



**Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations**  
**The Chronicle of Thomas of Eccleston**  
**By Fr. Cuthbert OSFC**

**M**

**Meditation – Franciscan History**

**CHAPTER IV**

**OF THE PRIMITIVE PIETY OF THE BRETHREN**

The brethren at that time, having the first-fruits of the Holy Spirit, served the Lord not so much by the observance of human constitutions as by the free outpouring of their piety, being content with their Rule and the very few other statutes which were made the same year that the Rule was confirmed.

This was the first statute made by St. Francis after the Rule was confirmed (as we are told Brother Albert of pious memory): namely that the brethren when they eat with seculars should not take more than three morsels of food continuously, that the holy Gospel might be observed, for a rumour had reached St. Francis that the brethren ate voraciously.

Now the brethren were accustomed to keep silence until the hour of terce, and so assiduous were they in prayer that there was scarcely an hour of night when some one of them was not at prayer in the oratory. Moreover, on the principal feasts they chanted with such fervor that their vigils sometimes lasted the whole night, and although there might be but three or four brethren, or at the most six, they sang the office solemnly according to note. Such too was their simplicity and purity that did any of them suffer any shame he confessed it before all the brethren of the chapter. There grew up amongst them a most religious custom never to swear to anything but simply to say, “Know that it is so.” Were anyone accused by his superior or companion, he at once replied, “Mea culpa!” and frequently prostrated. Wherefore Brother Jordan of holy memory, Master-General of the Friars Preachers, related how when the devil once appeared to him he said that this “Mea culpa!” snatched from his grasp whatever he had hoped to get from amongst the Friars Minor, since whenever one offended against another he always acknowledged his fault to the other.



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Yet the brethren at all times were joyful and merry amongst themselves that they could scarcely restrain their laughter even if they merely exchanged a glance. Whence it happened that at Oxford, where the young brethren were frequently given to much laughter, it was enjoined on one of them to take the discipline as often as he laughed in the choir or the refectory. Now it happened that one day when he had received the discipline eleven times and nevertheless could not restrain himself from laughing, one night following he dreamt that the whole community were standing according to the custom in the choir, and as usual the brethren were tempted to laugh, when behold! The crucifix which stood at the door of the choir turned towards them, as though it were alive, and said, “they are the sons of Core who at the time of divine office laugh and sleep.” It seemed to him also that the figure on the crucifix strove to free its hands from the cross as though wishing to come down and go away, but the Guardian immediately went up and made the nails fast so that the figure could not come down. When this dream was related to the brethren they were terrified, and henceforth bore themselves more seriously and without overmuch laughter.

So jealous were they for the truth that they would hardly permit themselves to speak in hyperbole, nor would they conceal their faults even when they knew that they would be punished did they confess. Whether in going to new places or in abiding in the place they were already in they made no difficulty, nor in regard to any matter or place whatsoever, once they knew it was the superior’s will. Whence it happened that brethren, noble by birth or in other ways, who were notable men in the world and most respected in the Order, would, without a murmur, allow themselves to be sent to places which in those days might be said to be simple wildernesses. This only, in the sweetness of their souls, seemed to sadden them, that they should have to separate from each other; wherefore the brethren would frequently accompany those who were sent away unto a far distance, and at parting copious tears of affection would show how they loved one another.