

EARLIER EXHORTATION TO THE BROTHERS & SISTERS OF PENANCE The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 1209 -1215

The earliest manuscript of this writing, located in the Guarnacci Library in the Italian city of Volterra, introduces it with these words: *“These are words of life and salvation. Whoever reads and follows them will find life and draw from the Lord salvation”*. While Kajetan Esser entitled it *“The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful”*, it has been more correctly seen as an exhortation given to those first penitents who came to Francis desiring to share his Gospel way of life. Since 1976, when Kajetan Esser brought the text into prominence, it has served as the Prologue to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.

In the Name of the Lord!

[Chapter One]

Those Who Do Penance

Mk 12.30 ¹All those who love the Lord *with all their heart, and with all their soul and with all their mind, and with all their strength* and love their neighbour as themselves, ²who hate their bodies with their vices and sins, ³who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴and who produce worthy fruits of penance. ⁵O how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them, ⁶because *the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them* and *make its home and dwelling place* among them, ⁷and they are children of the heavenly Father whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mt 22.39

Is 11.2

Jn 14.23

Mt 5.45

Mt 12.50

⁸We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹We are brothers to him when we do *the will of the Father who is in heaven*. ¹⁰We are mothers when we carry him in our heart and body through a divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others.

Mt 12.50

1Cor 6.20

Mt 5.16

¹¹O how glorious it is to have a holy and great Father in heaven! ¹²O how holy, consoling to have such a beautiful and wonderful Spouse! ¹³O how holy and how loving, gratifying, humbling, peace-giving,

Earlier Exhortation

sweet, worthy of love, and, above all things, desirable to have such a Brother and such a Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for his sheep and prayed to his Father, saying: ¹⁴*Holy Father, protect in your name, those whom you gave me from the world; they were yours and you gave them to me.* ¹⁵*The words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you and they have believed that you sent me.*

Jn 10.15
Jn 17.11; Jn 17.6
Jn 17.8

¹⁶*I pray for them and not for the world.* ¹⁷*Bless and sanctify them for their sakes I sanctify myself.* ¹⁸*I ask not only on behalf of these, but for those who will believe in me through their word that they may become completely one, as we are one.*

Jn 17.9; Jn 17.17
Jn 17.19
Jn 17.20; Jn 17.23
Jn 17.11

¹⁹*Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory in your kingdom. Amen.*

Jn 17.24
Mt 20.21

[Chapter Two]

Those Who Do Not Do Penance

¹All those men and women who are not living in penance, ²who do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, ³who practise vice and sin and walk after the evil concupiscence and the evil desires of their flesh, ⁴who do not observe what they have promised to the Lord, ⁵and who in their body serve the world through the desires of the flesh, the concerns of the world and the cares of this life: ⁶they are held captive by the devil, whose children they are, and whose works they do. ⁷They are blind because they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸They do not possess spiritual wisdom because they do not have the Son of God, the true wisdom of the Father. ⁹It is said of them: they are *at their wit's end* and *rebuked* are those *who wander from your commandments.* ¹⁰They see and acknowledge, know and do evil, and knowingly lose their souls. ¹¹See, you blind ones, deceived by your enemies: the flesh, the world and the devil, because it is sweet for the body to sin and it is bitter to serve God, ¹²for every vice and sin flow and *proceed from the human heart* as the Lord says in the Gospel. ¹³And you have nothing in this world or in that to come. ¹⁴And you think that you will possess this world's vanities for a long time, but you are deceived because a day and an hour will come of which you give no thought, which you do not know, and of which you are unaware when the body becomes weak, death approaches and it dies a bitter death. ¹⁵And no matter where, when or how a person dies in the guilt of sin without penance and satisfaction, if that person can perform an act of satisfaction and does not do so, the devil snatches that soul from its body with such anguish and distress that no one can know [what it is like] except the

Jn 8.41
Ps 107.27
Ps 119.21
Mt 15.19; Mk 7.21

one receiving it.

2 Chr 1.12 ¹⁶And every talent, ability, *knowledge and wisdom* they think they
Lk 8.18; Mk 4.25 have will be taken away from them. ¹⁷And they leave their wealth to
their relatives and friends who take and divide it and afterwards say:
“May this soul be cursed because this person could have given us
more and acquired more than what was distributed to us”. ¹⁸Worms
eat this body and so body and soul perish in this brief world and they
will go to hell where they will be tortured forever.

1 Jn 4.16 ¹⁹In the love which is God we beg all those whom these words reach
to receive those fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ written
above with divine love and kindness. ²⁰And let whoever does not
know how to read have them read to them frequently. ²¹Because *they*
Jn 6.63 *are spirit and life*, they should preserve them together with a holy
activity to the end.

Rom 14.12 ²²And whoever has not done these things *will be held accountable*
Mt 12.36 before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ *on the day of judgment*.