

The Testament of St. Francis

Before his death in October 1226, Francis dictated a document that he called "my testament" and said that he was writing it "so that we may observe in a more Catholic manner the Rule which we have promised to the Lord. Francis expressly told his brothers against looking on this document as "another rule," since it was only a "remembrance" or an "admonition."

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world.

And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would simply pray and speak in this way: "We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ, in all Your churches throughout the world, and we bless You, for through Your holy cross You have redeemed the world."

Afterward the Lord gave me and still gives me such faith in priests who live according to the manner of the holy Roman Church because of their order, that if they were to persecute me, I would still have recourse to them. And if I possessed as much wisdom as Solomon had and I came upon pitiful priests of this world, I would not preach contrary to thier will in the parishes in which they live.

And I desire to fear, love, and honor them and all others as my masters. And I do not wish to consider sin in them because I discern the Son of God in them and they are my masters. And I act in this way since I see nothing corporally of the Most High Son of God in this world except His Most holy Body and Blood which they receive and which they alone administer to others. And these most holy mysteries I wish to have honored above all things and to be revered and to have them reserved in precious places. Wherever I come upon His most holy written words in unbecoming places, I desire to gather them up and I ask that they be collected and placed in a suitable place. And we should honor and respect all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words as those who minister spirit and life to us.

And after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me. And those who came to receive life gave to the poor everything which they were capable of possessing and they were content with one tunic, patched inside and out, with a cord and short trousers. And we had no desire for anything more. We who were clerics used to say the Office as other clerics did; the lay brothers said the Our Father; and we quite willingly stayed in churches. And we were simple and subject to all.

And I used to work with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I firmly wish that all my brothers give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire of receiving wages for their work but as an example and in order to avoid idleness. And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, seeking alms from door to door. The Lord revealed to me a greeting, as we used to say: "May the Lord give you peace."

Let the brothers beware that they by no means receive churches or poor dwellings or anything which is built for them, unless it is in harmony with that holy poverty which we have promised in the Rule, and let them always be guests there as pilgrims and strangers. And I firmly command all of the brothers

through obedience that, wherever they are, they should not be so bold as to seek any letter from the Roman Curia either personally or through an intermediary, neither for a church or for some other place or under the guise of preaching or even for the persecution of their bodies; but wherever they have not been received, let them flee into another country to do penance with the blessing of God.

And I firmly wish to obey the minister general of this fraternity and another guardian whom it might please him to give me. And I wish to be so captive in his hands that I cannot go anywhere or do anything beyond obedience and his will, for he is my master. And although I may be simple and infirm, I wish nonetheless always to have a cleric who will celebrate the Office for me as it is contained in the Rule. And all the other brothers are bound to obey their guardians and to celebrate the Office according to the Rule. And if any are found who do not celebrate the Office according to the Rule and who wish to alter it in any way or who are not Catholics, let all the brothers be obliged through obedience that wherever they come upon such a brother they must bring him to the custodian nearest to that place where they have found him. And the custodian is strictly bound through obedience to guard him strongly as a prisoner day and night, so that he cannot be snatched from his hands until he can personally deliver him into the hands of his minister. And the minister is strictly bound through obedience to send him with brothers who shall guard him as a prisoner day and night until they deliver him before the Lord of Ostia who is the master, protector, and corrector of the entire fraternity.

And let the brothers not say: This is another Rule; because this is a remembrance, an admonition, an exhortation, and my testament, which I, little Brother Francis, prepare for all of you, my blessed brothers, so that we may observe in a more Catholic manner the Rule which we have promised to the Lord.

And the minister general and all other ministers and custodians are bound through obedience not to add to or subtract from these words. And let them always have this writing with them along with the Rule. And in all the chapters which they hold, when they read the Rule, let them also read these words. And I through obedience strictly command all my brothers, cleric and lay, not to place glosses on the Rule or on these words, saying: They are to be understood in this way. But as the Lord has granted me to speak and to write the Rule and these words simply and purely, so shall you understand them simply and without gloss, and observe them with their holy manner of working until the end.

And whoever shall have observed these things, may he be filled in heaven with the blessing of the most high Father and on earth with the blessing of His beloved Son with the most Holy Spirit the Paraclete and with all the powers of heaven and all the saints. And I, little brother Francis, your servant, inasmuch as I can, confirm for you this most holy blessing both within and without.