look, the alabaster jar of oil is now broken, now abundant graces will descent and be sprinkled about." And during the anointing Brother Bernard could not restrain himself, but cried abundant tears, he who was previously so withdrawn. Then he had the brothers gathered and threw himself to the ground on his knees and confessed his guilt for all his offences, saying: "I have not been a lesser brother except in temptations; in these the Lord supported me."

And he begged the brothers to pray devoutly for him; "But especially this prayer: that when you have me in mind, you think of yourselves." On Friday a basket of cherries was brought, and he said to the brothers who were with him and to the brother doctor: "Give me some cherries, and permit me to eat them, for I shall eat no more. I also ask you to eat with me and do the Passover with me." While he ate he could not restrain his tears. The brothers, therefore, began to say, "This saint was truly not recognized!" The brothers wept and joyfully regarded him as one of the Lord's saints.

When he began to grow weaker, he wanted to have a priest brother with him at all times, until the hour of his death. Whenever any thought entered his mind for which his conscience reproached him, he immediately confessed it and then said his penance.

After his death, his flesh became white and soft and he seemed to be smiling, so that he appeared more handsome after death than before. Whoever gazed on him experienced more delight in seeing him this way than when he was alive, because he looked like a saint who was smiling.

## **BURIAL**

*A Book of the Praises of Saint Francis by Bernard of Besse - Chapter 1:15-20, c1277-1283*

The bones of Brother Bernard, Rufino, Leo and Angelo were venerably buried in the Church of Saint Francis in Assisi.

## **THE LEGEND OF THE THREE COMPANIONS**

**c1241-1247**

### *Rubric*

These are certain writings of three companions of blessed Francis about his life and manner of living while he was in the attire of the world, about his marvellous and perfect conversion, and about the perfection of the origin and foundation of the Order in him and in the first brothers.

### *Letter*

To the Reverend Father in Christ, Brother Crescentius, by the grace of God General Minister, Brother Leo, Brother Rufino, and Brother Angelo, one-time companions, although unworthy, of the blessed father Francis, express their dutiful and devout reverence in the Lord.

By command of the last general chapter, and of yourself, the brothers are bound to forward to Your Paternity such signs and wonders of our blessed father Francis which they know or can ascertain. We who, though unworthy, lived for a long time in his company, thought it opportune to recount truthfully to Your Holiness a few of his many deeds. We ourselves have seen or heard about them from other holy brothers, in particular from Brother Philip, the Visitor of the Poor Ladies, Brother Illuminato of Arce, Brother Maseo of Marignano, and a companion of the venerable father, Brother Giles, Brother John, who gathered these things from that holy Brother Giles, and from Brother Bernard of blessed memory (deceased), the first companion of blessed Francis.....

## SAYINGS OF THE COMPANIONS OF ST FRANCIS

### *An Old Legend (Legenda Vetus) c1330's*

St Francis predicted the following before the Lord of Ostia and many brothers, and often preached this to the people, as the companions who heard it, Brother Bernard, Brother Leo, and Brother Angelo, have testified. His brothers, by the working of evil spirits, would turn aside from the way the holy simplicity and highest poverty. They would receive money, legacies, and bequests. Abandoning poor little solitary places, they would be build sumptuous places in towns and cities, which would not demonstrate poverty, but the luxury of the world of lords and princes. And, with great craftiness and human prudence, they would seek and receive from the Church and the Supreme Pontiffs privileges that would not only mitigate but even destroy the purity of their promised rule and life, revealed to them by Christ.....

### *The Words of Saint Francis c1257*

Blessed Francis used to say that a good Lesser Brother is one who would possess the life and qualities of the following holy brothers: namely, the faith and love of poverty which Brother Bernard most perfectly had; the simplicity and purity of Brother Leo who was truly a man of most holy purity; the courtly bearing of Brother Angelo who was the first soldier to enter the Order and was endowed with every courtesy and kindness; the friendly manner and common sense of Brother Masseo.....

## THE ORIGINAL HOME OF BERNARD OF QUINTAVALLE

