

THE FRANCIS TRILOGY
OF
THOMAS OF CELANO

The Life of Saint Francis
The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul
The Treatise on the Miracles of Saint Francis

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Ps 30:11 *became his helper.* Cherishing and comforting him, he embraced him
Col 3:12 in the depths of charity.

Look!

Now he wrestles naked with the naked.
After putting aside all that is *of the world*,
he is mindful only of divine justice.^a
Now he is eager to despise his own life,
by setting aside all concern for it.

1 Cor 7:33

Thus
there might be peace for him,
a poor man on a hemmed-in path,
and only the wall of the flesh would separate him
from the vision of God.

Chapter VII

HOW, WHEN CAPTURED BY BANDITS,
HE WAS THROWN INTO THE SNOW,
AND HOW HE SERVED LEPERS

¹⁶He who once enjoyed wearing scarlet robes now traveled about half-clothed. Once while he was singing praises to the Lord in French in a certain forest, thieves suddenly attacked him.^b When they savagely demanded who he was, the man of God answered confidently and forcefully: "I am the herald *of the great King!* What is it to you?" They beat him and threw him into a ditch filled with deep snow, saying: "Lie there, you stupid herald of God!" After they left, he rolled about to and fro, shook the snow off himself and jumped out of the ditch. Exhilarated with great joy, he began in a loud voice to make the woods resound with praises to the Creator of all.

Ps 48:3; Mt 27:4

a. The theme of nudity entered the language of spirituality through the literature of the early Christian martyrs, as can be seen in the *The Life of Polycarp* 13; *Acts of the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 10, 20; *Martyrdom of SS. Carpus, Pappus, and Agathonice*. It entered into medieval literature through Saint Jerome, *The Life of Paula* and Saint Gregory the Great, *Homilia in Evangelium* 32 n. 2 (PL 76, 1233). Cf. Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986); Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989).

b. The expression *lingua francigena*, translated in this text "French," refers to the language of Champagne. Francis may have learned French from his father or from accompanying him on his journeys to the trade fairs, cf. p. 192, b.

Eventually he arrived at a cloister of monks, where he spent several days covered with only a cheap shirt, serving as a scullery boy in the kitchen.^a He wanted to be fed at least some soup. No mercy was shown him and he was not even able to get some old clothes. Not moved by anger but forced by necessity, he moved on to the city of Gubbio, where he obtained a cheap tunic from an old friend. Shortly afterward, when the fame of the man of God had grown far and wide and *his name was spread* among the people, the prior of that monastery, when he recalled the event and understood what had been done to the man of God, came to him and, out of reverence for the Savior, begged forgiveness for himself and his monks.

2 Chr 26:8; Lk

¹⁷Then the holy lover of profound humility moved to the lepers and stayed with them.^b For God's sake he served all of them with great love. He washed all the filth from them, and even cleaned out the pus of their sores, just as he said in his *Testament*: "When I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers, and the Lord led me among them and I showed mercy to them." For he used to say that the sight of lepers was so bitter to him that in the days of his vanity when he saw their houses even two miles away, he would cover his nose with his hands.

Test 2

When he started thinking of holy and useful matters with the grace and *strength of the Most High*, while still in the clothes of the world, he met a leper one day. Made stronger than himself, he came up *and kissed him*.^c He then began to consider himself less and less, until by the mercy of the Redeemer, he came to complete victory over himself.

Lk 1:35

Mk 14:45

While staying in the world and following its ways, he was also a helper of the poor. He extended a hand of mercy to those who had nothing and he poured out compassion for the afflicted. One day, contrary to his custom (since he was very polite), he rebuked a poor person seeking alms from him, and he was immediately *led to penance*. He began to say *to himself* that to refuse what was asked by

Mt 27:3

a. This may have been the monastery of *San Verecondo*, today *Vallingegno*, located just south of Gubbio. The Latin word, *garcio* [scullery boy], is a term of contempt for a certain class of workers regarded as unskilled and uncouth.

b. This may be the leper hospital of San Rufino dell'Arce near the Portiuncula or that of San Lazaro close to the Rivo Torto, or that of San Salvatore delle Mura, site of the present day Casa Gualdi which lies below Assisi and halfway to Saint Mary of the Angels. The precise location is still contested. In Assisi, as in other communes, harsh rules governed the whereabouts and movements of lepers. They were forbidden to enter the city.

c. Association with lepers and outcasts was seen as part of the life of Martin of Tours and, through him, entered into the pattern of medieval spirituality. Cf. Sulpicius Severus, *The Life of Martin* 18: "At Paris, again, when Martin was entering the gate of the city, with large crowds attending him, he gave a kiss to a leper, of miserable appearance, while all shuddered at seeing him do so."

Lk 7:49
Ps 141; Acts 5:4

someone begging in the name of such a great King would be both a shame and a disgrace. And so he fixed this *in his heart*: to the best of his ability, never to deny anything to anyone begging from him for God's sake. This he did and with such care that he offered himself completely, in every way, first practicing before teaching the gospel counsel:^a *"Give to the one who begs from you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."*

Mt 5:42