

# 5

## THE PRAYERS OF SAINT FRANCIS

### 5.1 Prayer before the Crucifix (1205/06)

The *Prayer before the Crucifix*, composed originally in the Italian dialect of Umbria, is one of the earliest prayers among the Writings of Saint Francis. It was composed at the very beginning of his conversion process, when he would go to the derelict church of San Damiano to pray.

The *Legend of the Three Companions* 13, says: “A few days had passed when, while he was walking by the church of San Damiano, he was told in the Spirit to go inside for a prayer. Once he entered, he began to pray intensely before an image of the Crucified.” At this stage, two manuscripts of the same L3C, the Barcelona and Fribourg manuscripts, coming from 1405/1406, give us the text of the *Prayer before the Crucifix*.

The Codex in Bodleian Library gives us an interesting rubric regarding the circumstances of composition of this prayer: “Blessed Francis used to pray in Italian, and his prayers were then translated into Latin. This is how he prayed in the church of San Damiano in front of the image of the Crucified Jesus, from which he heard a voice coming down three times, telling him: ‘Francis, go and repair,’ as we read in the new legend.” The reference to the new legend is to the *Major Legend* by Saint Bonaventure, II,1.

The prayer also shows a striking resemblance with the episode of San Damiano as seen in the *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 10, in which “Francis was more than a little stunned, trembling and stuttering like a man out of his senses. He prepared himself to obey and pulled himself together to carry out the command.” The reference to Christ’s *mandatum*, or command, fits in well with the contents of this prayer: “that I may carry out Your holy and true command.”

The *Prayer before the Crucifix* has to be seen in relation to another prayer of Saint Francis, which is included in his *Testament*, known as the *Adoramus te*. This prayer was composed from liturgical texts, namely an antiphon used on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and was one of the first prayers that Francis and the brothers would recite whenever they met a church or a crucifix, as Thomas of Celano states in his *Life of Saint Francis*, 45: “The brothers at that time begged him to teach them how to pray, because, walking in simplicity of spirit, up to that time they did not know the Church’s office. Francis told them: ‘When you pray, say *Our Father* and: We adore you, O Christ, in all your churches throughout the whole world, and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.’”

## 5.2 The Parchment Given to Brother Leo (1224)

The *Chartula* or *Parchment given to Brother Leo*, is nowadays a precious relic of Saint Francis, venerated in the lower Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi. It is a small piece of parchment (10 x 14cm) with two autographs of Saint Francis, written on La Verna in 1224 and given to brother Leo. On one side we find the *Praises of God* and on the other the *Blessing given to brother Leo*, on which Francis signed with the characteristic *Thau cum capite*.

The rubrics written by brother Leo on the same parchment provide more than enough proof regarding the authenticity of this Writing. On one side of the parchment Leo wrote these words: “Two years before his death, the blessed Francis spent forty days on Mount La Verna from the Feast of the Assumption of the holy Virgin Mary until the September Feast of Saint Michael, in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and the blessed 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 parchment, Brother Leo added: “The blessed Francis wrote this blessing for me with his own hand”, and, “In a similar way he made with his own hand the this sign Tau together with a skull.”

The *Parchment given to Brother Leo* has been studied at great depth by Duane Lapsanski and Attilio Bartoli Langeli.<sup>50</sup>

A faithful account of the circumstances of composition of the *Parchment given to Brother Leo* is given to us by Thomas of Celano in his *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 49, with a parallel text in the *Major Life* by Saint Bonaventure, XI,9:

“While the saint was secluded in a cell on Mount La Verna, one of his companions 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 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 the brother, saying: ‘Take this

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<sup>50</sup> D. LAPSANSKI, “The Autographs of the «Chartula» of Saint Francis of Assisi”, *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 67 (1967) 18-37; A. BARTOLI LANGELI, “Gli Scritti da Francesco. L’autografo di un «illitteratus»”, *Frate Francesco d’Assisi*, Spoleto 1994, 101-159.

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 *Praises of God* are a hymn of praise to God for His divine attributes. They express the ecstatic spirit of Francis who had just received the stigmata on La Verna, as well as his typical style of prayer, all centred upon praise and thanksgiving. The *Blessing of Brother Leo* is taken from the Book of Numbers 6,25-26 (the blessing of Aaron). Van Dijk has asked whether Francis knew this formula of blessing from Scripture, or else he had heard it in some particular liturgical celebration. In fact, a Pontifical composed under Innocent III uses this blessing for the rite of reconciliation of penitents on Holy Thursday. What is interesting is how Francis includes the name of Leo within the *Tau cum capite*, or Tau with a skull, using the letter T as part of the blessing: *Dominus benedicat, frater Leo, Te*. Again, this is an indication that liturgy had a great role in influencing Francis’ style of prayer.

### 5.3 The Canticle of Creatures (1225-1226)

There is so much to say about *The Canticle of Creatures*, that we have to limit ourselves to the documentation we find in the Franciscan Sources. This poem, composed in the «volgare», or language of the common people, in the Umbrian dialect, is hailed as the oldest lyric of Italian literature, and a study of its contents says much about Francis and his love towards God, mankind and creation at large.

In the *Life of Saint Francis*, 80-81, Thomas of Celano writes: “Once the three young men in the furnace of burning fire invited all the elements to praise and glorify the Creator of all things, so this man, full of the spirit of God never stopped glorifying, praising, and blessing the Creator and Ruler of all things in all the elements and creatures ... He used to call all creatures by the name of «brother» and «sister».” And in paragraph 109, Celano says: “Knowing the time of his death was close at hand, he called to him two brothers, his special sons, and told them to sing *The Praises of the Lord* with a loud voice and joyful spirit.”

In the *Versified Life of Saint Francis*, by Henry of Avranches, XIII,111-112, we find an allusion to this Canticle in the following stanza:

“For I am called from pain to pleasure, a prisoner in a mundane  
Cell to liberty celestial. As a finishing touch to my work  
For Christ so gracious, sing ye a song of joy,  
And hymn your praises on my behalf.”

In the *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 213 and 217, Thomas of Celano gives us further proof regarding the authenticity of the *Canticle of Creatures*: “It was then that he composed the Praises about Creatures, rousing them in any way to praise their Creator.” Again, before he dies, Francis “also invited all creatures to the praise of God, and exhorted them to love by some words which he had composed earlier.”

In the *Major Legend* 9,1, Saint Bonaventure depends upon Celano when he writes: “Aroused by everything to divine love, he rejoiced in all the works of the Lord’s hands and through their delightful display he rose into their life-giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he contuited Beauty itself and through the footprints impressed in things he followed his Beloved everywhere, out of them all making for himself a ladder through which he could climb up to lay hold of him who is utterly desirable. With an intensity of unheard devotion he savoured in each and every creature – as in so many rivulets – that fontal Goodness, and discerned an almost celestial choir in the chords of power and activity given to them by God, and, like the prophet David, he sweetly encouraged them to praise the Lord.”

During the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, the Assisi Codex 338 gives us the oldest edition of the *Canticle of Creatures*, together with a precious rubric: “Here begin the praises of the creatures which blessed Francis composed in praise and honour of God, when he was ill, during the time he was staying near San Damiano.” In fol. 33r-34r it gives us the text of the Canticle, and even leaves an empty space for the musical annotation, which unfortunately was never written down.

This rubric provides important information regarding the date and circumstances of composition of *The Canticle of Creatures*. We know that Francis stayed for some weeks at San Damiano, under the maternal care of Clare and the Poor Ladies, during the early spring months of 1225, before moving on to Rieti for his eye treatment. It was in this circumstance that the first part of the Canticle, concerned with creation in general, was composed. The detailed account of the composition of this part of the Canticle is given by the *Assisi Compilation* 83: “The *Praises of the Lord* that he composed, that is, ‘Most High, all-powerful, good Lord’, he called *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, who is more beautiful than all other creatures and can be most closely compared to God.” The same account is found in *The Mirror of Perfection* (Sabatier) 100.

The second part of the *Canticle of Creatures* concerns the theme of forgiveness. This section was composed later on, probably during the last year of Francis’ life, when he was sick in the «vescovado» of Assisi. Again, the account is given to us by the *Assisi Compilation* 84 and *Mirror of Perfection* (Sabatier) 101. The bishop Guido of Assisi quarrelled with the podestà, Bernardo de Oportulo, and excommunicated him. The podestà prohibited any financial transactions on the part of the citizens with the bishop. Francis heard of this sad turn of events, and composed the part of the Canticle dealing with forgiveness, and sent two companions to sing the Canticle, with the new addition, in front of the bishop and podestà, who forgave each other and were reconciled.

The final part of the *Canticle of Creatures*, praises God for «sister bodily death». It is supposed to have been composed some days before Francis died at the Porziuncola. We find references to this circumstance of composition in the *Assisi Compilation* 7: “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.” Parallel texts are to be found in the *Mirror of Perfection* (Sabatier) 123 and (Lemmens) 10. The *Mirror of Perfection* (Sabatier) 120, gives us the full text of the *Canticle of Creatures*.

#### 5.4 Canticle of Exhortation for the Poor Ladies of San Damiano (1225)

The *Canticle of Exhortation for the Poor Ladies of San Damiano*, also known as *Audite Poverelle*, from the opening words, was not included in the critical edition of the Writings of Saint Francis by Kajetan Esser. In fact, it was during the same year of its publication, in 1976, that Giovanni Boccali, a Franciscan from the Umbrian OFM Province, discovered this Canticle in a manuscript in the Poor Clares monastery of San Fidenzio di Novaglie, near Verona.<sup>51</sup>

Francis composed this Canticle while he was ill at San Damiano in 1225. Although the text of the Canticle was lost until its discovery by Boccali, the Franciscan Sources do mention it. The *Assisi Compilation*, 85, says: “Likewise, in those same days and in the same place, blessed Francis, after he composed the *Praises of the Lord* for his creatures, also composed some holy words with chant for the greater consolation of the Poor Ladies of the Monastery of San Damiano. He did this especially because he knew how much his illness troubled them. And since he was unable to console and visit them personally because of that illness, he wanted those words to be proclaimed to them by his companions. In these words, he wanted to reveal his will to them briefly, for then and for always, how they should be of one mind and how they should live in charity toward one another. He wanted to do this because they were converted to Christ by his example and preaching when the brothers were still few ... With these words, then, he begged them that, as the Lord had gathered them as one from many different regions in holy charity, holy poverty, and holy obedience, so in these they should live and die. And he begged them particularly to provide for their bodies with discernment from the alms which the Lord would give them, with cheerfulness and thanksgiving. And he especially asked them to remain patient: the healthy, in the labours which they endure for their sick sisters; and the sick in their illnesses and the needs they suffer.”

The contents of the Canticle faithfully reproduce all these elements contained in the *Assisi Compilation*, and are a proof of the way in which the companions of Saint Francis cherished his memories, particularly regarding his relationship with Clare and the Poor Ladies of San Damiano. The Canticle *Audite Poverelle* is composed in the dialect of Umbria, just like the *Canticle of Creatures*, and concludes with a moving tribute to the Virgin Mary, queen of the little poor ones of the Lord.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> G. BOCCALI, “Parole di esortazione alle ‘poverelle’ di San Damiano”, *Forma Sororum* 14 (1977) 54-70; “Canto di esortazione di San Francesco”, *Collectanea Franciscana* 48 (1978) 5-29; O. SCHMUCKI, “The Rediscovery of the Exhortation «Audite» of St. Francis for the Poor Ladies of San Damiano”, *Greyfriars Review* 3 (1989) 115-126.

<sup>52</sup> English text of the *Canticle of Exhortation to Clare and the Poor Ladies* in: *Clare of Assisi. Early Documents*, revised and expanded by R.J. ARMSTRONG, 318-319.

## 5.5 Exhortation to the Praise of God

The *Exhortation to the Praise of God* is not found in the *editio princeps* of the Writings of Saint Francis by Luke Wadding (1623), but is present in the first volume of his *Annales Minorum* (1625). Wadding discovered it in the «Chronicle of the Order of Minors» by Mariano da Firenze (+1523), in which this Franciscan chronicler says that he discovered, at the hermitage of Cesi di Terni, an altar frontal, or «antependium», in 1500, in which Francis had requested many creatures to be painted, including some verses in which he invited them to praise the Creator. During Mariano da Firenze's time the altar frontal was conserved in a chapel of this Franciscan hermitage. Another eyewitness states that he saw this altar frontal after 1484, and gives us the text of the praises of God in a codex at the National Library of Naples.

The authenticity of this *Exhortation to the Praise of God* does not find any texts in the Sources to support it, and Esser bases it on internal evidence of the text. He notes the mixing of Latin with Italian idioms, typical of Francis, the use of the Roman Psalter, which Francis knew and prayed, the quotation of Scripture verses from memory, a lack of logical sequence in the various praises, the typical style of the «lauda», similar to the *Canticle of Creatures* and other prayers by Francis. The reference to the Virgin Mary and to Saint Michael the Archangel seems to be another proof, since the chapel of the hermitage of Cesi di Terni was dedicated to Saint Mary of the Angels, and we do know that Francis had a particular devotion towards the Archangel Saint Michael. Thomas of Celano, in the *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 197, states: "He often said that Blessed Michael should be especially honoured because his duty is presenting souls to God." Regarding the Virgin Mary, he says, in paragraph 198: "He embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love, since she made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us. He honoured her with his own Praises."

## 5.6 The Praises to be said at all the Hours

The *Praises to be said at all the Hours* is an apt title for this group of verses taken from the Psalms and other liturgical texts, which Francis composed freely and recited before the canonical hours of the Divine Office. The authenticity of this psalm of praise has never been questioned, although there is nothing original about it, except for the concluding prayer. It seems that its structure is based on a hymn which used to be recited in the old liturgy of the Mass, during the Saturdays of the Ember Days.

The different verses all have a refrain: "And let us praise him and glorify him for ever", suggesting that these Praises were recited by the brothers together, before they started the Divine Office. In fact, a rubric in the Codex of the Bodleian Library of Oxford, says that Francis recited these Praises before the Office of the day and that of the Virgin Mary, followed immediately by the "Our Father". An interesting feature of these Praises is that Francis includes various texts from the Apocalypse, which presents the

heavenly liturgy of praise in the presence of God. Like many other prayers of Saint Francis, it is not possible to fix a specific date of composition of these Praises.

Regarding Francis' devotion to the canonical hours of the Divine Office, the Sources give us some important clues. Thomas of Celano writes in the *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 96: "He celebrated the canonical hours with no less awe than devotion. Although he was suffering from diseases of the eyes, stomach, spleen and liver, he did not want to lean against a wall or partition when he was chanting the psalms. He always fulfilled his hours standing up straight and without a hood, without letting his eyes wander and without dropping syllables. When he was travelling the world on foot, he always would stop walking in order to say the Hours, and when he was on horseback he would dismount to be on the ground. So, one day when he was returning from Rome and it was raining constantly, he got off his horse to say the Office, and, standing for quite a while, he became completely soaked. He would sometimes say: 'If the body calmly eats its food, which along with itself will be food for worms, the soul should receive its food, which is its God, in great peace and tranquillity.'"

## 5.7 The Office of the Passion

This liturgical office, composed by Saint Francis from verses taken from Scripture and other liturgical texts, has been given various names by the critical editors of the Writings of Saint Francis. Wadding calls it *Officium Passionis Dominicae*; Lemmens and Boehmer call it *Officium Passionis Domini*. While the first part of the Office, made up of seven psalms, is indeed used during Holy Week, and fits into the title *Office of the Passion of the Lord*, the other sections of the Office, including eight other psalms, are composed for other liturgical seasons, and do not have the Passion as their main theme. The Office is rather a celebration of the whole mystery of redemption, from the incarnation to the passion, death, resurrection, ascension and second coming of the Lord. For this reason J. de Schampheleer has named it «L'office de la Pâque» (The Easter Office), and states that what Francis celebrates in this *Office of the Passion* is the entire paschal mystery.

Mariano da Firenze (+1523) speaks about a list of writings attributed to Francis, in which there is "a certain devout office in honour of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which varies according to the feastdays." O. Schmucki notes that, during the time of Alcuin, and even during the Patristic era, the latin term «passio» referred to the entire mystery of redemption, including the resurrection.

The authenticity of the *Office of the Passion* is proved by a text from the *Legend of Saint Clare*, 30: "She learned the Office of the Cross as Francis, a lover of the Cross, had established it and recited it with similar affection." Although the name *Officium Crucis*, Office of the Cross, does not appear in any one of the titles given to the *Office of the Passion*, we can conclude that this particular office which Clare recited was none other than this liturgical office composed by Saint Francis.

Another internal proof regarding the authenticity of the *Office of the Passion* comes from the use of the Roman Psalter. In fact, according to the *Later Rule*, 3,1: “Let the clerical brothers recite the Divine Office according to the rite of the holy Roman Church excepting the psalter.” Now, the Rule was written in 1223, and it is obliging the brothers to pray the Gallican Psalter, whereas before this date, the brothers had a mixed version of the Roman and Gallican Psalters. Francis would know much better the Roman Psalter by heart, and that is why he uses it in many of his prayers, especially in the *Office of the Passion*.

The tradition of praying the *Office of the Passion* was common in the Middle Ages, especially in monastic circles. This was one of the votive offices, like the Office of the Virgin Mary, which was very popular. Thus, the *Office of the Passion* does not aim at being a substitute for the Divine Office as it was prayed, according to the norms of the Church and the prescriptions of the Rule. It was a devotional addition to the Office, corresponding to the various liturgical seasons. In fact, the *Office of the Passion* has five distinct sections: (1) For the Easter Triduum and Holy Week and for the weekdays throughout the year; (2) For the Easter Season; (3) For Sundays and principal feasts; (4) For the Advent Season; (5) For Christmas and the Epiphany.

The first seven psalms concern the theme of the Lord’s Passion. They are made up of verses taken from different psalms and other liturgical texts, and blended together in a unique way. Many have prayed these psalms and seen in them a kind of a «Way of the Cross», because Francis seems to imply that he is meditating on the various moments of the Passion of the Lord. Thus the psalm of Compline is a reflection on the Lord’s agony in the Gethsemani; the psalm of Matins celebrates the Lord’s capture and trial and his confidence in the Father’s deliverance; the psalm of Prime recalls the trial before Pilate; the psalm of Terce the scourging and crowning with thorns of Jesus; the psalm of Sext the crucifixion; the psalm of None the hour of Christ’s death on the cross; the hour of Vespers, His glorious cross and resurrection.

The psalm composed for Christmas is also an expression of Francis’ devotion to the mystery of the incarnation: “For the Most Holy Child has been given to us and has been born for us on the way and placed in a manger because he did not have a place in the inn.” This note of poverty and the itinerant nature of Christ’s birth “on the way”, are typically Franciscan.

This Office also contains an antiphon in honour of the Virgin Mary, which Francis would recite before and after each psalm. The antiphon celebrates Mary, within the context of the Trinity, and in her interceding role. Francis also includes the Archangel Saint Michael within this prayer. It is a fitting picture of Francis’ own personal devotion to the Virgin Mary and Saint Michael, as we know from his annual retreat on La Verna between the feast of the Assumption and that of Saint Michael.

## 5.8 Prayer inspired by the Our Father

The *Expositio in Pater Noster*, or *Prayer inspired by the Our Father*, was a common way of praying the «Our Father» with a spiritual commentary and reflection. We have a witness of the devotion which Francis had towards the Lord's Prayer in Thomas of Celano's *Life of Saint Francis*, 45: "The brothers at that time begged him to teach them how to pray, because, walking in simplicity of spirit, up to that time they did not know the Church's office. Francis told them: 'When you pray, say: Our Father, and: We adore you, o Christ, in all your churches throughout the whole world.'"

In the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*, 21, Francis writes: "And day and night let us direct praises and prayers to Him, saying: Our Father, who art in heaven... for we should pray always and not become weary." And in the *Earlier Rule*, 22,28-30, Francis admonishes the brothers with these words: "And let us adore Him with a pure heart, because it is necessary to pray always and not lose heart; for the Father seeks such people who adore him."

The *Mirror of Perfection* (Sabatier edition) 82, states: "And he also ordered it to be firmly observed that if any brother, while walking or working in the company of other brothers at something, utters some useless or idle word, he must say one *Our Father*, praising God at the beginning and end of this prayer. If perhaps he is the first to notice it and accuses himself of what he did, let him say the *Our Father* for his own soul together with *The Praises* of the Lord ... The most holy father was always solicitous to say those *Praises of the Lord*, with a fervent wish and desire he taught and encouraged the other brothers to be similarly careful and devout in saying these *Praises*." This detail regarding the life of Saint Francis prompted Paul Sabatier to state that the *Prayer inspired by the Our Father* formed one whole piece with the *Praises to be said at all the Hours*.

This is the context in which we have to understand the importance of this prayer, which Francis composed in close relationship with the *Praises to be said at all the Hours*, and the *Office of the Passion*, as the rubrics in these prayers show. Similar examples of prayers inspired by the Our Father can be seen in the writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and Hugh of Saint Victor. For this reason, many scholars had doubted the originality and authenticity of the *Prayer inspired by the Our Father*, stating that Francis had merely copied texts he found elsewhere. But, as often happens in the Writings, Francis would give them his own style, and in many ways, they become distinctly his.

## 5.9 A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

In the *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 198, Thomas of Celano writes: "He embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love, since she made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us. He honoured her with His own Praises, poured out prayers to her, and offered her his love in a way that no human tongue can express. But what gives us greatest joy is that he appointed her the Advocate of the Order, and placed under her wings the sons to be left behind, that she might protect and cherish them to the end."

This description of the devotion which Francis had towards the Virgin Mary provides the background for understanding the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, which is one of the «laude» which Francis composed. It is a «salutation», built upon the Hail Mary.

The adjectives which Francis uses in this beautiful prayer of praise are profoundly theological. He calls Mary, God's palace, tabernacle, dwelling, robe, servant, Mother, and especially "the Virgin made Church" (*Virgo ecclesia facta*), a truly original title in the Middle Ages, which seems to be a forerunner of the modern title of Mother of the Church, given to Mary after Vatican II.<sup>53</sup>

This Salutation is also a prayer of praise in defence of the mystery of the Incarnation, in which Mary plays a principal role. Francis could have composed it, just as he did compose his "Eucharistic" writings, to defend Catholic doctrine regarding the mystery of the Incarnation against the heresy of the Cathars and other lay penitential movements which were accepting a dualistic Gnostic doctrine which condemned the real human nature of Jesus Christ as intrinsically evil, and hence impossible to reconcile, with His divinity.

The *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* ends with a salutation "to all You holy virtues". This has prompted scholars, like Boehmer, to conclude that this Salutation was originally part and parcel of the *Salutation of the Virtues*. Some manuscripts, in fact, unite together these two *opuscula*. Sabatier is of the opinion that the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin* is a logical consequence of the *Salutation of the Virtues*, and should follow it. Esser prefers to follow the majority of the manuscripts, and regards these two Salutations as two distinct *opuscula*, even though he admits that the concluding phrase of the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* is closely linked to the virtues which were present in her life. Francis salutes the Mother of the Lord and the virtues which the Holy Spirit had conferred upon her, which are also given to all those who, like Mary, are faithful in listening to and obeying the Word of God.

This Salutation is also a small treatise of Mariology against a Trinitarian background, just like the antiphon "Holy Virgin Mary", which we have seen in the *Office of the Passion*.

## 5.10 A Salutation of the Virtues

In the *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 189, we have yet another proof of the authenticity of another of Francis' Writings, this time the *Salutation of the Virtues*: "Holy Simplicity, the daughter of grace, the sister of wisdom, the mother of justice, with careful attention he showed in himself and loved in others. It was not just any kind of simplicity

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<sup>53</sup> Two studies in Latin on this prayer of praise are those of H. PYFFEROEN, "Sanctus Franciscus et Sancta Maria de Angelis ad Portiunculam", *Laurentianum* 10 (1969) 329-352; "Ave Dei Genitrix Maria, quae es Virgo, ecclesia facta", *Laurentianum* 12 (1971) 412-434.

that he approved, but only that which, content with her God scorns everything else. This is she who glories in the fear of God, who does not know how to do evil or speak it. This is she who examines herself and condemns no one by her judgment, who grants due authority to her betters and seeks no authority for herself. This is she who does not consider the best glories of the Greeks and would rather do, than teach or learn. This is she who, when dealing with all the divine laws, leaves all wordy wanderings, fanciful decorations, shiny trappings, showy displays and odd curiosities, who seeks not the rind but the marrow, not the shell but the kernel, not the many, but the much, supreme and enduring good. She was what the most holy father demanded in the brothers, learned and lay; not believing she was the contrary of wisdom but rather, her true sister, though easier to acquire for those poor in knowledge and more quickly to put into use. Therefore, in the *Praises of the Virtues*, which he composed, he says: ‘Hail, Queen Wisdom! May the Lord protect you, with Your Sister holy pure Simplicity!’”

Both the Assisi Codex and the witness of Angelo Clareno in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, indicate Francis as the author of the *Salutation of the Virtues*. One of the best proofs regarding the authenticity of these Praises is the fact that Francis calls the individual virtues by the adjective of “sisters” and “ladies” (*sorores/dominae*), which is a typical way of addressing creatures and all reality on the part of Saint Francis.

These Praises consider virtues to be couples, that is, to need to be present in a “fraternal” spirit in the hearts of the brothers. Thus Wisdom is the sister of Simplicity, Poverty is the sister of Humility, Charity is the sister of Obedience.

Cambell notes that this *Praise of the Virtues* is a kind of homily in the style typical of Saint Francis, at least according to what he himself states in the *Later Rule*, chapter 9, regarding preachers: “Moreover, I admonish and exhort those brothers that when they preach their language be well-considered and chaste for the benefit and edification of the people, announcing to them vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with brevity, because Our Lord when on earth kept his word brief.”

The unity between the virtues, which depend upon each other and which cannot be observed to the exclusion of any one of them, is present in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, like Saint Ambrose, Saint Jerome, Saint Bernard and Richard of Saint Victor: “Whoever offends one of them, offends them all ... Whoever has one of them, has them all.” Francis could have known or heard of these teachings, and proposed them with brevity and simplicity in these *Praises of the Virtues*.

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