

MIRA CIRCA NOS: The Bull of Canonization of St. Francis of Assisi Pope Gregory IX

*Given on the occasion of the canonization of St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226 A. D.)
in 1228 A. D.*

1. How wondrously considerate of us is God's pity! How priceless a love of charity which would sacrifice a Son to redeem a slave! God neither neglected the gifts of his mercy nor failed to protect uninterruptedly the vineyard planted by his hand. He sent laborers into it at the eleventh hour to cultivate it, and with their hoes and plowshares to uproot the thorns and thistles, as did Samgar when he killed 600 Philistines (Judges 3: 31). After the copious branches were pruned and the sucker roots with the briars were pulled out, this vineyard will produce a luscious, appetizing fruit, one capable of storage in the wine cellar of eternity, once purified in the wine-press of patience. Wickedness had indeed blazed like fire, and the human heart had grown cold, so as to destroy the wall surrounding this vineyard, just as the attacking Philistines were destroyed by the poison of worldly pleasures.

2. Behold how the Lord, when he destroyed the earth by water, saved the just man with a contemptible piece of wood (Wis. 10:4), did not allow the scepter of the ungodly to fall upon the lot of the just (Ps 124:3). Now, at the eleventh hour, he has called forth his servant, Blessed Francis, a man after his own heart (I Sam 13: 14). This man was a light, despised by the rich, nonetheless prepared for the appointed moment. Him the Lord sent into his vineyard to uproot the thorns and thistles. God cast down this lamp before the attacking Philistines, thus illumining his own land and with earnest exhortation warning it to be reconciled with God.

3. On hearing within his soul his friend's voice of invitation Francis without hesitation arose, and as another Samson strengthened by God's grace, shattered the fetters of a flattering world. Filled with the zeal of the Spirit and seizing the jawbone of an ass, he conquered not only a thousand, but many thousands of Philistines (Judges 15: 15-16) by his simple preaching, unadorned with the persuasive words of human wisdom (I Cor 1:17), and made forceful by the power of God, who chooses the weak of this world to confound the strong (I Cor 1:17). With the help of God he accomplished this: God who touches mountains and they smoke (Ps 103:32), so bringing to spiritual service those who were once slaves to the allurements of the flesh. For those who died to sin and live only for God and not for themselves (namely, whose worse part has died), there flowed from this jawbone an abundant stream of water: refreshing, cleansing, rendering fruitful the fallen, downtrodden and thirsty. This river of water reaching unto eternal life (Jn 7: 38), might be purchased without silver and without cost (Is 55:1), and like branches far and wide its rivulets watered the vineyard whose branches extended unto the sea and its boughs unto the river (Ps 79:12).

4. After the example of our father Abraham, this man forgot not only his country and acquaintances, but also his father's house, to go to a land which the Lord had shown him by divine inspiration (Gen 12). Pushing aside any obstacle he pressed on to win the prize of his heavenly call (Phil. 3:14). Conforming himself to Him (Rom 8:29) who, though rich, for our sake became poor (II Cor 8:9), he unburdened

himself of a heavy load of material possessions so as to pass easily through the narrow gate (Mt 7:13). He disbursed his wealth to the poor, so that his justice might endure forever (Ps 111:9).

Nearing the land of vision he offered his own body as a holocaust to the Lord upon one of the mountains indicated to him (Gen 22:2), the mountain which is the excellence of faith. His flesh, which now and then had tricked him, he sacrificed as Jephthe his only daughter (Judges 11:34), lighting under it the fire of love, punishing it with hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness and with many fasts and vigils. When it had been crucified with its vices and concupiscences (Gal 5:24), he could say with the Apostle: "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). For he really did not live for himself any longer, but rather for Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification (Rom 4:25), that we might no longer be slaves to sin (Rom 6:6).

Uprooting his vices and like Jacob arising at the Lord's command (Gen 35:1-11) he renounced wife and farm and oxen and all which might distract those invited to the great feast (Lk 14:15-20), and took up the battle with the world, the flesh and the spiritual forces of wickedness on high. And as he had received the sevenfold grace of the Spirit and the help of the eight beatitudes of the Gospel, he journeyed to Bethel, the house of God, on a path which he had traced in the fifteen steps of the virtues mystically represented in the Psalter (gradual Psalms). After he had made of his heart an altar for the Lord, he offered upon it the incense of devout prayers to be taken up to the Lord at the hands of angels whose company he would soon join.

5. But that he might not be the only one to enjoy the blessings of the mountain, clinging exclusively to the embraces of Rachel, as it were to a life of contemplation lovely but sterile, he descended to the forbidden house of Leah to lead into the desert the flock fertile with twins (Cant 4:2) and seeking pastures of life (Gen 29). There, where the manna of heavenly sweetness restores all who have been separated from the noisy world, he would be seated with the princes of his people and crowned with the crown of justice. Sowing his seed in tears, he would come back rejoicing carrying his sheaves to the storehouse of eternity (Ps 125:5-6).

Surely he sought not his own interests (Phil 2:21), but those of Christ, serving Him zealously like the proverbial bee. As the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full (Eccles. 50,6), he took in his hands a lamp with which to draw the humble by the example of his glorious deeds, and a trumpet wherewith to recall the shameless with stern and fearsome warnings from their wicked abandon.

Thus strengthened by charity he courageously took possession of the Midianite camp (Judges 7:16-22), that is, the camp of those who contemptuously disregard the teaching of the Church, with the support of Him who encompassed the whole world by His authority, even while still cloistered in the Virgin's womb. He captured the weapons on which the well-armed man trusted while guarding his house and parceling out his spoils (Lk 11:21-22), and he led captivity captive in submission to Jesus Christ (Eph 4:8).

6. After defeating the threefold earthly enemy, he did violence to the kingdom of heaven and seized it by force (Mt 11:12). After many glorious battles in this life he

triumphed over the world, and he who was knowingly unlettered and wisely foolish, happily returned to the Lord to take the first place before many others more learned.

7. Plainly a life such as his, so holy, so passionate, so brilliant, was enough to win him a place in the Church Triumphant. Yet, because the Church Militant, which can only observe the outer appearances, does not presume to judge on its own authority those not sharing its actual state, it proposes for veneration as Saints only those whose lives on earth merited such, especially because an angel of Satan sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light (II Cor 11:14). In his generosity the omnipotent and merciful God has provided that the aforementioned Servant of Christ did come and serve Him worthily and commendably. Not permitting so great a light to remain hidden under a bushel, but wishing to put it on a lampstand to console those dwelling in the house of light (Mt 5:15), God declared through many brilliant miracles that his life has been acceptable to God and his memory should be honored by the Church Militant.

8. Therefore, since the wondrous events of his glorious life are quite well known to us because of the great familiarity he had with us while we still occupied a lower rank, and since we are fully convinced by reliable witnesses of the many brilliant miracles, we and the flock entrusted to us, by the mercy of God, are confident of being assisted at his intercession and of having in heaven a patron whose friendship we enjoyed on earth. With the consultation and approval of our Brothers, we have decreed that he be enrolled in the catalogue of saints worthy of veneration.

9. We decree that his birth be celebrated worthily and solemnly by the universal Church on the fourth of October, the day on which he entered the kingdom of heaven, freed from the prison of the flesh.

10. Hence, in the Lord we beg, admonish and exhort all of you, we command you by this apostolic letter, that on this day reserved to honor his memory, you dedicate yourselves more intensely to the divine praises, and humbly to implore his patronage, so that through his intercession and merits you might be found worthy of joining his company with the help of Him who is blessed forever. Amen.

<Given at Perugia, on the fourteenth calends of August, in the second year of our pontificate.>

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