

BROTHER LEO

of Assisi

(died 1278)

A Companion of St Francis

Anthony Williams, of
September 2020

Although not one of the original twelve companions of St Francis, Leo was one of the first to join him after the approbation of the first Rule of the Friars Minor (1209-1210) and perhaps was already a priest. In the course of time he became the confessor and secretary of the saint, and from about 1220 up to the time of Francis's death Leo was his constant companion. He was with the "Poverello" when the latter retired to Fonte Colombo near Rieti in 1223 to re-write the rule of the order and he also accompanied him on his subsequent journey to Rome to seek its approval. The year following, Leo was with the saint on Mount La Verna when Francis received the stigmata. Francis called "Frate Pecorello di Dio" because of Leo's simplicity and tenderness. Leo nursed his master during his last illness.

Leo had entered deeply into the bitter disappointments experienced by the saint during the last few years of his life, and soon after Francis's death he came into conflict with those whom he considered traitors to the Poverello and his ideal of poverty. After Francis's death Leo took a leading part in the opposition to Elias of Cortona. Having protested against the collection of money for the erection of the Basilica of San Francesco, it was Leo who broke in pieces the marble box which Elias had set up for offertories for the completion of the basilica at Assisi. For this Elias had him scourged, and this outrage on St Francis's dearest disciple consolidated the opposition to Elias. Leo was the leader in the early stages of the struggle in the order for the maintenance of St Francis's ideas on strict poverty.

He thereupon retired to some hermitage of the order. Leo assisted at Saint Clara's deathbed, 1253; after suffering many persecutions from the dominant party in the order he died at the Porziuncula in extreme old age, and his remains are buried in the Basilica of St. Francis. (source: Wikipedia)

THE PRAISES OF GOD AND THE BLESSING **The Parchment Given to Brother Leo on LaVerna** **(c1224)**

Leo of Assisi, who was with Francis on LaVerna in the Fall of 1224, wrote in red ink on one side of this piece of parchment: "Two years before his death, the blessed Francis spent forty days on Mount LaVerna from the Feast of the Assumption of the holy Virgin Mary until the September Feast of Saint Michael the Archangel. And the Lord's hand was upon him. After the vision and message of the Seraph and the impression of Christ's stigmata upon his body, he composed these praises written on the other side of this page and wrote them in his own hand, thanking God for the kindness bestowed on him."

On the other side of the same parchment Brother Leo wrote: "The blessed Francis wrote this blessing for me with his own hand." Then: "In a similar way he made with his own hand this sign TAU together with a skull."

The original parchment is now preserved in the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi. In preparing his editions of these texts, Kajetan Esser relied on the work of Duane Lapsanki who had examined the original parchment with the help of infra-red technology and was able to read passages now illegible to the naked eye.

*You are holy Lord God who does wonderful things.
You are strong. You are great. You are the most high
You are the almighty king. You holy Father.
King of heaven and earth.*

*You are three and one, the Lord God of gods;
You are the good, all good, the highest good,*



*Lord God living and true.
You are love, charity; You are wisdom, You are humility,
You are patience, You are beauty, You are meekness,
You are security, You are rest,
You are gladness and joy, You are our hope, You are justice,
You are moderation, You are all our riches to sufficiency.*

*You are beauty, You are meekness,
You are the protector, You are our custodian and defender,
You are strength, You are refreshment. You are our hope,
You are our faith, You are our charity,
You are all our sweetness, You are our eternal life:
Great and wonderful Lord, Almighty God, Merciful Saviour.*

A LETTER TO BROTHER LEO **(1224-1226)**

This short letter was written on a small piece of parchment. Worn spots suggest that Brother Leo must have kept it with him as a precious relic. Although scholars do not agree, a comparison of Francis's handwriting in this parchment with that given to Leo on LaVerna indicates that he may have been suffering from the stigmata at the time of offering him this piece of advice.

Edition of Kajetan Esser

Brother Leo, health and peace from Brother Francis!

I am speaking, my son, in this way – as a mother would – because I am putting everything we said on the road in this brief message and advice. If, afterwards, you need to come to me for counsel, I advise you thus: In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footprint and poverty, do it with the blessing of the Lord God and my obedience. And if you need and want to come to me for the sake of your soul or for some consolation, Leo, come.

THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE DESIRE OF A SOUL

The Second Book

By Thomas of Celano

(c1246-47)

Crescentius ordered Thomas of Celano to undertake the task of re-presenting the remembrance sent to him. The result of Thomas's endeavour was a new, long and complicated text, completed shortly before the General Chapter of Lyons in July of 1247.

BROTHER LEO WHO WAS TEMPTED AND WANTED TO HAVE SOMETHING WRITTEN BY THE HAND OF THE SAINT

While the saint was secluded in a cell on Mount LaVerna, one of his companions (Brother Leo) was yearning with great desire to have something encouraging from the words of our Lord, commented on briefly by Saint Francis and written with his own hand. He believed that by this means he would be set free from, or at least could bear more easily, a serious temptation which oppressed him, not in the flesh but in the spirit. Though growing weary with this desire, he feared to express it to the most holy father. But what man did not tell him, the Spirit revealed. One day Saint Francis called this brother and said: "Bring me paper and ink, because I want to write down the words of the Lord and his praises upon which I have meditated in my heart." What he had asked for was quickly written brought to him. He then wrote down with his own hand the *Praises of God* and the words he wanted and, at the end, a blessing for that brother,

saying: "Take this paper for yourself and keep it carefully to your dying day," The whole temptation disappeared immediately. The letter was preserved; and later it worked wonders.

THE ACTS OF THE PROCESS OF CANONIZATION (CLARE OF ASSISI) **(1253)**

Within two months of the death of Saint Clare, Pope Innocent IV issued a papa bull, *Gloriosus Deus*, October 18, 1253, in which he entrusted Bishop Bartholomew of Spoleto with the responsibility of promoting the Cause of her canonization. The Bishop of Spoleto, who had previous experience in these matters, took as his associates the archdeacon, Leonardo of Spoleto, Jacobo, the archpriest of Trevi, Brothers Leo and Angelo of the Lesser Brothers who were close friends of Saint Francis, Brother Mark, chaplain of the monastery, and a notary.

The first witness present in the cloister of San Damiano on the twenty-fourth day of the month of November was Lady Pacifica, daughter of Guelfuccio of Assisi; the second, Lady Benvenuta, from Peroscia; the third, Lady Filippa, daughter of Sir Leonardo di Ghislerio; the fourth..... the ninth, Lady Beatrice, daughter of Sir Favarone of Assisi, the sister of holy Clare.... All are nuns of the monastery of San Damiano and took an oath to tell the truth about the life, conversion, manner of living, and miracles of Saint Clare in the presence of these witnesses: Leonardo, archdeacon of Spoleto; Jacobo, archpriest of Trevi; Brothers Leo, Angelo, and Marco of the Lesser Brothers; and the notary, Ser Martino, before the venerable father, Lord Bartholomew, Bishop of Spoleto.

THE VERSIFIED LEGEND OF THE VIRGIN CLARE **c1254-55**

XXXII. HER FINAL PASSING AND WHAT WAS SEEN AND DONE DURING IT

Who could narrate these things without crying? Or
who could suppress tears from welling up, when a sad event
causes sorrow and tears and nothing else to flow?
Two companions of Francis are there, one of whom,
Angelo, soothes the sorrow of the others by his own tears.

The other, Leo, places tear-filled kisses on Clare's sad bed
as he wept at her passing. The daughters grieve
over their mother, and their mother's passing,
while they see themselves destitute of a sweet consolation.

LEGEND OF SAINT CLARE **1255**

HER FINAL PASSING AND WHAT WAS SEEN AND DONE DURING IT [CHAPTER XXIX]

But since the Lord was very near and, as it were, already standing at the door, she wished the priests and her spiritual brothers to stand by and read the Passion of the Lord and holy words....

Finally she turned to her weeping daughters to whom she recalled in a praising way the divine blessings while entrusting them with the poverty of the Lord. She blessed her devoted brothers and sisters and called down the fullest graces of blessings upon the Ladies of the poor monasteries, those in the present and those in the future. Who could narrate the rest without crying?

Those two blessed companions of Francis were standing there: Angelo was one of them who, while mourning himself, consoled those who were mourning; the other was Leo who kissed the

bed of the dying woman. The daughters, distraught at the departure of their kind mother, followed her departure with their tears, knowing they would not see her anymore.

DOMINICAN HAGIOGRAPHY & SERMONS

JACOPO DE VORAGINE

c1255-67

Once when the servant of God, worn out from a journey, was riding an ass, his companion, Brother Leonard of Assisi, who was also tired, began to think and say within himself: "This man's parents and mine were not of equal birth." At that moment the man of God dismounted from the ass and said to the brother: "It is not right for me to ride and you go on foot, because you are of nobler stock than I." The brother, astounded at this, threw himself at his Father's feet and begged his pardon.

MISCELLANEOUS FRANCISCAN SOURCES

INSCRIPTION OF BROTHER LEO

c1257-60

This inscription by Brother Leo is at the beginning of the so-called Breviary of St Francis, which is still preserved today in the protomonastery of St. Clare in Assisi. It appears to have been written at the time he donated the breviary to the community, with whom he had a close connection.

Blessed Francis acquired this breviary for his companions Brother Angelo and Brother Leo, and when he was well he wished always to say the Office, as is stated by the Rule. At the time when he was sick and not able to recite it, he wished to listen to it. And he continued to do this for as long as he lived. He also had the Book of the Gospels copied, and whenever he would be unable to hear Mass due to infirmity or any other manifest impediment, he had that Gospel read to him, which on that day was read at Mass in Church. And he continued to do this until his death. For he used to say: "When I do not hear Mass, I adore the Body of Christ in prayer with the eyes of my mind, just as I adore It when I see it during Mass." After blessed Francis read the Gospel or listened to it, he always kissed the Gospel out of the greatest reverence for the Lord. For this reason Brother Angelo and Brother Leo, as much as they can, humbly beg Lady Benedetta, the abbess of the Poor Ladies of the Monastery of Saint Clare, and all the abbesses of the same monastery who are to come after her, that in memory of and out of devotion to our holy Father they always preserve in the Monastery of Saint Clare this book out of which he so many times read.

A BOOK OF THE PRAISES OF SAINT FRANCIS

by Bernard of Besse

(1277-1283)

THE CONVERSION OF ST. FRANCIS, AND HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

Holy brothers and fathers, renowned for great virtue, flourished even among the first brothers: such as, Brother Soldanerio, Brother Roger, Brother Rufino, and Brother John de Laudibus, who merited to touch the mortal wounds of the stigmata impressed on Francis's flesh while he was living. Brother Angelo, who was close to Saint Francis, Brother Leo, the saint's confessor....

HUMILITY

As he thought humbly of himself, he was, in his own eyes, a great sinner, while actually he was in every way a mirror of holiness, and also a virgin in the flesh, as he revealed to that very holy man, Brother Leo, his confessor, and then disclosed to the General Minister.

DOCUMENTS CONCERNING THE PORTIUNCULA INDULGENCE

(c1277-1300)

The Lord James Coppoli of Perugia told me, Brother Angelo, Minister, in the presence of Brother Deodato, Custos of Perugia, and Brother Angelo, my companion, that once in the hearing of his wife and [the priest] Little James [Jacobutio] and another lady, he asked Brother Leo, the companion of Saint Francis, whether the indulgence, which is attached to the Portiuncula, was true or not. He answered in the affirmative, and then related what the Blessed Francis had himself told him: namely, that he had petitioned the Pope to attach an indulgence to the Church of the Portiuncula on the anniversary of its consecration. And the Pope asked for how long he wanted this remission to be. For one year? For three years? At length they had gotten as far as seven years, but still Saint Francis was not satisfied. Then the Pope said to him. "Well, for how long then?" And Francis replied: "Holy Father, if it please your Holiness, my wish is that, because of the great benefits which God has distributed there and will yet distribute, all those who come there truly contrite and having confessed their sins may receive the remission of all their sins, so that no further [temporal] punishment is attached to them." The Pope replied: "I grant it; let it be so."

When the Cardinals became aware of this, they told the Pope that he should revoke it, because it would be to the prejudice of the Holy Land indulgence. But the Pope said: "I certainly shall not revoke it now that I promised it." They replied: "Put as much a limit on it as you can." And then the Pope said that it was valid for only the length of one natural day each year.

When blessed Francis left the Pope after the concession of the indulgence (*in c1215 Francis supposedly received the Portiuncula indulgence from Honorius III*), he heard a voice saying to him: "Francis, know that, just as this indulgence has been given on earth, so it also has been ratified in heaven." The Saint Francis said to Brother Leo: "Keep this secret to yourself and do not divulge it until the time of your death is near, because this is not yet the time for it. This indulgence will be hidden for a time, but the Lord will bring it to light and it will be made manifest."

After a time the Lord James, wishing to have more certainty about this, again questioned Brother Leo. And Brother Leo responded that it was just as he told him.

A BOOK OF EXEMPLARY STORIES

(c1280-1310)

Then Saint Francis called Brother Leo, a holy man whom he had chosen to be his guardian and his confessor, and told him: "I command that any time you see me failing to do these three just things, you should correct me." But Brother Leo answered: "Father, from this moment I will do what you wish in regards to your words and your actions, but I cannot correct your thoughts!" And Francis responded: "You don't have to worry about my thoughts, my son. Leave that between God and me. I hope that I will put them in order before Him. But in regard to the other things, by no means fail to do what I ask." And what I am tell you, I heard from the companions of Saint Francis.

Brother Peter recounts this incident which Brother Leo, the companion of Saint Francis, had told him. "When I was newly ordained," he said, "I was accustomed to spend a long time celebrating Mass. I used to experience divine consolations, and so I wanted to dwell on them. One day Saint Francis called me, and speaking to me affectionately, said: "Brother Leo, my son, do what I say. Celebrating your Mass with devotion, but without pausing too much while you are celebrating; rather, conform yourself to the other priests. If the Lord should give you some grace, wait until Mass is finished and go into your cell; there you can meditate and enjoy the divine consolations, if these are given you from heaven. I think that this way of acting is better and more secure. Indeed, because of those assisting at Mass, some temptation of vainglory or something else inordinate might overcome you, and then the devil will rapidly snatch away any

merit of such apparent devotion. But in your cell, where no one can see you, you can more securely abandon yourself to prayer, and the devil cannot easily find an occasion to tempt you. In addition, it can happen that some of those assisting at such a drawn-out Mass might be led to make some negative judgment about you, perhaps thinking that a priest who celebrates with such outward devotion does so in order to show off or to wear out the congregation.

And Brother John, a companion of Brother Leo, who in his turn was the companion of Saint Francis, tells the following story. Brother Leo used to have an old winter tunic made out of sackcloth, which he had worn for more than four years. So I said to him one day: “Brother Leo, let me get a better tunic for you. That one isn’t going to do you much good, if any, keeping out the cold!” But he answered me: “I know that I am getting weaker, and I think it may please God to soon bring an end to my labours. And so I don’t want another tunic now. I want death to find me a poor man.” And within that very year he died, a little poor man, wearing that same old tunic. And I believe that devout and “poor, he entered heaven a rich man.”

THE ASSISI COMPILATION (c1311)

The second text resulting from the request of Crescentius, *The Assisi Compilation*, presents anecdotes about Francis that could only have come from day-to-day association with him. “We who were with him” offer stories of his practice of virtue, his dealings with the brothers, and his struggles with those who found the Gospel vision difficult to understand. In scattered recollections that lack any plan or structure. *The Assisi Compilation* provides details of incidents that took place not in the piazzas or papal households, but in the remote and hidden places of the brothers, and offers insights into the daily life of the primitive fraternity. Very quickly the reader of these reminiscences becomes aware that they flow from personal and intimate experiences with the saint.

HE RESPONDS TO BROTHER ELIAS AND THE MINISTERS WHO OBJECTED TO THE RULE HE WAS WRITING AT FONTE COLOMBO

When blessed Francis was on a mountain with Brother Leo of Assisi and Brother Bonizo of Bologna to make the Rule, - because the first, which he had written at Christ’s instruction, was lost – a great many ministers gathered around Brother Elias, who was the vicar of blessed Francis. “We heard that Brother Francis is making a new rule,” they told him, “and we fear that he will make it so harsh that we will not be able to observe it. We want you to go to him and tell him that we refuse to be bound to the Rule. Let him make it for himself and not for us.

CHRIST COMPLAINS TO BROTHER LEO ABOUT THE INGRATITUDE OF THE BROTHERS

One time the Lord Jesus Christ said to Brother Leo, the companion of blessed Francis: “I have a complaint about the brothers.” “About what, Lord?” Brother Leo replied. And the Lord said: “About three things. They do not recognize My gifts which, as you know, I generously bestow on them daily, since they neither sow nor reap. All day long they are idle and complain. And they often provoke one another to anger, and do not return to love, and do not pardon the injury they receive.”

AT THE NEWS OF HIS COMING DEATH HE HAS THE BROTHERS SING THE CANTICLE OF BROTHER SUN, WITH A NEW VERSE FOR SISTER DEATH

Although racked with sickness, blessed Francis praised God with great fervour of spirit and joy of body and soul, and told him: “If I am to die soon, call Brother Angelo and Brother Leo that they may sing to me about Sister Death.

Those brothers came to him and, with many tears, sang the Canticle of Brother Sun and the other creatures of the Lord, which the Saint himself had composed in his illness for the praise of the Lord and the consolation of his own soul and that of others. Before the last stanza he added one about Sister Death:

*Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.*

ANGELO CLARENO
EXPOSITION OF THE RULE OF THE LESSER BROTHERS
(1321-22)

Later Rule II 16: “Let all the brothers wear poor clothes....”

Although this passage is attributed to Brother Leo and the companions, it cannot be found among those texts attributed to them and may well be a compendium of Francis’s teachings scattered throughout those texts.

And as Brother Leo wrote and other companions of the same Saint testified, who survived many years after his passing from this life, in the desert of this world he taught his brothers to have nothing besides lowly and cheap clothing. And as pilgrims long for their homeland, and those held in prison desire freedom, so the poor of Christ and those who have sworn enmity to the world because of Christ and His kingdom are all the more bound to desire pilgrimage away from the prison of this world and the body.

Later Rule V: “Let the brothers never receive money...”

Clareno ends his commentary on the fourth chapter of the Rule with this statement which, he claims comes directly from the pen of Brother Leo. The first part of Leo’s written statement, at least in this form is lost.

And brother Leo wrote, “Saint Francis always exhorted and encouraged his brothers by word and example to love of the highest poverty and sharply rebuked in them anything that deviated from its pure observance. And he frequently said these words to the brothers ‘My brothers, I have never been a thief, that is, of alms, which are the inheritance of the poor; I always took less than my due, so that I might not defraud the other poor of their portion, because whoever would do the contrary would be a thief.’”

THE DEEDS OF BLESSED FRANCIS
AND HIS COMPANIONS

By Ugolino Boniscambi of Montegiorgio
(1328-1337)

SAINT FRANCIS TEACHES BROTHER LEO THAT PERFECT JOY IS IN THE CROSS

On one day in winter Saint Francis was going from Perugia to Saint Mary of the Angels. Brother Leo was with him and they were suffering very acutely from the cold. Saint Francis called to Brother Leo who was walking a short distance in front of him. “Brother Leo,” he said, “although in every area the Lesser Brothers give great example of sanctity, honesty, and edification, nevertheless write, that is, diligently note that perfect joy does not consist in this. “Then after he walked a little farther, he called to him again: “O Brother Leo, even if a Lesser Brother should give sight to the blind, straighten crooked limbs, cast out demons, give hearing to the deaf, movement to the halt, speech to the dumb, and, what is more, life to one dead for four days, write that this is not perfect joy.” And calling again he said: “O Brother Leo, if a Lesser Brother knew the languages of all peoples, all knowledge, and all Scriptures, so that he could

prophecy and reveal not only the future but also the consciences of others, write that this is not perfect joy.” And while they were walking he called again: “O Brother Leo, little lamb of God, even if a Lesser Brother spoke with the tongue of an angel, and knew the courses of the stars and the powers of herbs, and knew the locations of the earth’s treasure, if he knew the worth and properties of bird and fish, of animals, men, roots, trees, stones and waters, write down and diligently note that perfect joy is not there.” And after a little while he cried out again: “O Brother Leo, even if a Lesser Brother knew how to preach so well that he could convert all infidels to the faith, write that this is not perfect joy.”

This type of talking went on for about two miles. Brother Leo, however, was in admiration about all this and said: “Father, I ask you in God’s name to tell me where will I find perfect joy?” Francis answered: “When we arrive at Saint Mary of the Angels so drenched by the rain and frozen by the cold, spattered with mud and suffering from hunger, and we knock on the door of the place and the porter comes and angrily says: ‘Who are you?’ And we say: ‘We are two of your brothers’; and he says in return: ‘You are, in fact, coarse fellows who go about the world stealing alms from the poor, and he will not let us enter but keeps us standing in the snow and water, in cold and hunger until it is night, and then if we patiently endure such insults and rebuffs without being disturbed or murmuring, and humbly and charitably feel that even this porter knows us for what we are and that God loosened his tongue against us, O Brother Leo, write that this is perfect joy. And if we persevere in knocking, and the porter, disturbed at our importunity, comes out and attacks us with very hard blows and says: ‘Leave here, you worthless idlers, and go to an inn! Who do you think you are? You certainly are not going to eat here! And if we bear these things patiently and with love accept the insults wholeheartedly, O Brother Leo, write that this is perfect joy. And if thoroughly suffering from great hunger and painful cold as night comes on we continue to knock and call out and tearfully cry out for admittance, and the aroused porter says: ‘These men are very impudent and bold, and I will quiet them!’ Then coming out with a knotty club and grabbing us by the capuche, he throws us to the ground in mud and snow, and so beats us with the club that we are filled with wounds on all sides. And if we endure so many evils, so many insults and blows with joy, thinking that we ought to bear and endure most patiently these pains of the blessed Christ, O Brother Leo, among all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which Christ gives to his friends is to conquer oneself and willingly endure abuse for Christ and for the love of God. For in all the wonderful things mentioned above we cannot glory, because they are not ours but God’s: Name something you have that you have not received. If, then, you have received it, why are you boasting as if it were your own? But we can boast in the cross of tribulation and affliction, because that is our own. Therefore, the Apostle says: *‘May I never boast of anything but the Cross of our Lord.’* to whom be praise forever.

GOD SPEAKS TO SAINT FRANCIS THROUGH BROTHER LEO

In the beginning of the Order our holy Father Francis was staying in a little place with Brother Leo and they did not have the books to recite the Office. One night when they arose for matins, Saint Francis said to his companion: “Dear brother, we do not have a breviary so we can say matins, but in order to spend the time in praising God, say what I tell you and do not change a word. I will say this: ‘O Brother Francis, you have committed so many sins in the world that you deserve hell.’ And you Brother Leo will respond: ‘It is true that you deserve hell’ “The pure minded Brother Leo answered with the simplicity of a dove: “Willingly, Father. Begin in the name of the Lord.” Then Saint Francis began: “O Brother Francis, you have committed so many sins in this world that you deserve hell.” Brother Leo answered: “God will work such good through you that you will go to paradise.” Saint Francis said: “Do not say that, Brother Leo. When I say: ‘O Brother Francis, you have performed so many evil deeds against God that you deserve to be cursed,’ you will answer: ‘You deserve to be listed among the damned.’” Brother Leo answered: “Certainly, Father.”

With many tears and sighs and beating the breast Saint Francis said in a loud voice: "O Lord, O God of heaven and earth, I have done so many evil things against you that I deserve to be thoroughly cursed." Brother Leo responded: "O Brother Francis, God will make you such that you will be singularly blessed among the blessed." Saint Francis, amazed that Leo answered to the contrary, said: "Brother Leo, why do you not answer as I instruct you? I command you under holy obedience to answer according to the words I tell you. I will say: 'O Brother Francis, you miserable little man, do you think that God will have mercy on you even though you have committed so many sins against the father of mercies and the God of all consolation that you are not worthy to find mercy? And you, Brother Little Lamb, will respond: 'In no way are you worthy to find mercy.'" Brother Leo answered: "God the Father, whose mercy is infinitely greater than your sin, will grant you great grace and mercy, and add many more graces besides."

Saint Francis, mildly irritated and patiently disturbed, said: "Brother, why have you dared to act contrary to obedience and answered so many times contrary to what I proposed?" Then Brother Leo humbly and reverently replied: "God knows, my dear Father, that I always intended to say just what you ordered, but God made me speak according to His will and not according to my intention." Saint Francis was amazed at this and said: "I ask you, my dear brother, that this time when I accuse myself as before, you say that I am not worthy of mercy." And with many tears he kept on proposing this for Brother Leo to say. Brother Leo responded: "Tell me again, Father, for this time I will answer as you wish." Saint Francis, shouting out with many tears, said: "O Brother Francis, you great sinner, O Brother Francis, you miserable little man, you know that God will not show you mercy!" Brother Leo replied: "Yes, Father. God will show you mercy; in fact, you will receive great glory from God your Saviour, and he will exalt and glorify you for all eternity, because everyone who humbles himself shall be exalted. I am not able to speak differently because God is speaking through my mouth." In this contest of humility they remained awake until dawn in tears of compassion and in divine consolation.

To the praise of our Lord Jesus Christ

THE LITTLE FLOWERS OF SAINT FRANCIS (after 1337)

HOW SAINT FRANCIS DESCRIBED TO BROTHER LEO A BEAUTIFUL VISION HE HAD SEEN

One time when Saint Francis was seriously ill and Brother Leo was taking care of him, that same Brother Leo was near Saint Francis and praying, and he was rapt in ecstasy and led in spirit to a very great river, wide and turbulent. As he was watching those crossing over, he saw some brothers with heavy loads entering that river. They were immediately overwhelmed by the force of the river and drowned. Several others went a third of the way across the river, and some as far as the middle of the river, and some as far as the shore; but all of them, because of the force of the river and the loads they carried with them, finally fell in and drowned. Brother Leo, seeing this, felt great compassion for them; and suddenly, as he stood there, a great multitude of brothers arrived, without any loads or burdened by anything at all, and in whom shone holy poverty. They entered the river and crossed it without any harm at all. Having seen this, Brother Leo returned to himself.

The Saint Francis, sensing in spirit that Brother Leo had seen a vision, called him to himself, and asked him what he had seen. And the same Brother Leo told him the whole vision in detail, and Saint Francis said: "What you saw is true. The great river is this world; the brothers who drowned in the river are those who do not follow their evangelical profession especially in regard to highest poverty. Those who crossed without danger are those brothers who neither seek nor possess anything earthly or anything of the flesh, but are content having only basic food and clothing, following Christ naked on the Cross and willingly and happily carrying the burden and

the gentle yoke of Christ and of holy obedience; and therefore they cross easily from temporal life to eternal life.

THE KINGSHIP OF SAINT FRANCIS

By Arnald of Sarrant

(c1365)

Just as in the beginning Christ called simple, unlettered, and ignorant men and through them attracted the world's rulers and learned, so did blessed Francis exactly. He chose the poor, simple, and unlettered in whom only the wisdom of God shone.

Blessed Francis also had four authors who wrote more authentically of his life, just as Christ had four evangelists. For although many have written a life of Francis and his deeds, nevertheless four are more authentic, thoroughly holy men; just as many wrote a Gospels are authentic and accepted by the Church without hesitation.

Brother Leo, who, like another Mark, is symbolized by a lion, wrote his life out of great zeal, roaring against violators of this Rule. In that life he explains in particular Francis's intention about the Rule and his zeal against those wanting to mitigate it.

As Christ even changed the names of his disciples, so too did Francis change the names of some of his disciples. He called Brother Leo "Pecorella [The Little Lamb],”.....

[“Saint” John the Evangelist]

[Brother Leo]

Francis's fourth companion was Brother Leo, his confessor, who was very much like blessed John the Evangelist. Blessed John was very pure, simple, and thoroughly gentle, so that Christ loved him more than the others. In the same way, Brother Leo was very innocent, simple, and gentle, so that Francis called him 'the little lamb' and loved him most dearly. As Christ was closer to John and revealed His secrets to him more than to the others, so Saint Francis was much closer to Brother Leo and revealed to him more than to the others mysteries of his heart, even things God has revealed to him.

As John saw Christ transfigured on the mountain, so, on LaVerna, Brother Leo frequently saw Saint Francis lifted from the earth speaking with God and the angels in the midst of the greatest brilliance. He was also with him when he received Christ's stigmata, just as John was the only one of the Apostles at the foot of the cross when Christ was pierced with a lance. As John wrote Christ's Gospel, so Brother Leo wrote a life of Saint Francis. As John saw many future events, as is obvious in the Apocalypse, so Brother Leo had a number of figurative visions about the future that Saint Francis occasionally would explain more clearly to him. John, speaking about Christ, says of him: *And the one who saw bears witness*. In a similar way, Leo, speaking of Saint Francis, frequently says in the legend he wrote: "We who were with him until his death bear witness...."

As John saw in the Apocalypse Christ conquering the evils of Asia's rulers and subjects, so once Brother Leo saw Christ Who spoke to him about conquering the lazy, lukewarm, ungrateful, and quarrelsome brothers.

Among the Apostles, John lived the longest; Brother Leo likewise passed away extremely old.

REVELATIONS OF WHAT HE WOULD ACHIEVE AND THE BROTHERS WOULD NOT WANT TO ACHIEVE

And Brother Leo added: "We who were with him when he wrote the Rule and almost all his other writings bear witness that he had many things written in the Rule and in his other writings, to which certain brothers, especially prelates, were opposed. So it happened that on points where the brothers were opposed to blessed Francis during his life, now, after his death, they would be very useful to the whole religion. Because he greatly feared scandal, he gave in, although unwillingly, to the wishes of the brothers. But he often repeated this saying: 'Woe to those

brothers who are opposed to what I know to be the will of God for the greatest good of the religion, even if I have unwillingly given in to their wishes.’

“He often said to his companions: ‘Here lies my pain and grief: those things which I received from God by His mercy with great effort of prayer and meditation for the present and future good of the religion, and which are, as He assured me, in accordance with His will, some of the brothers relying on the skill of their prudence, oppose me saying: “These things must be kept; but not those!”’”

A MIRROR OF PERFECTION **(c1388)**

HIS ZEAL FOR THE PERFECTION OF THE BROTHERS

The most Blessed Father, having in a certain way transformed the brothers into saints by the ardor of his love and the fervent zeal which he had for their perfection, often used to ponder within himself about the qualities and virtues which should abound in a good Lesser Brother.

And, he 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.....

INTERPOLATION

Brother Leo, the companion and confessor of Saint Francis, wrote to Brother Conrad of Offida the following account, claiming that he had it from the mouth of blessed Francis. This same Brother Conrad related this at San Damiano near Assisi.

Saint Francis was standing in prayer behind the pulpit in the church of Saint Mary of the Angels, with his hands raised on high, and he was crying out to Christ to have mercy on the people in the great calamity that was to come. And the Lord said: “Francis, if you want Me to have mercy on the Christian people, do this for Me. Let your Order remain in that state in which it was founded, because there is nothing else left in the world for Me. And I promise you that, for love of you and your Order, I will not permit any calamity to come upon the world.

“But, I tell you, that they must withdraw from the way on which I have set them. And they will provoke me to such great anger that I will rise up against them, and I will summon the demons and give them all the power that they wanted. And they will place such scandal between them and the world that no one will be able to wear your habit except in the woods. And when the world loses the faith of your Order, light will no longer remain, because I have set them as the light of the world.”

And Saint Francis said: “How will my brothers who dwell in the woods survive?”

Christ answered: “I will feed them as I fed the children of Israel with manna in the desert, because they will be as good as they were, and then they will return to the original state in which it was founded and began.”

A COLLECTION OF SAYINGS **OF THE COMPANIONS OF BLESSED FRANCIS** **(late 13th – early 14th century)**

THE WORDS OF BROTHER CONRAD

THIS IS THE PROPHECY THAT BROTHER CONRAD SAID HE HAD FROM BROTHER LEO, COMPANION OF SAINT FRANCIS

Blessed Conrad heard from Brother Leo, the companion of Saint Francis, that what had been done through blessed Francis was nothing compared to what was to happen in the future. So blessed Conrad asked him when that would be. He replied that it would be in the time of those

great tribulations, but he did not say what it would be. Some have guessed that he would appear bodily in the world because of the questions and terrible tribulations that would arise.

A PROPHECY OF BLESSED FRANCIS

Once Brother Leo, a companion of Saint Francis, sent a letter to Brother Conrad. In it were contained those terrible things that were to come upon the Order on account of sins. After some time he saw Brother Leo, and had it from his own mouth, as Brother Conrad himself tells it, that when blessed Francis came from prayer he always related something new.

CONCERNING A VISION OF BROTHER LEO

One time holy Brother Conrad heard from Brother Leo, companion of Saint Francis, that Brother Leo once got up terrified by a dream to recite the hour of matins with blessed Francis. He told blessed Francis that he had had a dream that frightened him to no end. Saint Francis said: "What did you see?" He replied: "I thought I was standing next to a river that was churning and white. Many brothers were coming who had to cross it; they were carrying books and were drowned in the river. And I, while I want to cross, with this breviary, I would drown in the river. I threw it aside because otherwise I could not cross, and I crossed. [Indeed, I believe that breviary was cheap,]" Then blessed Francis responded with sorrow and grief: "Brother Leo, those are the evil books that will destroy this Order. I hold that he is not a Lesser Brother who is not content to say the Our Father." I firmly believe this was to remove the desire and eagerness of books.

CONCERNING A CERTAIN GRACE OF BLESSED FRANCIS

Another time blessed Francis said to Brother Leo: "Brother Leo, my son, there in paradise a certain glory is being kept for me which no one else will have." It is believed that Francis said this after he had been assured of eternal life.

A MIRACLE HE TOLD ABOUT BLESSED FRANCIS

Brother Leo told this about himself, as if about another, saying in this way, that a certain companion of blessed Francis saw a miracle of his, in that going along the way with him, blessed Francis said to him: "Go back!" And he said this with vehement emotion. The brother was leaving him as quickly as he could, when he saw a piece of paper fall from the sky upon his head and swirl around his feet. The brother looked closely, caught the paper and picked it up. But what happened to the paper is unknown to this day.

A CERTAIN VISION OF BROTHER LEO

Another time Brother Leo suffered a fever at night, and in the morning Francis called him and said: "Get up, brother, and come with me."

Brother Leo got up and went with him without telling him that he had that night suffered a fever. He did this because he did not want to pass up the presence of blessed Francis. Then the Lord showed him this vision while walking down the road with our blessed father Francis. He saw the Lord was looking at the face of blessed Francis.

However, it is believed that whatever went on in the heart of blessed Francis appeared outwardly in the eyes of Brother Leo.

A PROPHECY ABOUT OUR ORDER

The holy Brother Conrad reported that he had had it from Brother Leo, who was the companion and confessor of Saint Francis, and he heard it from his own mouth, that blessed Francis was once at prayer at Saint Mary of the Angels saying: "Lord, spare your people." Christ appeared to him and said: "I gladly grant you that, for it is of great value to me as well. But please do this for me, that your Order stay with me. But a time will come when they will depart

from the way in which I put them. Then after that I will give power to the demons, and then if a son goes to his father's home for bread, he will give it to him like a stick on the bread.

[“And there shall arise from your Order a Supreme Pontiff. In his time all these things will be fulfilled, and he will be blessed if he does well, but if not, he will die miserably.”]

“And if the brothers knew of the tribulations of those days, they would already begin to flee, and many shall flee to deserted places. But later they will come out and rebuild the Order in its original perfect state. But woe to those who congratulate themselves over only the appearance of a religious way of living, but grow sluggish in idleness, and fail to resist firmly the tribulations permitted to try the elect. For only those who have been tried will receive the crown of life, those who meantime are vexed by the wickedness of the condemned.”

TRUE & PERFECT JOY

(date unknown)

The fourteenth century biographical tradition is the source of this piece which has always been considered authentic. Kejetan Esser placed this text in a section entitled “Dictated Writings” and relied on the research of Benvenutus Bughetti whose convincing arguments placed it among the writings of Francis. While it parallels *Admonition V* and Thomas of Celano’s *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 125 and 145, it reflects the letter which Francis sent to Brother Leo which was the result of a conversation on the road and the resolution of a question about Gospel life. It is impossible to date this incident with any certainty.

The same [Brother Leonard] related in the same place that one day at Saint Mary’s blessed Francis called Brother Leo and said: “Brother Leo, write.” He responded: “Look, I’m ready!” “Write,” he said, “what true joy is.”

“A messenger arrives and says that all the Masters of Paris have entered the Order. Write: this isn’t true joy! Or, that all the prelates, archbishops and bishops beyond the mountains, as well as the King of France and the King of England [have entered the Order]. Write: this isn’t true joy! Again, that my brothers have gone to the non-believers and converted all of them to the faith; again, that I have so much grace from God that I heal the sick and perform many miracles. I tell you true joy doesn’t consist in any of these things.

“Then what is true joy?”

“I return from Perugia and arrive here in the dead of night. It’s winter time, muddy, and so cold that icicles have formed on the edges of my habit and keep striking my legs and blood flows from such wounds. Freezing, covered with mud and ice, I come to the gate and, after I’ve knocked and called for some time, a brother comes and asks: ‘Who are you?’ ‘Brother Francis,’ I answer. ‘Go away! He says. ‘This is not a decent hour to be wandering about! You may not come in!’ When I insist, he replies: ‘Go away! You are simple and stupid! Don’t come back to us again! There are many of us here like you – we don’t need you!’ I stand again at the door and say: ‘For the love of God, take me in tonight!’ And he replies: ‘I will not! Go to the Crosiers’ place and ask there!’

“I tell you this: If I had patience and did not become upset, true joy, as well as true virtue and the salvation of my soul, would consist in this.”

FRANCIS OF ASSISI

By Arnaldo Fortini

LET THEM BE LESSER BROTHERS

Maggiori and *minori* were becoming by now so mixed together that they looked back with stupor at the storm from which they had emerged and tried to show those still in the midst of it how to find salvation.

And every day other citizens dropped out of the life of the world to join Francis and increase the small company of his first companions. There was Leo, the dearest of all to Francis and Francis's confessor.

[The only Leo in Assisi records is a "Domino Leone" – a title sometimes used for priests – who is mentioned in one of the documents dealing with the liberation of the serfs.]

SAINT CLARE, LADY OF LIGHT

She died the next day, toward evening. With her were the faithful companions of Saint Francis, Brother Juniper, Brother Angelo, and Brother Leo.

THE PERVERSE LEPER

Francis said to Brother James the Simple, "You must watch yourself in taking the Christians about (this is what they usually called the lepers), for it is not expedient for you or for them." But scarcely had he said these words than he repented of having done so, for it seemed to him that the poor sick man found them mortifying. Wishing to make amends for what he held to be his great offence against charity, he saw to it that the leper was placed at the common table to eat from the same bowl as himself.

Brother Leo, present at the time, attested to the shiver of horror mixed with compassion that all felt on seeing that poor leper immerse his fingers, contracted and dripping with blood, in Father Francis's bowl, allowing blood and pus to trickle inside it.

BLESSING FOR BROTHER LEO

Brother Leo, in the Basilica di San Francesco in Assisi, the blessing that Francis wrote for him (on LaVerna) is still preserved. This humble little lamb of God carried it over his heart as long as he lived. On it are a few wavering lines, uneven, faded, in the handwriting of Saint Francis. At the bottom Francis wrote the wish, infinitely touching, coming, as it did, at the dawn of his own life in the spirit.

THE CONTEST BETWEEN THE POET AND THE NIGHTINGALE

On another occasion, Francis himself sang in competition with another creature of song.

We are again in the Porziuncula woodlands, at the end of a spring day. Francis looks at the darkening sky. Soon it will be evening. It would be good, O Brother Leo, to lay the table of the Lord near the flowering hedge of whitethorn, in the peace that comes with the first shadow of evening.

They sit down on the grass, Francis and faithful Leo. Suddenly, as they are about to eat, they hear in the twilight calm the first notes of a nightingale.

They listen with suspended hearts, these two who have walked together through these same woodlands in the squalid mud and ice of a distant winter evening, talking of perfect joy.

Francis says, "Let us go praise God together with our Brother Nightingale."

When they reach the tree where the invisible singer awaits, Francis invites Brother Leo to sing.

"Father," says Leo, "I do not have a good voice. You have a fine voice and know so many beautiful songs – you must reply to the nightingale."

So they begin to sing a tenzon or competition, in the perfect style of the Provençal troubadours, Francis and the nightingale, the man who had once led serenades through the streets of Assisi and the noble virtuoso of the woods.

Which songs, new and old, does the minstrel of God bring back from his heart's depths to compete in this new court of love? Perhaps the songs of his melancholy, when he went about through the city searching for the lady whom his soul loved. Perhaps of a love that neither iron nor fire could part. Or his newer song of devotion that begins:

Hail, Queen Wisdom! The Lord save you,
with your sister, pure, holy Simplicity.
Lady Holy Poverty, God keep you,
with your Sister, holy Humility.

The nightingale replies. He sighs in sympathy at the grief of the disconsolate lover. He exults in a joyful song of love won again. He grows humble and plaintive in prayer. He puts questions in his turn. Then he launches into a dizzying flood of nimble notes that rise and fall in a thousand tones, in a thousand swift and resonant progressions, in an immense jubilation that on one could resist sharing. And when the last passionate note dies away, everything remains still under the spell of the power and sweetness of that song.

Francis turns to Leo and says, "Brother, truthfully I must confess that the nightingale has beaten me."

They return to their meal. The nightingale comes to rest on Francis's hand. This pleases him and he says to his companion, "Brother, let us give something to eat to our sister bird, who deserves it more than we do."

Thus, all together, they share the supper.

THE SERAPH

On one those nights Brother Leo came to the brink of the gorge and said the words agreed upon, "Lord, open my lips."

No one replied. He crossed the log and looked into the cell. Francis was not there. He went further and walked through the woods. At last he saw Francis on his knees, his face and his hands raised to the sky. Over and over he said, "Who are you, my dearest God? And what am I, your vilest little worm and useless little servant?" In the still night was a man overcome by his own insignificance as he confronted the immensity of God.

According to the Fioretti, on LaVerna Brother Leo constantly spied on Francis "with holy ingenuity." Among the marvels that he said to have seen are seeing Francis raised off the ground as he prayed, seeing a scroll from heaven and, later, a torch, come down and rest on Francis's head, hearing him converse with God and with the angels.

FAREWELL, MOUNTAIN OF ANGELS

Afterwards, Francis suffered anguish from his wounds. His hands and his feet looked as though they had been pierced by nails. The wound in his side was like one made by a lance; blood constantly flowed from it and clotted on his habit. He was forced to confide in some of his brothers – his companion during the Crusade, Brother Illuminato, his favourite disciple, Brother Leo. Leo had the duty of changing the bandage on his side nearly every day; Francis wore one over the wound until his death.

At the end on September he wanted to go back to Porziuncula, so he prepared to leave LaVerna, saying he would never return there. His faithful companions remained: Angelo, Illuminato dell' Arce, Silvestro and Masseo. Brother Leo would accompany him during the trip.

IN THE BISHOPS HOUSE

One of the brothers, perhaps again Brother Leo, asked him jokingly one day for how much he would sell to the Lord the rough clothes he was wearing – his patched habit, the worn bandage wrapped around his head.

“One day many canopies and silken palls will cover this little body of yours that is now clothed in sackcloth!” he told Francis.

Francis smiled and replied “with a great outburst of joy,” “What you say is true, for it will be to the praise and glory of my Lord!”

Brother Leo himself would have given his life to have the habit of his master and to be able to keep it in memory of him. His longing did not escape Francis, who called him and said to him, “I give you this tunic; take it that it may be yours for the future. Thought I wear it while I am alive, it will be yours at my death.”

THE STIGMATA

Whatever the words, they sprang unbidden from those who knelt beside Francis’s spent body, kissed his inert hands, paused to collect a droplet of the blood that was continuing to flow from his side. No one would ever forget this stupendous revelation.

No one of those who saw, rejoiced, and wept, in the brief time that the incredible marks could be examined, could ever tell others about that miracle without feeling again something of the shining things seen and felt in that great hour.

Brother Leo, with all his faith, gave the most beautiful account of the scene, in answer to Brother Salimbene’s curiosity: “It was as if it were Jesus taken down from the cross.”

A HISTORY OF THE FRANCISCAN ORDER From Its Origins to the Year 1517 By John Moorman

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE ORDER

Francis now felt that what they needed was some old church which would become the centre of their life, and around which they could build some simple huts. So he made various inquiries and was eventually offered by the Benedictine monks of Subasio the Portiuncula as the poorest church which they had. Francis was delighted since it was, of all places, the one which he would most like to have. He agreed to give the monks each year a basket of fish, and the monks in return gave him a vessel of oil.

Once the friars were settled at the Portiuncula their number was more than doubled by the arrival of several new men. The first was probably the priest, Sylvester, who, having repented of his avarice, now came to join the poor men. After him came Leo, Rufino, Maseo, Juniper, Illuminato, Augustine, Stephen, Leonard, James of Assisi, Theobald, Simon of Assisi, Simon of Collazono, and John ‘de Laudibus’.

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