



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
The Life of St. Francis of Assisi
By St. Bonaventure O.F. M.

M Meditation – Franciscan Poverty

Chapter Seven: On his Love of Poverty and the Miraculous Fulfillment of his Needs

Among the gifts of grace which Francis received from God the generous Giver,
He merited as a special privilege to grow in the riches of simplicity through his love of the highest poverty.

The holy man saw that poverty was the close companion of the Son of God,
And now that it was rejected by the whole world, he was eager to espouse it *in everlasting love*.
For the sake of poverty he not only *left his father and mother*, but also gave away everything he had.

No one was so greedy for gold as he was for poverty;
Nor was anyone so anxious to guard his treasure as he was in guarding this pearl of the Gospel.

In this especially would his sight be offended if he saw in the friars
anything which did not accord completely with poverty.

Indeed, from the beginning of his religious life until his death,
His only riches were a tunic, a cord, and underclothes; and with this much he was content.

He used to frequently call to mind with tears the poverty of Jesus Christ and his mother,
Claiming that it was the queen of the virtues because it shone forth so preeminently
In the *King of Kings* and in the Queen, his mother.

When the friars asked him at a gathering what virtue does more to make one a friend of Christ, he replied as if opening up the hidden depths of his heart: “Know, brothers, that poverty is the special way to salvation, as the stimulus of humility and the root of perfection, whose fruit is manifold but hidden. This is the Gospel’s treasure *hidden in the field* (Mt. 13:44); to buy this we should sell everything, and in comparison to this we should spurn everything we cannot sell.”

Whoever desires to attain the height of poverty should renounce in some way not only worldly wisdom but also learning, that having renounced such a possession, he *might enter into the mighty works of the Lord* (Ps. 70:15-16) and offer himself naked to the arms of the Crucified. No one can be said to have perfectly renounced the world if he still keeps the purse of his own opinion in the hidden recesses of his heart.

...For he used to say that the law of pilgrims was to take shelter under another’s roof, to thirst for their homeland and to travel peacefully. Sometimes he ordered the friars to tear down a house they had built or to move out of it if he noticed something contrary to Gospel poverty either because they had appropriated it as their possession or because it was too sumptuous. He used to say that poverty was the foundation of the Order, on which the entire structure of their religious life so basically depended that it would stand firm if poverty were firm and collapse completely if poverty were undermined.

He taught, as he had learned from revelation, that one entering the holy Order should begin from this text of the Gospel: *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all that you have, and give to the poor* (Mt. 19:21)...



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...Francis' vicar came to him, pointed out the destitution of the friars and asked permission to keep aside some of the goods of the novices when they entered so that the friars could have something to fall back on in case of necessity. ...Francis said to him: "Let it be far from us dearest brother, to sin against the rule for the sake of any man. I prefer that you strip the altar of the glorious Virgin, when necessity requires it, than to tamper even a little with the vow of poverty and the observance of the Gospel. The Bless Virgin will be more pleased to have her altar stripped and the Gospel counsel observed perfectly rather than to have her altar adorned and her Son's counsel neglected when we have promised to keep it.

One time when the man of God was going through Apulia near Bari with a companion, he found on the road a large purse, of the type they call *funda*, apparently bursting with money. His companion advised him and nagged him to pick up the purse from the ground and give the money to the poor. The man of God refused, claiming there was a trick of the devil in this purse they had found and that the friar was recommending something sinful rather than meritorious, namely to take what belonged to another and give it away. They left the place and hurried to finish the journey they had begun. But the friar was not yet satisfied, deluded as he was by a false sense of charity; he kept bothering the man of God as if the latter had no concern to relieve the destitution of the poor. Finally the patient man agreed to return to the place—not to carry out the friar's wish, but to uncover the devil's trickery. So he returned to the purse with the friar and with a young man who was on the road. After praying, he commanded his companion to pick it up. The friar was dumbfounded and trembled, for now had a premonition of some diabolic manifestation.

Nevertheless, because of the command of holy obedience, he drove away the doubt in his heart and stretched out his hand toward the purse; and behold, a large snake jumped out of the purse and suddenly disappeared along with it, showing the friar that this was the deception of the devil. The enemy's trickery and cunning were grasped, and the holy man said to his companion: "To the servants of God, brother, money is the very devil and a poisonous snake."

...They offered him the gift of a new salutation, saying: "Welcome, Lady Poverty!" When he heard this, the true lover of poverty was filled with unspeakable joy because there was nothing in him that he would rather have people acknowledge that what these women singled out.

They suddenly disappeared, and when his companions considered their remarkable similarity, their novel greeting, their strange meeting and disappearance, they concluded not without reason that this had some mystical meaning for the holy man.

It seemed that these three women who were so alike in appearance, who gave such an unusual greeting, and disappeared so suddenly, appropriately showed that the beauty of Gospel perfection, in poverty, chastity, and obedience, shone forth all perfectly equal in the man of God, although he had chosen to glory above all in the privilege of poverty which he used to call his mother, his bride, and his lady.

It was in poverty that he desired to surpass others because from it he had learned to regard himself inferior to all.