

THE TESTAMENT, 1226

This document, which Saint Francis dictated as his health deteriorated and death drew near in 1226, has come to be known as *The Testament* and has remained a primary expression of Francis' profound wisdom and vision. While popular tradition maintains that it was written at the Portiuncula while he was dying, the document's different styles of writing suggest that it was written at different moments of those final days and was prompted by different questions swirling around his simple Gospel vision.

cf. Sir 35.4 ¹The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. ²And the Lord himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. ³And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.

⁴And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way and say: ⁵ 'We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, in all your churches throughout the whole world and we bless you because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world'.

cf. 1Kgs 4.30-31 ⁶Afterwards the Lord gave me, and gives me still, such faith in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them. ⁷And if I had as much wisdom as Solomon and found impoverished priests of this world, I would not preach in their parishes against their will. ⁸And I desire to respect, love and honour them and all others as my lords. ⁹And I do not want to consider any sin in them because I discern the Son of God in them and they are my lords. ¹⁰And I act in this way because, in this world, I see nothing corporally of the most high Son of God except his most holy Body and Blood which they receive and they alone administer to others. ¹¹ I want to have these most holy mysteries honoured and venerated above all things and I want to reserve them in precious places. ¹²Wherever I find our Lord's most holy names and written words in unbecoming places, I want to gather them up, and I beg that they be gathered up and placed in a becoming place. ¹³And we must honour all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words and respect them as those who minister to us *spirit and life*.

Jn 6.64

¹⁴And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what

- I had to do, but the Most High himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the holy Gospel. ¹⁵And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me. ¹⁶And those who came to receive life gave whatever they had to the poor and were content with one tunic, patched inside and out, with a cord and short trousers. ¹⁷We desired nothing more. ¹⁸We clerical [brothers] said the Office as other clerics did; the lay brothers said the *Our Father*; and we quite willingly remained in churches. ¹⁹And we were simple and subject to all.
- Mat 6.9-13*
- Acts 20.34* ²⁰And *I worked with my hands* and I still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work. ²¹Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness. ²²And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door. ²³The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say: *May the Lord give you peace.*
- 2Thes 3.16*
- cf. 1Pet 2.11* ²⁴Let the brothers be careful not to receive in any way churches or poor dwellings or anything else built for them unless they are according to the holy poverty we have promised in the Rule. As pilgrims and strangers, let them always be guests there.
- Mt 10.23* ²⁵I strictly command all the brothers through obedience, wherever they may be, not to dare to ask any letter from the Roman Curia, either personally or through an intermediary, whether for a church or another place or under the pretext of preaching, or the persecution of their bodies. ²⁶But, wherever they have not been received, let *them flee to the next* country to do penance with the blessing of God.
- ²⁷And I firmly wish to obey the general minister of this fraternity and the other guardian whom it pleases him to give me. ²⁸And I so wish to be a captive in his hands that I cannot go anywhere or do anything beyond obedience and his will, for he is my master.
- ²⁹And although I may be simple and infirm, I nevertheless want to have a cleric always with me who will celebrate the Office for me as it is prescribed in the *Rule*.
- ³⁰And let all the brothers be bound to obey their guardians and to recite the Office according to the Rule. ³¹And if some might have been found who are not reciting the Office according to the Rule and want to change it in some way, or who are not Catholics, let all the brothers, wherever they may have found one of them, be bound through obedience to bring him before the custodian of that place nearest to where they found him. ³²And let the custodian be strictly bound

through obedience to keep him securely day and night as a man in chains, so that he cannot be taken from his hands until he can personally deliver him into the hands of his minister. ³³And let the minister be bound through obedience to send him with such brothers who would guard him as a prisoner until they deliver him to the Lord of Ostia, who is the Lord, the Protector and the Corrector of this fraternity.

³⁴And the brothers may not say, 'This is another rule'. Because this is a remembrance, admonition, exhortation, and my testament which I, little brother Francis, make for you, my blessed brothers, that we might observe the Rule we have promised in a more Catholic way.

cf. Dt 4.2; 12.32 ³⁵And let the general minister and all the other ministers and custodians be bound through obedience not to add to or take away from these words. ³⁶And let them always have this writing with them together with the Rule. ³⁷And in all the Chapters which they hold, when they read the Rule, let them also read these words. ³⁸And I strictly command all my cleric and lay brothers, through obedience, not to place any gloss upon the Rule or upon these words, saying: 'They should be understood in this way.' ³⁹But as the Lord has given me to speak and to write the Rule and these words simply and purely, may you understand them simply and without gloss and observe them with a holy activity until the end.

cf. Gen 27-28 ⁴⁰And whoever observes these things, let him be blessed 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 all the powers of heaven and with all the saints. ⁴¹And, as far as I can, I, little brother Francis, your servant, confirm for you, both within and without, this most holy blessing.