

# T LITTLE PORTION

The Magazine of the Third Order, Society of St Francis, European Province



*Saint Francis and Brother Leo In Meditation*  
(El Greco)

Br. Leo, Francis's closest companion, was our editor's favourite saint. Richenda intended to write an article about him herself in this issue, but her unexpected death on 4th July intervened. Leo was Francis's secretary and confessor during the last six years of his life, with him as the saint dictated the 1223 Rule in Fonte Colombo, with him on Mount La Verna when Francis received the stigmata in 1224, and faithfully nursing him through his final illness in 1226.

All of us on the Editorial Board miss the leadership and inspiration given by Richenda during the four years she was the Editor of 'Little Portion', and she requested most of the articles in this issue. They cover a large number of Franciscan 'saints' who lived from Francis's own time to the 20th century. We have welcomed many new contributors who will hopefully write for future issues. Above all we pray that you will all be inspired by the stories in these pages, and we hope no.27 is a fitting tribute to the dedicated work of Richenda Milton-Daws.

## Franciscan Saints

### Contents

#### *Theme Articles*

We are all saints	2
Francis and the flowering of 'sainthood'	3
Elizabeth of Hungary	4
Anthony of Padua	6
Giles of Assisi	7
Bonaventure	9
Agnes of Prague	10
Margaret of Cortona	12
Jacopone da Todi	13
John Duns Scotus	14

Angela of Foligno	15
Joseph of Cupertino	17
Maximilian Kolbe	18
John Cyril Hawes	20
John Bradburne	21
Francis - the Saint and the Pope	22
Walking with the saints:	
Pio Forgione, Jean Vianney, Mychal Judge	24
What Next?	27
Books Recommended	28
Author interview: Susan Pitchford	30

## THEME ARTICLES

Franciscan  
Saints***We are all saints***

**Alan Williams** is a member of the Midlands West Area and the current Provincial Communications Guardian.

***“Enjoy them while you can; they’ll be teenagers before you know it!”***

That is something I often say to baptism families when they come with their infant for baptism. I volunteer with a Scout group, and I know only too well that adolescence kicks in around the age of 10 these days, and following rules or instructions becomes rather arbitrary.

The other thing I ensure that our baptism families know is that we will be making their child a saint (sanctus) of God, made holy (sanctified) through the sacred water, and given a guarantee of future forgiveness when they genuinely seek it. Something that is true for all those of us who have been baptised.



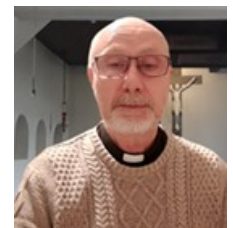
I am grateful that our Lord’s most precious command is that we *love* one another, because nowhere does he seem to instruct us to *like*.....

....My test for loving someone is: if a van is hurtling towards someone, would we risk our safety to push them to theirs? I hope that the answer from each of us will be yes, yet we know that the path to sainthood is full of trial and failure, which we offer to God seeking his strength, and forgiveness where necessary.

We have been created in the image and likeness of God, whoever we are, whatever our lifestyle is and whatever we look like. That is very clearly stated in scripture. But from the very beginning of time, we have failed to follow God’s laws and are thus sinners. The saints mentioned in this edition of *Little Portion* are all that joyous mix of saint and sinner, trying and failing, picking themselves up and doing better the next time. Some, like our own Seraphic Father, may well have been garrulous and difficult to live with. Others will have been faithful to the end, great examples of godly living and true heroes of the faith.

As saints we must constantly ask of ourselves: Do we turn to Christ – or do we get bogged down with the worries of the world? Do we repent of our sins – or fail to recognise the times our actions and words betray the love of God for his creation? Do we renounce evil – or stand idly by while evil happens and we say nothing to call it out?

The saints of old and of our modern era are those who remember the baptismal covenant that was either made for them by parents and godparents, or that they made for themselves, who do all that is in their ability to carry those promises out, and who recognise when they fail. Many of us keep our spiritual fingers crossed and hope that no one else (or God!) notices.



## Francis and the flowering of 'sainthood'

**Sue McCoulough**, from the *Axe Valley group in the Devon Area*, is the newest member of the *Little Portion Editorial Board*.



### **Pope Innocent III approves the Rule**

*The seventh of 28 scenes mostly painted by Giotto in the Upper Basilica of St Francis in Assisi.*

A glance through this edition of *Little Portion* will reveal that St Francis attracted a number of contemporary or near contemporary followers, including third order members, who were later canonised. Whilst still tending to favour pomp and pageantry in their own lives, the papal leaders of the 13th century began the formal process towards canonisation of saints. Prior to this, beatification generally happened at a local level, involving the local bishop, synod and often the ruler. Why did this 'centralisation' take place?

My reading suggests that the 13th century western church was deliberately strengthening its 'status quo', seen to be under attack from all sides during Francis' time. In Western Europe the Holy Roman Empire was in decline, though still accounting for much of modern northern and central Europe. Until the 12th century, this Empire was one of the most powerful monarchies in Europe, depending on cooperation between emperor and vassals, but by Francis' lifetime it was fragmenting and so becoming less of an empire. The Eastern Roman (*Byzantine*) imperial church headed by Constantinople was becoming

increasingly sidelined, especially as the Ottoman Turks had taken over most of what was the former glory of Byzantium.

Why would a 'holy fool' like Francis appeal to a Church actively engaged in propping up its declining power, with seemingly endless crusades and other expressions of 'sacred violence'? After all, other groups were quickly suppressed if deemed heretical, e.g. the Cathars, who believed God was wholly Spirit and that Satan was another god, existing wholly in the material world as a corrupting influence. By contrast, Franciscan teaching sees our natural world as sacramental, displaying the colour, diversity and abundance of our Creator's love.

One would have thought Francis was preaching a dangerous gospel, given that 'equality' issues would not be fully addressed for a number of centuries. Yet church authorities in 1215 declared that the Waldensians were heretics, not because they preached apostolic poverty, which Franciscans also preached, but because they refused to recognise the prerogatives of local bishops over their preaching content or even to provide standards about who was fit to preach.

Francis was more modest, compassionate and open about what his followers were called, or not called, to do. Indeed, the Franciscans themselves held different opinions on how literally to accept his call to radical material poverty - and still do! Francis' radical commitment to embracing simplicity and nonviolence, whilst being seen as totally counter cultural in his day, was lived out with such delightful joy that the church authorities must have warmed to him and his followers. Plus Francis taught his followers to have an open and modest readiness to welcome ridicule and persecution, which would have made him engaging and less of a threat to the authorities. ....Continued overleaf

*'Francis and the flowering of 'sainthood', continued . . . . .*

I hope I don't sound too cynical about the papacy's motives in welcoming Francis and his followers, and taking control of the canonisation of saints. I'm sure they saw Francis' authentic holiness as soon as it was witnessed first hand. Other orders would have their saints recognised too and the rise of scholasticism at that time surely hastened the papal decision to honour some notable souls, many of whom allowed their lives to be turned upside down in total identification and dedication to Christ. There was humble acknowledgement from the apparently worldly Pope Innocent III, who was won over by Francis to endorse his newly formed order. Innocent said *'This man (Francis) merely wishes us to live according to the Gospel. Now if we tell him that this surpasses human strength, then we are declaring that it is impossible to follow the Gospel, and blaspheming Christ, the author of the Gospel.'* #

#*The Franciscan Saints by Robert Ellsberg, Franciscan Media, Cincinnati, Ohio, pub 2017*



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## Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231)

*Martin Cooke is a member of the Chichester group in the Sussex area.*



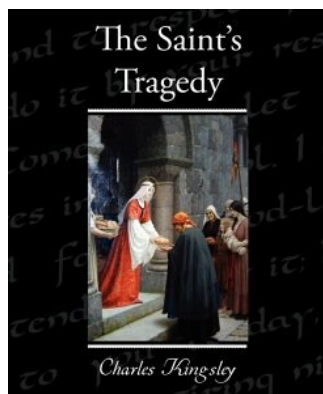
In her brief life Elizabeth, this daughter of a Hungarian king, was influential in the spread of secular Franciscan groups across Europe and later on in the rediscovery of the third order by a member of the Anglican communion. Aged 14 she was married to the German ruler of Thuringia, until his death six years later. In 1223 she began to learn about Saint Francis from some of the first friars and started vigorously to use her inherited wealth to fund alms to the poor. She also had a leper hospital built at Marburg (in Thuringia) as a consequence of her becoming professed in the third order. News of this initiative may well have encouraged Franciscan missionaries' zeal at that time in starting to offer in England residential care for those with that incurable disease, even in small cities like Chichester.

After her death she was soon given saintly status as a result of the information provided to the pope about her good work with lepers and the vulnerable poor. She became the patron saint of bakers because of her enthusiasm in supplying daily bread to the deprived.

By the 14<sup>th</sup> century her shrine at Marburg had become a very popular pilgrimage centre. The intensity of her application of Franciscan humility is revealed in this incident: before she prayed in the chapel at her husband's castle Elizabeth would remove her crown and place it before the cross. One day her mother-in-law saw her taking that action and reprimanded her. She responded "*How can I, a wretched creature, continue to wear an earthly crown when my Christ is crowned with thorns?*"

### **Revival of interest in Saint Elizabeth**

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a translation of an account of Saint Elizabeth's life by her contemporary, Dietrich of Thuringia, gained the attention of an English writer. He was the Anglican priest Charles Kingsley, famous as the author of the story for readers of all ages, "The Water Babies". In 1848 he wrote a long poetic version of Dietrich's biography entitled "The Saint's Tragedy". In it he emphasised the tensions Elizabeth experienced between her noble lineage and her commitment to a life of humble service overshadowed by the tragic loss of her husband. In a footnote Kingsley strongly praised St Francis for his initiative in creating the third order: "*This order was an invention of the creative mind of that truly great man, St Francis, by which worldlings were enabled to participate in the spiritual advantages of the Franciscan rule and discipline without neglect of their family and civic duties*". Kingsley was then active in promoting Christian Socialism which may have strengthened his admiration for the social welfare Elizabeth led with great determination.



His response to the life of St Elizabeth is a very early Anglican example of interest in laity practising the Franciscan charism, some 50 years before Sabatier's life of St Francis helped bring about the revival that led to our Third Order.

Another admirer of St Elizabeth was the composer Franz Liszt. In 1873 he wrote an oratorio about her giving up her bed for a leper.

An order of St Elizabeth was formed in 1916 by a group from the Confraternity of the Divine Love to share Elizabeth's compassion for the poor. They took over a house at Heathfield in East Sussex which became a much appreciated retreat venue until the 1980s.



I found this prayer that sums up this saint's contribution to our Order on one of the many online informative websites about her:

*"Saint Elizabeth,  
you dedicated yourself  
to your crucified Lord.  
From an early age  
you rejected the vanities of this world.  
May we also reject all that is vain  
and choose our Lord and His will  
above all else."*



## Anthony of Padua

### (1195-1231)

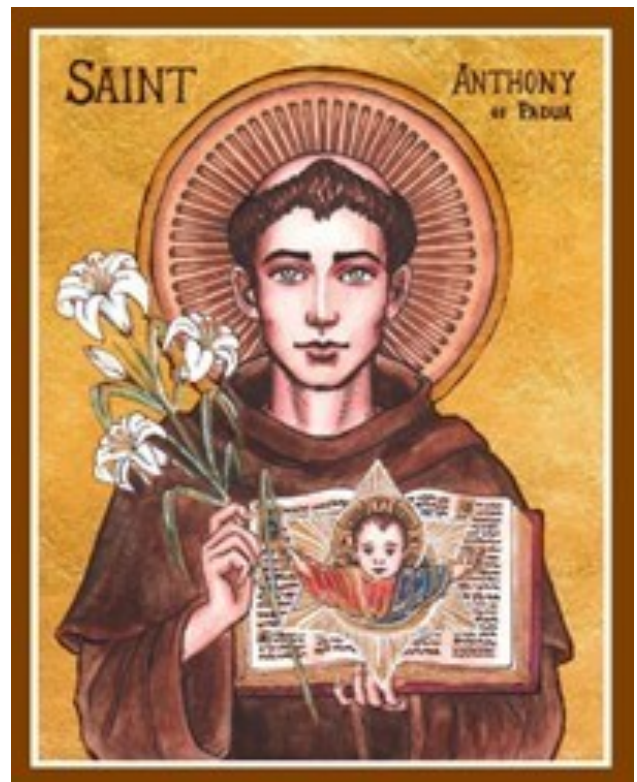
*Alex Firman is a Novice in the Borders Area, and Assistant Curate in the Diocese of Newcastle.*

St Anthony of Padua is best known as the patron saint of lost things, so if you've lost your car keys again, St Anthony is your man. Anthony's patronage is not just confined to lost items but lost people and lost souls. In his lifetime, Anthony found himself losing the path he expected to follow, but in doing so he brought the word of God to those who were lost and marginalised in society.

Born in Lisbon to a wealthy family and named Fernando he started an early monastic career, joining an Augustinian abbey in his hometown at the age of 15. Wanting to find a quieter contemplative life, he was transferred to study theology in Coimbra. It was there he first met Franciscans and heard of some friars who had been martyred for preaching in Morocco. Fernando felt it was his calling to follow their example and asked to be released from the Augustinians to join the Franciscans. On joining, Fernando took a new name, the first recorded instance of someone doing that when professing religious vows. He was now named Anthony, in memory of the Desert Father Anthony the Great, whose life of simplicity and solitude he hoped to emulate.

Once in Morocco, Anthony fell ill and was sent back to Spain by his superiors. The ship he was on was blown off course by storm and eventually landed across the Mediterranean in Sicily. Anthony was given care and shelter by friars there and as he recovered he pursued a life of solitude and contemplation, becoming a hermit and taking simple jobs amongst Franciscan

communities in Italy. However one day, when he was accompanying his brothers to an ordination of Franciscans and Dominicans, it was realised no-one had prepared a sermon. Since nobody else came forward, Anthony was eventually asked if he would preach and in his preaching he combined his theological studies with sincerity and enthusiasm. From this moment his reputation for preaching grew and led him to meet with St Francis. After recognising their shared devotion to poverty and proclaiming Christ to the world, Francis gave his approval for Anthony to accept lecturing posts at universities, and entrusted any Franciscan friars who wished to study for ordination to his care.



In both Italy and France Anthony's reputation for preaching continued to grow and draw in many people to hear Christ preached. One of his students in France was the later mystic writer Thomas a Kempis and his sermons influenced the Franciscan theologian Bonaventure.

At a time when people were disgusted with the Church's wealth and defence of its status, he preached about the life of poverty and joy found in the Gospels to call people back to faith. Eventually residing in Padua, he still found time to go into solitude and even found a grotto near the city. He also used his authority as a celebrated preacher to change laws that punished debtors in the city.

Anthony died at the age of 35. He was made a saint in 1232 and proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1946 for his energy in preaching the gospel. His journey took him from solitude to academic study and celebrated preacher. Although he desired the life of a hermit, he went into the world and used his experiences to draw people disillusioned with or forgotten by the Church to know God was present with them. Anthony's life is an example of being taken in unexpected directions, but still looking for and making God's presence known in the lost corners of the world.

### Questions for Reflection

- ❖ Anthony always sought a life of contemplation but was drawn into a busy public life. Do we ever find that struggle in our lives?
- ❖ Are we able to find a resolution to that tension as Anthony did in Padua?
- ❖ Anthony used both his academic studies with the Augustinians and the spirituality of the Franciscans to be an effective preacher. Do we look for ways that our previous life experiences build upon each to share the gospel in our own way?

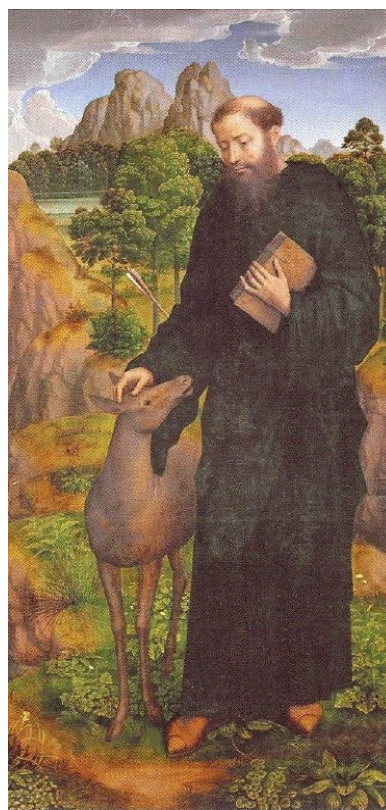


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## Giles of Assisi (1190-1262)

*Andrew Mayes is the Formation Guardian for the Wyevern Area.*

Not a superstar in the firmament of Franciscan saints but a real character, Giles was a down-to-earth, dusty mystic, an itinerant, pilgrim, radical and visionary, a fool for Christ.



One of the very first to follow Francis, he'd been a farmer until he heard the call which set him out on many apostolic travels. In his journeys he insisted on procuring by manual labour what food and shelter he needed, making baskets, cutting wood, treading the wine-press, digging graves – doing whatever was needed at the time. Living out a practical mysticism, he united the apostolic and contemplative, the prophetic and mystical. While the guest of a cardinal at Rieti he insisted on sweeping the house and cleaning the knives!

.....Continued overleaf

*Giles of Assisi, continued . . . . .*

We have his teaching in collected sayings – short, pithy counsels. He was a bit of a rebel and didn't mince his words. Marked by humanity and originality, they authentically reflect early Franciscan spirit and teaching. He experienced prayer as transformative:

*The graces and virtues found in prayer are many. You are enlightened in mind. You are strengthened in faith. You know your weaknesses. You arrive at holy fear and humility and self-knowledge. You gain contrition of heart. You are purified in conscience. You are confirmed in patience. You learn obedience. You come to true discretion and discernment. You reach high knowledge. You come to understanding. You acquire fortitude. You receive wisdom. You arrive at the knowledge of God who reveals himself to those who adore him in spirit and in truth. You become inflamed with love, fragrant with grace, and, attaining courtesy and sweetness, led to peace of mind and finally come to glory.*

I imagine him then saying “so, go for it!” He testified to seven degrees in contemplation:

- *fire: a divine light floods the soul with light*
- *anointing: a wonderful fragrance invades the soul (Song of Songs 1:3)*
- *ecstasy: the soul experiences a rapture and becomes withdrawn from the bodily senses*
- *contemplation: gazing on God in a wonderful manner*
- *taste: we truly ‘taste and see that the Lord is good’ (Ps 33:9)*
- *rest: the soul abides in this sweetness*
- *glory: replenished with boundless joy ‘I shall be satisfied when your glory appears’ ( Ps 16:15)*

He testified to a divine ascent: *‘You can become re-animated and re-energised by such fervour of spirit, and as long as you can stay focused, not desiring anything else but God, your heart will ascend to the heights of contemplation. The graces of God and virtues are the ladder and way of ascending into heaven....’ #*

But he also said plainly:

*‘No-one can come to the knowledge of God except through humility. The way of going above is to go below... Descend into the depths...The way up is to go down.’ ##*

# Paschal Robinson, tr., *The Golden Sayings of Blessed Brother Giles of Assisi* (1906).

## Kathryn Krug, tr., *The Earliest Franciscans: the legacy of Giles of Assisi, Roger of Provence and James of Milan* (Paulist Press, 2015).

### Questions for Reflection

- ❖ How do you allow yourself to be yourself as a Franciscan?
- ❖ How do you not only balance but integrate contemplation and action?



Taste and see that  
the Lord is good

**Psalm 33:9**

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# St Bonaventure

(1217-1274)

*Jenny Penson is a Novice in the Exeter Group, Devon Area.*

St Bonaventure is known as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Founder of the Franciscan Order. He was a theologian and a Friar, whose devotion to God was absolute. His great intellect was tempered by his humanity; his Franciscan love shines through his writings.



Born John of Fidanza, he was brought up in Bagnoregio, north of Rome. He took the name of Bonaventure when he entered the Order of the Friars Minor in Paris in 1238, at the age of 22.

Bonaventure means “Good Luck” in Latin and, indeed, good fortune appeared in his life at an early age. It seems that when he was a small child, he suffered a severe illness which even his physician father could not cure. It was thought that his life was saved through his mother’s intercessions, addressed to St Francis who had recently been canonized. It seems feasible that his family adopted that name for him, and that this inculcated in him a deep love and reverence for St Francis.

He moved to Paris to complete his academic studies under Alexander of Hales, founder of the Franciscan School of Theology. It was there that he developed his philosophy, inspired by St Francis’s mystical love for God. It appears that he was an outstanding teacher, during a time of violent opposition to the Mendicant Orders by secular professors who became jealous of the academic success of the Franciscans and Dominicans.

A Doctorate was bestowed on St Bonaventure, and on his colleague St Thomas Aquinas, in 1257. He was known as “Doctor Devotus” and later as the “Seraphic Doctor”. Both of these titles were a tribute to his steadfast fidelity to God: *“Since happiness is nothing less than the enjoyment of the Supreme God, and the Supreme God is above us, no-one can enjoy happiness unless he rises above himself.”*

He was also elected Minister General of the Friars Minor with the task of bringing together two factions: those who insisted upon the literal observance of the original Rule of St Francis - especially that of poverty - and those who wanted to develop an academic approach. He had the ability to heal this division through a theology grounded in humanity, taking full account of our ability to reason, to imagine and to love, which may be seen as the essence of the Franciscan way:

*“When in prayer, the voice of the heart must be heard more than what proceeds from the mouth.”*

His philosophy highlighted the dangers of worldly attachments and the pursuit of superficial knowledge:

*“If you learn everything, except Christ, you learn nothing. If you learn nothing, except Christ, you learn everything”.*

*St Bonaventure, continued . . . . .*

St Bonaventure was asked to write the 'Life of St Francis', which was officially approved as the standard biography in 1260. It appears that much of it was written on the holy ground of Mt La Verna, the very place where St Francis received the Stigmata.

He died very suddenly in Lyons at the age of 53, under suspicious circumstances. He was canonized 200 years later and his Feast Day is 15<sup>th</sup> July.

The link between St Francis, the poor man of Assisi, and St Bonaventure, the scholar of Paris, is a fascinating one. Each was venerated in his lifetime, and miracles were attributed to them. What they both left behind them continues to encourage and inspire us today.

*"Therefore, let us stop speaking and let us pray to the Lord that we may be granted the experience of that about which we have spoken".*

#### Resources

Detail from : Herrera, Francesco de (1628) painting

"St Bonaventure enters the Franciscan Order" [https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/h/herrera/francise/bonavent.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/h/herrera/francise/bonavent.html)



St. Bonaventure (2013) edit Paul A. Boer *"The Journey of the Mind into God"* Veritatis Splendor Publications

St. Bonaventure (2005) edit Emilie Griffin *"The Life of St Francis"* with a foreword by Donna Tartt Pauline Press

Rout, Paul (1996) *"Francis and Bonaventure"* Fount Christian Thinkers

Ramon, Br. (1994) *"Franciscan Spirituality"* SPCK

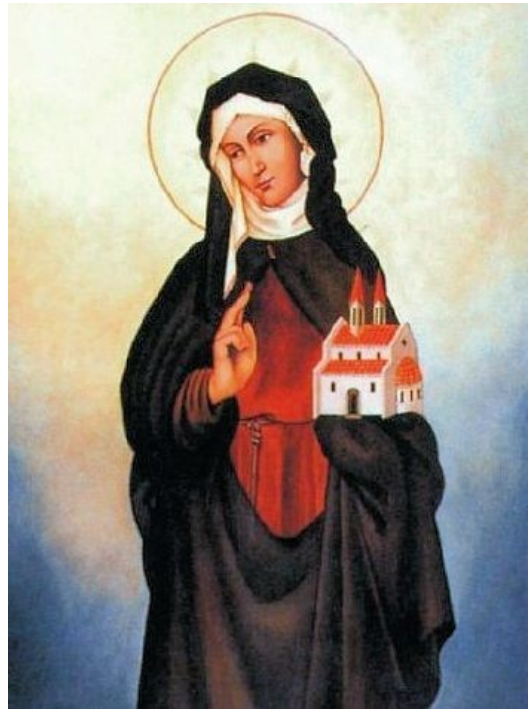


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## Agnes of Prague (1211-1282)

*Carole Selby is Convenor of the Norwich Daytime Group in the East Anglia Area.*

The sister declared by Clare to be dearer to her than all others was Agnes of Prague. In her fourth letter to Agnes she wrote: *"In this contemplation may you remember your poor mother, knowing that I have inscribed the happy memory of you indelibly on the tablets of my heart, holding you dearer than all the others."*



Though living geographically many miles apart, in Assisi and Prague, Clare and Agnes developed a close friendship through written correspondence. Unfortunately there are no records of Agnes' replies to the four letters written by Clare. Recorded within her fourth letter, Clare wrote: *"If I have not written to you as often as your soul and mine well desire and long for, do not wonder or think that the fire of love for you glows less sweetly in the heart of your mother. No, this is the difficulty: the lack of messengers and the obvious dangers of the roads."*

So who was this closest of sisters?

Daughter of King Premislaus of Bohemia and a Queen of Hungary, Agnes seemed destined for courtly life. The death of one suitor (when she was only three years old!) and her jilting of another, years later, led her father to refuse further offers and allowed Agnes to continue with charitable works.

Meeting friars and learning of Clare, she founded a hospice and built a convent, establishing a monastery of Poor Clares in Prague in 1236. She entered this monastery herself and later became the Abbess for many years.

As noted earlier, Agnes enjoyed a special friendship with Clare through the exchange of letters. The letters addressed to her by Clare on questions of 'seraphic perfection', admonish Agnes to "look into that mirror without spot daily... in that mirror are reflected poverty, humility and ineffable charity, as with the grace of God, you may perceive."



Although the letters are not prayers, anyone receiving them would surely be spurred on to greater endeavour in their own life of prayer. In her first letter, Clare wrote:

*To leave the things of time  
for those of eternity,  
to choose the things of heaven  
for the goods of earth,  
to receive the hundredfold in place of one,  
and to possess a blessed eternal life.*



From 'St Agnes tending the sick'  
by Bohemian Master of the year 1482  
National Gallery, Prague

Thus, Agnes was encouraged to meditate daily on the King of angels lying in a manger, hanging on a cross. Agnes was honoured to receive these letters written in the last twenty years of Clare's life, writings which must have strengthened her resolve to unwaveringly live out her chosen vocation as a Poor Clare.

Agnes died in 1282. In the Franciscan calendar of memorials her life is celebrated on March 2nd.

### Questions for Reflection

- ❖ How open am I to really knowing God's will for me?
- ❖ How challenging is it to consistently live out that calling?
- ❖ How good am I at maintaining enriching lines of communication with Tertiaries beyond my Local Group?

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## Margaret of Cortona

### (1247-1297)

*Margaret Maslen is in the Cirencester Group, Severn Area.*

#### A LIFE TURNED AROUND



Margaret of Cortona is not an archetypical Franciscan saint. She is confusing and contradictory, yet remains fascinating throughout her life, which she completely turned around.

It is this contradiction which most fascinates me. Margaret shows us a lot about repentance and forgiveness, saintly attributes in her changed way of life. But even her new life could be extreme in its rituals of penitence. We might say the same about Francis himself, I suppose, but as a brother once told me in Assisi when we discussed Margaret: “Even saints can sometimes get things very wrong”.

St Margaret was born in Lavino, Tuscany, the daughter of a farmer. Her mother died when she was a child, and her father’s second wife did not care for her.

She became the mistress of Arsenio, a Knight of Montepulciano (famed for its high-quality wine). She had a son and although Arsenio would not marry her because of her lowly status she had privileges.

Life was shattered when Arsenio was murdered. His aristocratic family disowned Margaret, and she turned to the Friars at Cortona for help. Countess Marinara and her family took them both in and found Margaret a job as a midwife.

This was the turning point of contradiction. Repentance for her past life overwhelmed her and she asked if she might join the Third Order. They were not at first convinced, but she persisted and was allowed to join in 1277. She became a Novice and her son was educated by the Friars.

Margaret went what might now be termed “a bit over the top”. She threw herself into devotion and service and the Sacrament of the Mass, but also wore a hair shirt and fasted to extreme lengths. Wearing a penitent’s garment, she served the needy as a midwife, baptising new-born babies as necessary – especially those stemming from an irregular relationship.

Her spiritual director was Br. Giunta Bevegnati, with whom she worked closely to bring peace to the people of Cortona. Inevitably, it might be thought, the Church hierarchy was suspicious of their friendship, and he was sent off to the Friary at Siena.

Like St Francis Margaret turned from a life of self-interest to be Christ-centred, and spread the gospel. Grounded in the Third Order, even using excessive rituals of penitence she lived for others.

She was scorned, but always faithful. The Friars were not always comfortable with her, maybe because of the depth of her spiritual life.

Like St Francis, Margaret meditated much upon the Passion of Our Lord. They shared so many traits and turning points in life. She died at the age of 50, having spent 29 years as a penitent. She was formally canonised in 1728, having been honoured by the Diocese of Cortona from 1515.

#### Question for Reflection

- ❖ Do we still see ourselves as an order of penitents?



## Jacopone da Todi

(?-1306)

*This article is from a tertiary in the Sussex Area who wishes to remain anonymous.*

To ask the question why people become Franciscan tertiaries would prompt a multitude of diverse spiritual answers, each inspired by the Holy Spirit given by God's grace. Who was Jacopone da Todi (Jacopone Benedetti) and what did he have in common with St Francis? He was born in Todi, Italy (date unknown) and started out in life with good health and education, a young married man with a very promising career in Law. He and his wife enjoyed socialising, including at parties. How familiar this sounds during the thirteenth century and even today for many people!

Then tragedy overcame this young man. Sadly his wife died in an accident falling from a balcony that collapsed. This tragic loss, so early in his married life, had a profound effect on Jacopone. He resigned from the Law and lived as a nomad, not with animals but alone in penitence. Nor did he become involved in the numerous court cases to prove who was responsible for the building of the property that claimed his wife's life and thus try to claim money. In his bereavement he completely surrendered to God, continuing his penance and writing or reciting poems.



People were alarmed at his behaviour, calling him insane. St Francis was also at times called insane. The term 'insane' can be used for people who deviate from what most people call the 'norm'. How often even the hospital authorities label certain behaviour as insane. Do any of us really have an understanding of people who deviate from the so-called norm? How can any of us understand another's relationship with God? God is not of us. God is and always has been in existence beyond man's full understanding. God through the Holy Spirit can do all things by man.

Jacopone left his nomad life and around 1278 joined a Franciscan community in Umbria as a lay brother. Franciscans have always offered safe havens, providing either homes for children or education in schools, in nursing, and many other social activities where the love of God abides. Many Franciscans will have read of Sister Leonore CSF or Brother Ramon SSF and their contributions to society.

Jacopone was now living solely for love of God but decided to contribute to Franciscan life. He became a spokesman for the Spirituels which led to six years in prison after he opposed Pope Boniface VIII. In prison he continued to write celebrating his love for Christ, and upon his release lived quietly at a convent of Poor Clares in Todi until taken by God on Christmas Day 1306.

What an example and legacy he left for all of us.

Love, Love, You have wounded me,  
Your name only can I invoke;  
Love, Love, I am one with You,  
Let me embrace You alone.  
Love, Love,  
You have swept me up violently,  
I want to faint,  
Love; may I always be close to You:  
Love, I beseech You, let me die of love.

Jacopone da Todi *The Lauds* (New York: Paulist, 1982, transl Serge and Elizabeth Hughes), 264

## The Blessed John Duns Scotus (1265-1308)

*Colin Hull is in the Welwyn Group, Beds and Herts Area.*

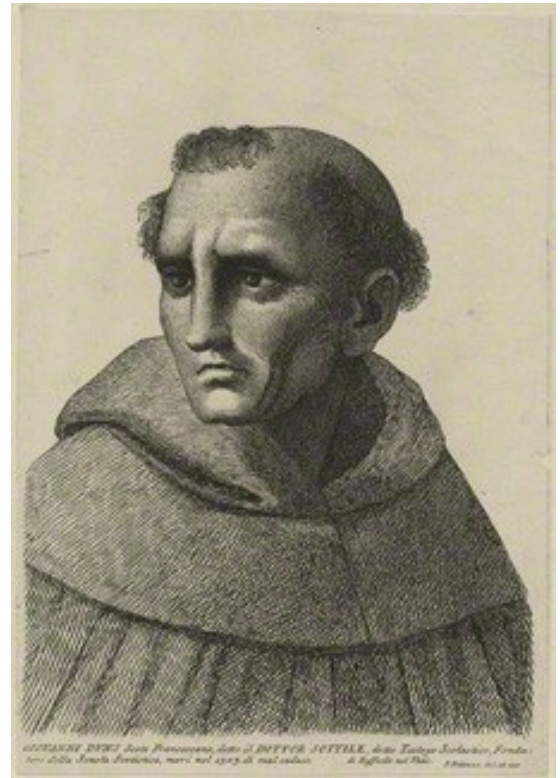
I came across Duns Scotus in a talk by Fr Richard Rohr over a decade ago and what he said caught my interest, so I started looking for books and information about him.

Some details about his early life are sketchy but we know he was ordained priest with the Friars Minor at 25 (1291). He was educated at a Franciscan school that had been formed at Oxford, where he later also became a leading teacher. Some of his time was also spent at the great medieval university in Paris. He was only 43 when he died suddenly of a disease while visiting Cologne.

Scotus was a deep thinking philosopher and academic. His recorded and published works are arguments along philosophical and rational grounds, but this perhaps misses the less obvious spiritual motives of a searching heart lying behind the arguments which are fully immersed in the Franciscan Order and its spiritual heritage. Out of love for Christ he was trying both to define and defend Christian doctrines that should also arouse the devotional feelings of the heart.

The things Scotus discusses go far beyond traditional Catholic theology. Of great importance to me have been:

- His considerations of the nature of God as the origin causing things towards a purpose in Christ, part of rational arguments for the existence of God.



- The Incarnation in Christ as the most special pre-destined focus for the whole of creation and all its history and future.
- His examination of the relationships within the Trinity.
- His extensive examination of what motivates us to goodness or selfish ends with the specific focus of love as our main motivation.
- His unique interpretation of the role of Christ as Saviour, with God accepting the merits of Christ to cover our sin.
- His arguments about uniqueness of the individual that gives grounding for human dignity and the unique dignity of all things in creation.

Scotus is also remembered for defending the idea of the Virgin Mary being “sinless” by the Grace of God from the moment of her conception, for which he is titled the ‘*Marian Doctor*’.

In addition to theology Scotus also engaged in a critical examination of the writings of Aristotle about Being, natural philosophy and ethics, weaving some of this into his theology. In doing so he is a model for theologians engaging with the science and natural world as we know it today.

Scotus' writings have a sophisticated argumentative style, posing and answering questions with long examinations of arguments from the Bible texts and other sources. This makes him hard read so he has been called the '*Subtle Doctor*'. It seems to me a great pity that, unlike St Bonaventure, he seems not to have written for less academic audiences.

In March 1993 Pope John Paul II beatified Duns Scotus and he has a Feast Day on 8th November.

Colin has written a lot about Duns Scotus' theology and St Bonaventure related to science on his website [www.cosmicscotus.com](http://www.cosmicscotus.com) and a book is planned for publication this summer: *Cosmic Franciscans*.



"If all men by nature desire to know, then they desire most of all the greatest knowledge of science. And he immediately indicates what the greatest science is, namely the science which is about those things that are most knowable. But there are two senses in which things are said to be maximally knowable: either because they are the first of all things known and without them nothing else can be known; or because they are what are known most certainly. In either way, however, this science is about the most knowable. Therefore, this most of all is a science and, consequently, most desirable."

— John Duns Scotus

## Angela of Foligno (1248–1309)

*Nicholas Alan SSF is the Guardian at Glasshampton Friary.*

### FRANCISCAN THIRD ORDER MYSTIC AND VISIONARY

Born of a wealthy family, and by her own later admission rich, proud and vain, at the age of 37 Angela was converted to a life of penance, eventually taking the habit of the Third Order Franciscans.



For six years she met with her cousin, the Franciscan friar Arnaldo, mostly in the Church of St Francis at Foligno, with Angela telling of her experiences and visions in prayer. These were somewhat surreptitious meetings, Arnaldo hastily writing down her Umbrian dialect reminiscences, simultaneously translating them into Latin. Angela described a journey of 30 steps eventually leading to full union with God. The journey was not an easy one for her. She confesses to Arnaldo:

You need to be aware also that each of these steps takes time. It is indeed very pitiful and truly heart-breaking that the soul is so sluggish and moves so painfully and ponderously toward God. It takes such tiny steps at a time. As for myself, I lingered and wept at each step. My only consolation was being able to weep, but it was a bitter consolation.

(*Angela*, 1993, p. 125)

*Angela of Foligno, continued . . . . .*

At other times she was full of the divine light, her face radiant and joyful, her eyes shining like candles. As the eyes of her soul were opened she saw ‘the single fullness of God’:

And in the entire world I discerned nothing but divine power – the experience is completely indescribable. Then my soul in a state of awe cried out, ‘This world is pregnant with God!’  
(Mazzoni, 1999, p. 54–55)

Then, having shown Angela his power, God goes on to show her his humility in making himself present in the sacrament of the Eucharist. She feels herself to be totally unworthy to receive communion, and yet as an intense joy settles within her she hears God saying:

Indeed I am within you; and although you are receiving me, you have already received me. Receive communion with the blessing of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I who am worthy make you worthy.  
(Mazzoni, 1999, p. 55)

Then comes a dramatic change. Before she had seen the light, beauty and fullness that is in God, but now all this is taken away from her and she loses the awareness of God’s love. God is there, but in a wholly different way:

After that, I saw God in a darkness – in a darkness because God is a greater good than can be conceived or understood.  
(Mazzoni, 1999, p. 67–8)

This experience of God in the darkness brings no smile to her lips, nor warmth to her heart. What Angela seems to be experiencing here is the transition from the *Via Positiva* to the *Via Negativa*, from the Way of Light to the Way of Darkness.

Yet when I am in that darkness I see everything and I see nothing. . . . .  
I see the God-man [Jesus].  
He draws my soul with such gentleness, and he sometimes says, ‘You are I and I am you.’  
(Mazzoni, 1999, p. 69)



### Further reading

- ❖ Angela of Foligno, 1993, *The Book of Blessed Angela of Foligno in Angela of Foligno: Complete Works*, Classics of Western Spirituality, translated, with an introduction by Paul Lachance, OFM, New York: Paulist Press.
- ❖ Mazzoni, Cristina, 1999, *Angela of Foligno: Memorial*, translation by John Cirignano, The Library of Medieval Women, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.
- ❖ Worssam, Nicholas Alan, 2022, *Being Franciscan: Living the Tradition*, Norwich: Canterbury Press.



## Joseph of Cupertino (1603-1663)

*Chris McDermott is the Convenor of the Brighton Group in the Sussex Area.*

### SANCTITY IN A BROKEN VESSEL

The Franciscan priest and saint Joseph of Cupertino and the accounts of his life originate in a very different thought world from that which most of us inhabit today. The stories of his life are replete with accounts of levitations (hence he is deemed to be the patron saint of astronauts), miracles attributed to him and some severe mortifications that he inflicted on his body. His biography makes uncomfortable reading for the modern reader.



*Image credit: capdox.capuchin.org.au*

But what I find inspiring about Joseph of Cupertino has little to do with miracles and mortifications. It is the sense of the saint's vulnerabilities that emerges from the details of his biography. As a young man he suffered with a rather unpleasant ailment involving painful tumours, fits and seizures; he was poor, and, by all accounts, not very clever. The hagiography written about his life by Paulo Antonio Angelli in the 17<sup>th</sup> century puts a positive spin as far as possible on certain matters, but one cannot escape the conclusion that his widowed mother was controlling, manipulative and judgemental toward Joseph.

The saint was undoubtedly devout and vigorously pursued the life of a holy person, but his initial attempts to enter the Franciscan order of Conventual Friars Minor was rejected on the grounds of his "lack of literacy". He himself was up front about his lack of erudition and found it very difficult to absorb his studies. Indeed, he was seen by his contemporaries as dim-witted and clumsy and was undoubtedly the object of scorn and mockery at times. After a stint of manual work as a lay brother with the Capuchin order, he was eventually allowed to enter the Minor Conventual Order's monastery where he had originally sought entry - to tend the monastery's mule. Over time his evident piety and devotion drew the attention of the Order and, received by the Franciscans as a seminarian, he eventually passed through his noviciate and was ordained priest.

Joseph continued, according to his hagiography, to submit himself to excessive physical rigours, be associated with miracles and occasionally be seen to levitate at times of mystical devotion. The latter experience particularly became a source of controversy as levitation was associated with witchcraft.



.....Continued overleaf

*Joseph of Cupertino, continued . . . . .*

What I draw from the story of Joseph of Cupertino has little to do with the hagiographical accounts of self-injurious ascetic practices, miracles and levitations. Rather, his story is an account of how God calls us amid our vulnerabilities, when we lack those abilities and skills that are celebrated in the world. From impoverished roots, beset by poor health, with little prospects and utterly bereft of intellectual abilities that distinguish the likes of Bonaventure and Anthony of Padua, Joseph of Cupertino is a cracked vessel through which the light shines and the grace of God is seen.

We too are called to bring whatever gifts with which life has graced us – along with our vulnerabilities, weaknesses and our sense of lack – and to offer them to God who lovingly receives what we bring and lifts us up (probably without the kind of levitation associated with Joseph's story!) to be beacons of his love and compassion for the world.

### Questions for Reflection

- ❖ What are some abilities and gifts that we can offer to God and one another?
- ❖ Of what vulnerabilities and weaknesses are we aware in ourselves?
- ❖ How might we offer these also to God and the world by way of our service?

### Further reading

❖ *The Life of the Blessed Joseph of Cupertino* by Paolo Antonio Agelli (Translated by Christopher David Costanzo) Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, North Charleston, USA, 2014



## Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941)

*Francoise Pinteaux-Jones is the Severn Area Minister.*

From childhood Raymund Kolbe had a profound devotion to the Holy Virgin. Turning to her to know “*what would become of him*” (as his harassed mother had admonished), he saw her offering him two crowns, the white crown of chastity and the red crown of martyrdom, which he stoutly accepted.



Nearly forty years later, now Father Maximilian Kolbe, he was risking his life as he stood in front of Auschwitz' deputy camp commander, offering his life for another man's.

Two men had escaped, for which ten must suffer death by starvation, a punishment designed to crush spirit, hope and solidarity among the prisoners. At the anguished cry of Franciszek Gajowniczek, Maximilian's loving heart propelled him to his side and Franciszek heard him say: “*He has a wife*

*and children and his family needs him, but I don't have a family, I can go instead of him."* And the dumbfounded SS assented.

Maximilian had been spared none of the degrading abuse designed to rob inmates of any humanity but he modelled Christ in long-practised love and selflessness, as witnesses stated:-

*"What I found astonishing about Father Kolbe was his extraordinary serenity and spiritual tranquillity. He didn't seem to be apprehensive or afraid at all, which is what you could see in most of us. He was calm and cheerful."*

*"He was unshaven and emaciated, but full of peace and goodness, and that's what people noticed in him."*

Raymund Kolbe was born in the part of Poland ruled by Imperial Russia. Too poor for a formal education under the tzars (who had closed all Catholic institutions), he wangled his way into the Franciscan seminary in Lvov, then under Austrian authority.

Now Brother Maximilian, he was sent to Rome to complete his studies, gaining doctorates in philosophy and theology – while creatively exploring the domains of science and technology.

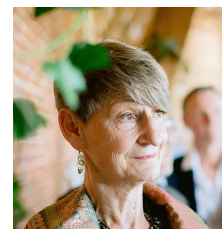
Dismayed by the spread of atheist theories, he committed to making our Lord known and "to spread the civilization of love" through the foundation of the Militia Immaculatae (Army of Mary). To this end, back in inter-wars Poland, he set about organising his Militia in structured groups whose aim he bolstered through a growing number of publications. His Niepokalanow friary founded in 1927 near Warsaw would grow to 800 members. His strategic grasp of modern media established the friary as the largest printing press in Central Europe, with a shortwave radio station for which Maximilian held a license.

Whether in Rome, in Japan (where the monastery he founded in Nagasaki survived the atomic blast and still thrives) or in his native Poland, he was animated by his desire to be reborn in the form of Christ in the heart of Mary, ceaselessly expressing his desire to love without limits. He wrote:-

*"Reflect often on the fact that all your greatness, all your holiness, and all your dignity depend solely on the fulfilment of the will of God; the rest: good reputation, riches, pleasure, activities, conversations, prayers, penances, and even martyrdom, are nothing, a waste of time, a sin, if they are outside of God's will."*

In this spirit, he rejected the German status offered by the Nazi authorities in 1939, with no regard for the privileges it entailed. He took into the friary some 3000 displaced people, hiding the many Jews among them, and he wrote in an article that *"No one can change any truth. One can only seek the truth, find it, acknowledge it, conform one's life to it"*.

A few months later, he was in Auschwitz and well on his way to Block 13 where he and nine other condemned men would be left to die a slow death without food or water. For ten days the whole camp breathed the hymns and prayers into which Father Kolbe led his dying companions. The "slow process of a man dying, before the eyes of the whole camp—not in disgrace but absorbed in supreme contemplation, in the dignity of a choice deliberately made" was "like a powerful shaft of light in the darkness of the camp", a prisoner recalled; but now the Bunker was needed and so the priest was killed by lethal injection on the eve of Assumption Day. He was 47.

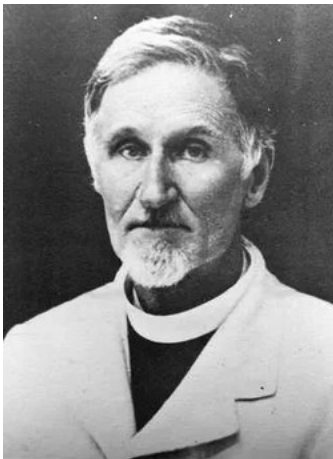


## John Cyril Hawes

(1876-1956)

*John Wylam is a member of the Cheviot group, Borders Area.*

John Cyril Hawes (JCH), later known as Fr. Jerome, was an architect and priest. Bishop Wilfrid Hornby, formerly Bishop of Nyasaland, was impressed by the design of a church JCH had displayed in the Royal Academy, and he commissioned him to build a Chapel of Ease for Gunnerton, about 12 miles from Hexham in the parish of Chollerton. It was in the style of the Arts and Crafts Movement, very beautiful, in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, *“the best he ever did.”*



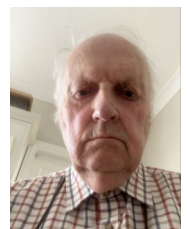
On my arrival as vicar of Chollerton in 1999 I was confronted by the Church of St Christopher, but its glory had departed. I asked Vincente Stienlet of Newcastle, an experienced ecclesiastical architect, to refurbish the building, and to incorporate a meeting area with a toilet and kitchen - in a village with no amenities. It was very much in the spirit of the message St. Francis received: “Rebuild my Church”. Vincente used his experience, attention to detail, ingenuity and initiative to determine, for example, the original colour scheme in the nave which included peacock blue and warm marble, and to install new heating and lighting. The renowned artist William Tillyer

was commissioned to design a colourful window for the west end of the building. During the building of Gunnerton Church JCH exercised a lay ministry which led to his ordination as an Anglican and later Roman Catholic priest. As a priest he had a varied, extraordinary and colourful ministry, particularly in Australia and Cat Island.

Before leaving for Chollerton to live in the comfortable vicarage, JCH was involved with the Christian Socialist Movement. He was aware of the Society of Divine Compassion which echoed Franciscan values and was a sign of the emergent religious life in the Anglican Church. He had a devotion to the “little poor man of Assisi”. He was aware of Charles de Foucauld, a hermit, and was also inspired by the book on Saint Francis by Paul Sabatier, so he described himself as a Hermit Tertiary of St. Francis. He set up his ‘carceri’ on Cat Island in the Bahamas. Although alone there, he shared in the hardships and privations of his neighbours, sleeping on the uncomfortable floor, troubled by insects and choosing poverty, penitence and solitude as the values to be observed.

As a Franciscan he prayed the Rule of St. Francis, assembled his own Daily Office, and even drew up a Litany of the Saints which he used every night. Sometimes miserable, and missing the company of his fox terrier dog, Dominie, he often ate on his feet and his breakfast was paltry. Like St. Francis he had a care for the poor and marginalized which he acknowledged in his ministry and even in his will.

Told by his bishop to write his biography, he asked Peter Anson, a friend and author, to do this and it was published in 1958 after his death, entitled “The Hermit of Cat Island”. It is full of information, food for thought and reflection on the life of a faithful solitary tertiary hermit inspired by St. Francis.



## John Bradburne (1921 - 1979)

*John-Francis Friendship spent 25 years as an SSF friar but is now a tertiary in the London South Area. He has written several books and helps lead the TSSF Contemplative Steering Group.*

### VAGABOND FOR GOD

Strange vagabond,  
Who knows not  
what to seek ...  
God's love  
within you is your  
native land!  
Then seek  
none other,  
For you are homeless  
save God keeps  
your heart.  
(To a Wandering Jew, 1958)



That's one of many poems written by this son of an Anglican priest who was born in 1921 and went on to become a Roman Catholic Franciscan hermit, mystic – and martyr. In World War II he fought in Malaya (and was awarded the Military Cross); then, during recovery from malaria, he experienced a vision of our Lady, to whom he became devoted. Thus began his vocational journey.

Received into the Roman Catholic Church at Buckfast Abbey he asked to become a novice but wasn't accepted. He then visited the Carthusians at Parkminster but found their Office unappealing. Describing himself 'a vagabond for God' he travelled to the Holy Land where he explored a calling to the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion but, again, this was not to be. 'What a monstrous self-centred fellow', he wrote in 1951, '... what a wastrel introvert – nothing but God and him, him and God, as though there were nothing and nobody else. I reply ... What's the mood of a lover – is he accused because all he can see is his lover's love for him and his for his lover?'

He returned to England where he lived in a variety of huts and rooms in Devon and London. Faith in Divine Providence led him to exist by begging, earning money through playing his recorder and undertaking odd jobs because, as he once wrote: 'St Francis is my master.' He attended Mass at Westminster Cathedral and, in 1956, joined the Third Order, continued to write poetry and was becoming another Jacopone da Todi.



In 1962 a friend invited him to Rhodesia where John expressed three wishes: to assist victims of leprosy, die a martyr, and be buried in the Franciscan habit. He was drawn to the black population and his lifestyle became like that of the Anglican priest, Arthur Shearly Cripps, who had lived nearby and was later described as 'the Saint Francis of the African countryside'.

In 1969 John was introduced to the Mutemwa Leprosy Settlement northwest of Salisbury where, at last, he felt he belonged. Political violence, however, was on the increase; his compassion for the lepers brought disapproval and 'Baba John' was expelled by forces that wanted the land for themselves.

On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1979, he was kidnapped and led away in his habit to a cave. There he was abused for being a government agent and marched to a roadway where he knelt and was shot dead. It's reported that chanting was heard, a white bird flew into the sky from where blue, red and white lights descended, and at his funeral a pool of blood appeared beneath his coffin. He is now on the path to canonization.



For further information visit:  
[www.johnbradburne.com](http://www.johnbradburne.com)

## Francis – the Saint and the Pope (1936-2025)

**Fran Wakefield** is the Durham Area Minister.

On March 13, 2013, at 7:06pm, the historic words ‘habemus papam’ were announced from the Vatican, and the new pope was named Franciscus. Gorge Mario Bergoglio was the first Pope from the Global South, the first Pope from the Jesuit order and the first Pope ever to be named after the Patron Saint of Italy.



In the introduction to his famous encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis explained his reason for taking this name. He wrote: ‘I do not want to write this encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically’. *Laudato Si para 10 (LS 10)*.

Many of us are drawn to St Francis by how he lived out the gospels, and having recently re-acquainted myself with both *Laudato Si* and *Evangelii Gaudium* (the Joy of the Gospel) I am struck again by how deeply embedded in Pope Francis’ writings are the Franciscan notes of humility, love and joy, of living out a life in harmony with all creation, of sharing the joy of the Gospel with all those with whom we share a common home.

‘Small, yet strong in the love of God, like Saint Francis of Assisi, all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples.’ *Evangelii Gaudium para 216 (EG 216)*

Famously, Pope Francis refused to live in the papal apartment. He welcomed in the outcasts, the vulnerable. He provided accommodation to the homeless and gave them prominent places in Vatican events. He attempted to live a simple life whilst performing the most public of roles. Like St Francis, he was spontaneous, unpredictable at times, but hugely loved and admired. One of the things we find so attractive about following St Francis is the sheer number of stories that tell us how he lived out the gospel imperative. Stories are still emerging about Pope Francis which illustrate how he too lived out the gospel in a very different time and context.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis explains that he wants to see a church which ‘goes forth’ in a community of missionary disciples, and he makes it clear that he wants to see evangelizers who ‘take on the “smell of the sheep”’. (EG24) Later he states: ‘I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.’ (EG 49)

When Francis and the early brothers went out to preach they went out in poverty, preaching personal and social conversion to the people, the joy of the Gospel. In the early exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance (the Third Order) Francis writes: 'Those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole mind, with their whole strength (Mk12.30) and love their neighbour as themselves.... O how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do such things and persevere in doing them... they are children of the heavenly father whose works they do (Mt 5.45), and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 12.50)'

Pope Francis sought to rebuild the church from the bottom upwards, and in 2021 introduced a Synodical Process. This involved listening to and discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit through all members of the church. This was radical in that lay men and women held executive roles and non-clergy had voting rights. He envisaged a church that is synodal at every level, everyone listening to one another, learning from one another and taking responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel. The Synodical Document was declared to be the teaching of the Synod without further Papal editing.

The early Franciscans were drawn from all walks within a very feudal society, all equal brothers and sisters through baptism in our older brother Christ Jesus, all with an equal say. Of course, fairly soon after Francis' death, rules were imposed which changed this – including the rule that no lay brother could be made Minister General.

'Those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole mind, with their whole strength .....and love their neighbour as themselves.... O how happy and blessed are these men and women ..... they are children of the heavenly father whose works they do.'

(Mark 12.30 & Matthew 5.45)



Image credit: [www.angelusnews.com](http://www.angelusnews.com)

## THE LEGACY OF POPE FRANCIS

On July 9th Pope Leo celebrated a new mass formulary entitled 'Care of Creation' at Castel Gandolfo where the Laudato Si Educational Centre is being developed. He introduced the mass by saying: "When justice and peace are trampled underfoot, those who are most hurt are the poor, the marginalised and vulnerable... We must also pray for the conversion of many people, both inside and outside the Church, who still do not recognize the urgency of caring for our common home,"

This gives me confidence that the Franciscan legacy will continue into the future.

*In this article, I have drawn from the recent CCS Public Lecture by Sr Margaret Carney 'Francis of Assisi, Francis of Rome and a Church Re-Imagined'.*

*This can now be found on YouTube and I commend it to you.*



## Walking with the saints:

*Ann Leigh is a member of the Torbay Local Group in the Devon Area, and secretary of the Little Portion Editorial Board.*



St Peters Square, Rome

*'We have just heard that Padre Pio is being canonised in Rome on June 16th. Can we book you to accompany some of the pilgrims?'*

This fax (remember them?) in 2002 was typical of the requests I received to 'walk with the saints', taking church (and TSSF) parties on pilgrimages to Italy and other European countries. Many groups were following Francis and Clare, but others asked for a saint I had never heard of before, which meant a lot of research before I could bring my new 'friend' alive to the pilgrims I escorted.

Sometimes they knew a lot more about the saint than I did, but this was probably the first time they had visited the sites associated with his or her story. That was certainly true of the devoted followers of Padre Pio, now San Pio. My task was to help them 'walk with their saint' as we visited birthplace, family home, churches, etc. in the land where he had lived and worked.

### FRANCESCO FORGIONE (PADRE PIO) (1887-1967)

My first 'meeting' with Padre Pio was at his Beatification in St. Peter's Square in May 1999 when my pilgrims, many of them from Ireland, were part of the vast throng that not only filled the Square but stretched right down Via della Conciliazione to the Tiber River. After our short stay in Rome we travelled further south to a much poorer, more remote part of Italy, avoided by most tourists, the Gargano.

Francesco was the rather sickly son of poor farmers in the little village of Pietrelcina where he lived as a youth and spent the first years of his priesthood. He entered a Capuchin friary when he was 15 years old, but alarmed his superiors with his fasts, fainting spells and self-flagellation. In 1918, two years after being sent to another friary in San Giovanni Rotondo he began to bleed from his hands, feet and side, but the church authorities thought the stigmata were self-inflicted and for some years he was forbidden to say Mass in public or hear confessions. Eventually he was reinstated and remained there until his death in 1968.

Pietrelcina is a maze of picturesque streets and alleyways, with steep descents and unexpected little



squares, where we could visit the tiny house where he was born, just one room with a bed, table, chest and washstand, so simple that it looks more like a stable. The Forgione family also owned another small house almost next door, where we saw the kitchen, fireplace and the adjoining dining room, Francesco's home for his first 15 years. Nearby was the 'Little Tower', all that remains of a house that was destroyed in an earthquake in 1967, where he slept and prayed as a young priest. We prayed in the parish church where he was baptised, took his First Communion and later celebrated his first Mass.

San Giovanni Rotondo was an insignificant town when Padre Pio was sent to the humble friary there in 1916, but now it is an



enormous pilgrimage centre with many hotels, a vast new church and an outside worship area holding about 30,000 people. He always had a great concern for the poor and the sick, but as we stood in front of the Home for the Relief of Suffering which dominates the town, inaugurated in 1956, it was difficult to imagine the small hospital with 20 beds which he opened in 1925. Here we were not conscious of his personal life so much as his achievements, and there were even opportunities to speak with friars who had known him personally and to be blessed with bloodstained relics.

### **JEAN VIANNEY (THE CURE D'ARS) (1786-1859)**

In May 2003 I was asked to take a pilgrimage to Central France in the steps of several saints, including Jean Vianney. He also was born into a family of farmers, in the little village of Dardilly, near Lyons, but this was the time of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror when all churches were closed and anyone harbouring a priest (as Jean's pious father did) could face deportation. Masses were said in a barn, with guards outside to warn of danger, and a brave priest in the next village held secret classes to prepare the children for their first communion.

In 1802, when Jean was 16, the Terror was over and churches were able to reopen. Jean longed to be a priest but he had very little education. The brave priest spoke for him, and managed to get him into a seminary, but Jean struggled and he was 29 before he was ordained in Grenoble.

He served for several years with the priest who had sponsored him but then was sent to one of the smallest and poorest parishes in France, Ars. "There is not much love for God there" he was told. "You will bring some into it".

Like all pilgrim parties we stood and prayed by the 'Monument of the Meeting' on the outskirts of the village. Weary after a 19 mile walk from Dardilly and lost in the mist, Jean came across a group of shepherd children and asked their help. When one boy answered, Jean replied "You have shown me the way to Ars. I will show you the way to Heaven", and those words are inscribed on the monument.



He made the church his home, praying constantly for his parishioners' conversion, just returning to eat and sleep in the humble presbytery which has been preserved unchanged. Little by little he revived their faith through his sermons, his prayers and his simple lifestyle. He gave away all that he was given, mainly to embellish the village church and to build an orphanage and free school, 'La Providence'. His reputation spread and people came from all over France to attend his masses and confess their sins. About 60 families lived in Ars when he arrived there in 1818, but over 100,000 a year visited by the time of his death in 1859.

*'Walking with the saints' continued*

## **MYCHAL JUDGE (1933 -2001)**

On 11th September 2001 I was with pilgrims in Rome when we heard of the planes crashing into the World Trade Centre. There was chaos in the hotels because no American could fly home but their rooms were needed for new arrivals. I met a young student from New York who was desperately worried about her family but couldn't get a flight, and I persuaded our hotel to let her sleep in my room on a mattress for a few days.

One of the most moving photos in the papers showed a man's body being carried by five rescue workers from the dust and rubble of the North Tower - the body of a Franciscan friar, Mychal Judge, the chaplain of the New York Fire Department. He was the first certified fatality of 9/11 and was labelled Victim 00001.



Mychal was born in Brooklyn, the son of Irish Catholic immigrants. His father died when he was only 6, but his mother worked very hard so that all 3 children could have a good education. He went to a Franciscan seminary school where he was drawn to the simple lifestyle of the friars, and though he struggled with academic work he felt called to be a Franciscan priest. He began drinking and the addiction got worse once he was ordained and more involved in parish work, but he gradually recovered through the help of AA classes.

In 1984 he was granted a sabbatical year in England which he spent mainly at the Franciscan International Study Centre in Canterbury, where some of the older friars found it difficult to accept his love of fun and larger-than-life behaviour. He returned to the States with greater self-confidence and vision, and immediately inaugurated a ministry among New York's gay community, working closely with AIDS sufferers.

He was appointed chaplain to the New York Fire Department in 1992, supporting the men when they were called out and also in their personal lives. As thousands fled from the inferno on 11th September Mychal raced into the lobby of the North Tower with the firemen, to be struck by flying debris as he was praying the last rites over a dying firefighter. "He was a hero who lived a glorious life - and he had a glorious death" (the words of his twin sister).

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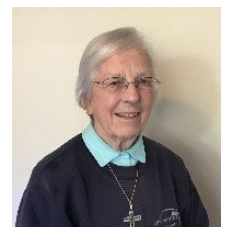
Three Franciscan priests from three different countries. All from very poor families, poor health, poor education, yet renowned for their preaching, personal piety, as confessors and spiritual guides.

Padre Pio has been called the 'patron saint of stress relief and the January blues' because he was famous for the advice he gave to many who sought his help: "Pray, hope and don't worry".

Jean Vianney was canonised in 1925, and four years later he was proclaimed 'patron saint of parish priests'.

Mychal Judge has been called New York's most popular and charismatic Franciscan, and was canonised by the Orthodox Catholic Church of America in 2002.

It has been a great privilege to walk with them.



# What Next?

Each time the Editorial Board meets to plan the next issue of 'Little Portion' we also think about future themes, and that has certainly happened as we approach the 800th anniversary of Francis's death.

LP 28 (Spring 2026) will be about Francis and Clare. We are aiming to include lesser known stories about the two saints, but we are particularly looking for Tertiaries' personal experiences of 'walking in their footsteps', whether in Assisi or elsewhere in Italy.

Have you perhaps crossed Lake Trasimene to Isola Maggiore, where Francis spent 40 days in solitude during Lent 1211, apparently consuming only half a loaf of bread during the whole period?

Or have you prayed in the chapel in Bastia cemetery, the only surviving part of the Benedictine convent where Clare was housed after she fled her rich home to join Francis at the Porziuncola?

Have you spent time on Mount La Verna where Francis received the stigmata, explored the streets of Gubbio where he tamed the fierce wolf that was terrorising the local people, or stood on the steps of St. John Lateran in Rome where he changed clothes with a beggar?

Perhaps you have visited San Damiano on 22nd June when the local townspeople celebrate how Clare's intercessions saved Assisi from the Saracens, or you have watched the Calendimaggio, the 3-day festival in May between the 'minores' of the Lower Town and the 'maiores' of the Upper Town, reminiscent of the boisterous celebrations that Francis so often led as a young man.

But even if you have never visited Italy we would like to hear your favourite stories of Francis and Clare.

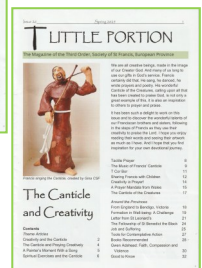
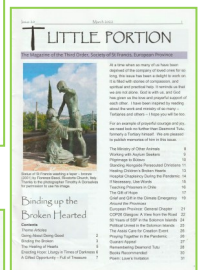
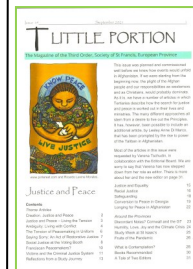
One regular feature which couldn't be included in this issue is Around the Provinces, but we will certainly correct that in LP 29 (Autumn 2026) because we want news from all five Provinces about celebrations during this very special year. Advent 2025 will see the launch of Francis 800 which culminates at Francistide (3/4 October). The themes include deepening our own personal Franciscan commitment, spreading news of TSSF in our communities, and pilgrimage. If we receive news from every Area in the European Province and from the other four Provinces, we could have enough material to fill LP 30 (Spring 2027) as well.

Whether you are the oldest Tertiary or the newest Postulant we invite you to take up the challenge to write for 'Little Portion', giving support and encouragement to whoever is invited to take over the editor's role from Richenda Milton-Daws.

[editor@tssf.org.uk](mailto:editor@tssf.org.uk)



**Richenda Milton-Daws**  
*'Little Portion' Editor*  
Issues 19-26  
Autumn 2021 - Spring 2025



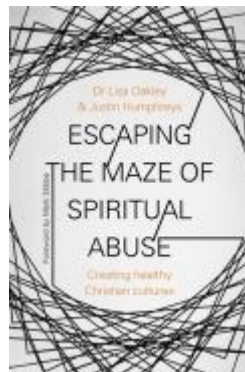
## Books Recommended



Dr Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys

### Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse

SPCK 2019



This book sits in the light of the Makin Report and is given credence in the Foreword by the Revd Dr Mark Stibbe, a survivor of the abuse of John Smyth. He notes that the beatings were accentuated through Smyth's psychological and emotional abuse. Without this spiritual dimension to his behaviour, there would have been no abuse at all; it was "a very real and widespread phenomenon".

The book opens by exploring a definition of spiritual abuse and associated problems. It is stressed that no definition is perfect and there is an awareness of the criticism around the whole concept of spiritual abuse. However, the authors emphasize that our understanding of abuse is constantly developed through experience and research. There is no doubt that people have experienced coercive control in Christian and other faith contexts.

The following chapters explore the features of spiritual abuse and how to respond well to allegations. I liked the use of the many testimonies and comments from people that support the ideas and concepts of the book. In addition, survivor experiences are used to develop 12 characteristics which are summarised in a useful table. Furthermore, the book draws attention to the fact that leaders can be spiritually abused as well.

Although published in 2019 it has lost none of its relevance and importance in the intervening years. It is very accessible and thought-provoking, though often an uncomfortable read.

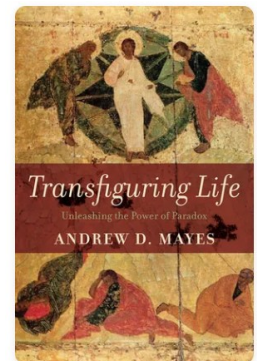
*Ian MacKarill*

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Andrew D. Mayes

### Transfiguring Life – Unleashing the Power of Paradox

Resource Publications  
2025



As its title suggests this book (commended by both Bishop Rowan Williams and Br Nicholas Alan SSF) concerns Christ's pivotal Transfiguration, how it has the potential to have a similar effect on us and the place of paradox in understanding the heart of our faith. Whilst not being specifically Franciscan, its content draws on the writings of Franciscans and the Fathers and is clearly indebted to the author's vocation as a Tertiary.

In an early comment Andrew points out the 'energy and dynamic of paradox', and its Franciscan charism is realised by his recognition that we need to perceive the hidden presence of God in all things. That contemplative approach enables us to 'see' things as they actually are – an ability to which our culture can be blind. 'The act of perception transforms the perceiver ... We know in order to participate, not in order to dominate.' (Moltmann) There are chapters on the way transfiguration can affect approaches to life and faith, prayer, the cosmos – and, of course, the place of paradox - and each closes with reflective questions and prayer exercises.

This book rewards slow and reflective reading for there is much to be realised as the words we encounter open us to the mystery of our faith.

### ***John-Francis Friendship***

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Susan Pitchford

### **Following Francis - the Franciscan Way for Everyone**

Morehouse  
Publishing, 2006

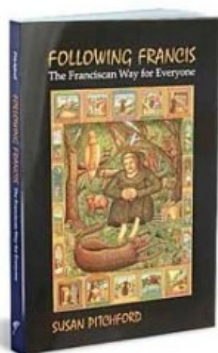


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The Franciscan Way  
for Everyone:  
Pitchford, Susan:  
9780819222350:  
Amazon.com: Books](#)

In the preface to this book Susan Pitchford describes herself as "an affluent, married, professional woman in twenty-first century America, trying to live according to a Rule established in the thirteenth century by an Italian religious fanatic."

She arranges the contents around the nine elements of the Franciscan Rule shared by all tertiaries in TSSF and the other themes that feature in our Principles, and it is a very honest, personal account of the joys and struggles of a Novice walking the path to Profession and beyond. Several times she refers to 'Forming the Soul (Life) of a Franciscan', a commentary which Tertiaries in the American Province study during their formation and are urged to return to regularly after Profession. I found the document on our European website (all 179 pages of it!) and was fascinated by some of the differences of practice between our two Provinces, such as the American requirement to pray Morning and/or Evening Prayer each day and to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year.

There are many stories of Francis in these pages but Susan gives us a salutary reminder: "The point of the Third Order, and indeed of all Franciscan Orders, is not to relive Francis' life, but to live our own with the same goal and the same dedication as he lived his."

Each chapter ends with some excellent 'Questions for Reflection' which would provide material for a Local Group for many meetings, and also 'Steps into..... Prayer, Work, Obedience, etc.' with practical advice for individuals as they seek to keep the Rule.

I would thoroughly recommend this book equally to the newest enquirer wondering what TSSF is about and to the long-established Tertiary reviewing their Rule before renewing.

***Ann Leigh***

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## Author interview:

**Susan Pitchford, TSSF**



*Susan Pitchford was the guest speaker for a weekend retreat in May this year, arranged for the students on the Spiritual Direction course. It was an ideal opportunity to ask her some questions about herself and her books.....*

### **Please tell us a bit about your early Christian journey**

At about eight or nine years old, I happened to hear a televangelist on the radio, the worst kind of religious snake oil salesman. I was converted on the spot. I came from a secular family, though, so this made me an instant outsider but for one saintly and supportive grandmother. She was very dear to us all, but unfortunately was killed by a drunk driver when I was eleven years old. After that, my only religious instruction came from attending church with the family of my best friend. But they were fundamentalists, and their church was never mine. I came to the Episcopal Church, oddly, through my big sister. A lifelong atheist, she decided to join a friend's confirmation class just for fun, and I followed her. My faith has been through its ups and downs since then, but I always belonged to Jesus—whether I was paying attention to that or not.

### **How did you discover TSSF?**

In my mid-thirties I came back to the church. Chased out by some bad experiences, I realized after a decade that a life without God was not going to work for me. I longed to go deep into God, but I was wary of going there alone, having seen people get very weird when left to their own devices. I happened to read Kathleen Norris' book *The Cloister Walk* in which she talks about becoming a Benedictine oblate, and I loved the idea of that kind of community, anchored in a centuries-old monastic tradition. But the Benedictines were too stable and sensible for me, and in the end I fell hard for Francis' passion and joy.

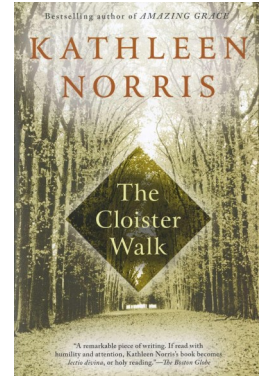


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### **What made you write *Following Francis*?**

This Franciscan way, this Franciscan community, quickly became my spiritual home. I felt it probably would for many others, too, if they only knew it existed. It was at a regional convocation that I found myself in a conversation on this topic, and I said: "Somebody should do for the Franciscans what Kathleen Norris did for the Benedictines." I didn't see anyone else's hand go up, so I thought I'd give it a try. Of course, my books haven't had the kind of impact that Norris' work has, but I hope readers have found them helpful. I certainly enjoy writing them.

### **Distances in America are much greater than in the UK. Are you able to meet with other Tertiaries in person?**

The Province of the Americas, like other Provinces, covers immense distances,

which makes it difficult for Tertiaries to meet in person – especially for the elderly among us. Even just considering one region of our Province, like North America, the distances are huge and transportation is expensive.

Plus there are few options: it's very difficult to take a train anywhere in the U.S. except the Northeast, and buses are uncomfortable and honestly pretty sketchy. I envy Europe's smaller distances and better transportation networks!

### **As a Novice were your meetings in person or online?**

Formation in my Province has certainly changed since I began 25 years ago. Initially, I reported by letter to my counselor, but soon I was fortunate enough to join a formation class that met in person. That was a bit of a luxury, because the Seattle area was Franciscan-rich. But now most formation takes place on Zoom, as do most of our fellowship meetings. Zoom has been a gift, but there is still so much value in meeting in person. We had several regional convocations that met annually before Covid, but I'm not sure how many are going on now. I do know that it will take some work to get the one in my region going again. This means that many of us have regular contact with other Tertiaries, but not in person. I'm sure I've seen more Tertiaries in England this year than I have in my own country!

### **Which Principle do you find the most challenging?**

Probably Days 10-12, about living simply. I struggled with this for the first few years in TSSF, as my husband is African American and grew up in real poverty in inner-city Pittsburgh. He makes no apology for his successful career and the comforts it's brought to both of us (I've never made much money myself). It was St. Elizabeth of Hungary, one of our patrons, who showed me the way. She limited her own luxuries, but did not impose austerities on her

husband, and the arrangement suited them both until his premature death. In all honesty, I confess that I am nobody's idea of an ascetic, so while I cherish Elizabeth's example, I don't do a great job living up to it.

### **We believe you have written another book that is being published this August. Please tell us more about it.**

The title is *The Paradox of Poverty: Why are the Poor in Spirit "Blessed"?*

Here's the description that appears on my website ([susanpitchford.net](http://susanpitchford.net)):

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit," said Jesus, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And we smile, nod and think: "Lovely thought". But if we are paying attention, it's a shocking, almost offensive thought. The grieving, the broken hearted, the marginalized, the stigmatized – all blessed, all happy? In the *The Paradox of Poverty* I examine the ways in which followers of Christ have understood "poverty of spirit", and the traditions that have formed around their attempts to follow Jesus on this radical path.*

Over the centuries, those who have heard Jesus have learned the truth of his promise that we will find the greatest happiness, our deepest fulfillment – the kingdom of heaven, in fact, our blessedness and our belovedness – in the things that seem to impoverish our souls. *The Paradox of Poverty* looks at some of the wisdom traditions that have formed this understanding: the Scriptures, the desert mothers and fathers, the Franciscans, liberation theologians, the 12-Step Movement, and more. At both individual and collective levels, these traditions help us understand that varied kinds of poverty can become a "blessing" by bringing us to know our belovedness in God.

## Good to Know

**Little Portion** editor:

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**Little Portion** forthcoming issues:

**Issue 28** (Spring 2026):

Theme - 'Stories of Francis and Clare'

Copy deadline: 10 January 2026.

**Issue 29** (Autumn 2026): 'Francis 800'

Copy deadline: 12 July 2026

Contributions from Tertiaries are welcome on the published themes and for the 'Around the Provinces' section, preferably well in advance of the indicated deadline. We are looking for lesser known stories of Francis and Clare in issue 28, while in the Autumn we hope for lots of Area news of anniversary celebrations from Europe and further afield in the 'Around the Provinces' section.

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### Helping those with disabilities

(Alternative formats, access, support. Audio, CD and large print copies of various publications are available.)

For the time being please direct any enquiries to the **Little Portion** editor.

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All opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and contributors, and not necessarily those of the European Province of the Third Order, Society of St Francis.

*Little Portion* is the magazine of the European Province of the Third Order, Society of St Francis. Its purpose is to strengthen the community of the dispersed Third Order, be a means of contact between Tertiaries, enrich life-long formation and inform Tertiaries of good practice throughout the Province. The Editor is appointed by Provincial Chapter. It is published twice yearly.

*Little Portion* is free of GDPR and can be handed on and displayed in public places.

Write to [editor@tssf.org.uk](mailto:editor@tssf.org.uk) about your local group or Area with:

- Something unusual you experienced
- Something you are passionate about
- Something you think it is important for readers to know about
- Something you enjoyed
- Something encouraging
- Something you want to comment on in this issue of *Little Portion*

Send the details of a book you enjoyed reading or thought might help other Tertiaries in their study of the Franciscan life.

## And finally ...

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

*Psalm 116:15*

[www.tssf.org.uk](http://www.tssf.org.uk)

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