

St. Francis At Prayer – Introduction

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Hecho todo él no ya orante sino oración (2Cel 95a)

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I. Franciscan Locations and Francis's Writings

1. Early Franciscan Locations

Prayer and meditation occupied a central place in St. Francis's life and were, in fact, the key to his whole personality and the well-spring of his spiritual life. This is clear to anyone who visits the early Franciscan locations, such as San Damiano and the Carceri, just outside Assisi, as well as the hermitages at Poggio Bustone, Greccio and Fonte Colombo, perched like swallows' nests on the mountain slopes in the valley of Rieti. The Celle at Cortona, Monte Casale, Narni and La Verna are eloquent witnesses to Francis's love of retiring to isolated places to pray and meditate. In the quiet solitude of almost inaccessible heights and in the depths of thick oak woods and dense forests, he found spiritual peace and reached the creator through His creatures. In contemplating the unspoiled beauty of nature, he touched the hem of the intangible, of Him about whom the psalmist sang: "O Lord my God, thou art very great! Thou art clothed with honor and majesty, who coverest thyself with light as with a garment" (Ps 104:1f.).

2. Francis's writings

Francis's writings give us an even clearer insight into how he prayed and about what, for they are redolent of his "spirit of holy prayer and devotion" (cf. RegB 5:2), his total surrender to the Lord, and his fervent love for God and people.

Francis composed his *Later Rule* in prayer and fasting. After receiving the stigmata on Mount La Verna, he wrote the *Praises of God* and his *Blessing for Brother Leo* in his own hand on a piece of parchment. *The Canticle of Brother*

Sun was the fruit of long hours of meditation as he lay on his sick-bed. When dictating his Letters or his Rule, he spontaneously used several different kinds of prayer. He might begin with the sign of the cross (2EpFid; EpOrd) or with a blessing (EpMin), and he almost always ended with a blessing. In his letters, there are several prayers as such, either songs of praise or long meditations (see, for example, 2EpFid 54-62; EpOrd 27, 38f, 50-52). In his first Rule, the one that was confirmed orally by the Pope in 1221, there is a lengthy discourse on prayer (RegNB 22), followed by an even longer hymn of praise (RegNB 23). This shows that Francis not only taught about prayer but also drew his listeners and readers to prayer and prayed with them. Besides Francis's exhortations to pray and his instructions on prayer which we find in so many places in the Rules and the letters, we also have other writings of his which, in form and contents, are prayers properly-so-called. These other compositions by Francis are among his most beautiful and most praised works. He attained great heights of poetic power and beauty, not only in his *Canticle of Brother Sun*, but also in some of the prayers he had composed before the *Canticle*.

A quick glance at the prayers in Francis's writings is very instructive. We find that *praise, thanksgiving and adoration* figure prominently in them, while only two of them are prayers of petition, strictly-so-called. One of these petitions is the *Prayer before the Crucifix* at San Damiano, chronologically speaking the first of all the prayers of Francis that have come down to us; and the other petition appears in the closing prayer of the *Letter to the Entire Order* (EpOrd 50-52). And in both petitions he asks only for spiritual favors, faith, hope and charity, understanding and knowledge of God's commandments (OrCruc), and the grace to do what God wants and to be able to follow in Christ's footsteps (EpOrd 50-52).

Most of his prayers are closely connected with the liturgy. His *Office of the Passion* is a kind of small breviary; his *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* is a meditative expansion of the *Hail Mary*; and chapter 23 of the *Earlier Rule* is a sort of Franciscan preface or eucharistic prayer. Some of the prayers, such as the *Office of the Passion*, the *Praises to be said at all the Hours*, the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* and the *Prayer Inspired by the Our Father* blend well with the Church's *Divine Office* or *Liturgy of the Hours*.

II. Francis at Prayer

Thomas of Celano provides us with an admirable description of Francis's attitude to prayer:

Francis had been taught not to seek his own (interests) but to seek especially what in his eyes would be helpful toward the salvation of others; but above everything else he desired to depart and to be with Christ.... He made himself insensible to

all external noise, and, bridling his external senses with all his strength and repressing the movements of his nature, *he occupied himself with God alone*. In the clefts of the rock he would build his nest and in the hollow places of the wall his dwelling.... He who had totally emptied himself remained so much the longer in the wounds of the Savior. He, therefore, frequently chose solitary places so that he could direct his mind completely to God.... His safest haven was prayer; not prayer of a single moment, or idle or presumptuous prayer, but prayer of long duration, full of devotion, serene in humility. If he began late, he would scarcely finish before morning. Walking, sitting, eating or drinking, he was always intent upon prayer. He would go alone to pray at night in churches abandoned and located in deserted places (1Cel 71).

1. *His love for the eremitical life*

The first thing that strikes us about Francis is how he deliberately used to seek inner and outer solitude in order to devote himself to prayer.

a) *Outer solitude — in woods, "in clefts in the rock," crevices in steep cliffs and isolated churches.*

"He always sought a hidden place where he could adapt not only his soul but also all his members to God" (1Cel 94d). Referring to the time when Francis decided not to continue on the military expedition from Apulia but returned instead to Assisi, the *Legend of the Three Companions* tells us that:

He gradually withdrew from the tumult of earthly things... (and) often hid himself from the eyes of deceitful men and withdrew to pray in secret, incited to do so by the same sweetness in his heart which took possession of him with increasing frequency, drawing him apart to pray far from all public meeting places (L3S 8a).

It is more than likely that Francis knew about the hermits who had originated in Syria and who were living their solitary life on Monte Subasio, near Assisi, and Monteluco, close to Spoleto. The eremitical influence was quite strong during the first years of the Fraternity and reappeared again and again in the later history of the friars. Indeed, Francis even wrote a Rule for Hermitages. However, he did not intend to establish hermitages in the accepted sense of the term but simply places in which "three or, at most, four brothers" would live together. Furthermore, these brothers were not to act as masters and servants, or teachers and disciples. On the contrary, they were to serve each other and take turns at being "mothers" and "sons," the "mothers" taking care of the material necessities while the "sons" dedicated themselves to contemplation. They were to live in an enclosure in which each friar was to have a cell where he prayed and slept: and they were to say the *Divine Office* in common.

In the *Earlier Rule*, there are traces of Francis's first inclination to dedicate himself to the eremitical life. During the period when he repaired the little

church of San Damiano, he wore something resembling the habit of a hermit. But after listening to the Gospel being read at Mass describing the sending out of the disciples (Lk 10) or the Apostles (Lk 9), he took off this garb because he saw that he had to engage in the life of the apostolate as well as the life of solitude. When he went on pilgrimage to Rome to ask the Pope to approve his Rule and proposed way of life, Cardinal John of St. Paul advised him:

...to turn to the life of a monk or a hermit. But St. Francis refused his counsel, as humbly as he could, not despising what was counselled, but in his pious leaning toward another life, he was inspired by a higher desire (1Cel 33a).

Fully aware of what he was doing, he deliberately chose the life of the apostolate and, *at the same time*, the life of contemplation and fraternity, instead of opting for a life of permanent solitude. That is precisely why he conceived his own special form of temporary eremitical life for small groups of three or four brothers at a time. Certainly, nowadays this type of life is proving to be popular and is being practiced with greater or lesser variations in several places, especially in France, at Le Cassine, and in Italy, as well as in the Capuchin friary in Arth in Switzerland.

b) Inner solitude — "the temple of the heart"

The main characteristics of St. Francis's prayer were recollection, silence and simplicity. For him, the purpose of inner solitude was to remain interiorly alone with God, to be silent, to pray to God and to listen to Him speaking heart to heart. The outer "cell" was at the service of "the temple of the heart."

When he suddenly felt himself visited by the Lord in public, lest he be without a cell he made a cell of his mantle... so that he would not disclose the hidden manna. Always he put something between himself and the bystanders.... Thus he could pray unseen even among many people in the narrow confines of a ship. Finally, when he could not do any of these things, he would make a temple of his (heart) (2Cel 94d). He gradually withdrew from the tumult of earthly things and applied himself secretly to receive Jesus Christ into his soul with that pearl of great price which he so desired as to be willing to sell all he possessed in order to gain it. To this end he often hid himself from the eyes of deceitful men and withdrew to pray in secret (L3S 8a).

2. Praying with soul and body

As we can see from the descriptions given us by his first biographers, the next striking thing about Francis is that he used to pray with his body as well as with his soul. His prayer was often accompanied and sustained by fasting.

a) *Affective prayer*

Francis always had perfect control over his emotions and external senses (cf. 1Cel 71). But, when he was alone, he used to give outward expression to the thoughts of his heart and his spiritual yearnings:

When he prayed in the woods and in solitary places, he would fill the woods with sighs, water the places with his tears, strike his breast with his hand; and discovering there a kind of secret hiding place, he would often speak with his Lord in words. There he would give answer to his judge; there he would offer his petitions to his father; there he would talk to his friend; there he would rejoice with the bridegroom. Indeed, that he might make his whole being a holocaust in many ways, he would set before his eyes in many ways him who is simple to the greatest degree. Often, without moving his lips, he would meditate within himself*not so much praying as becoming himself a prayer* (2Cel 95a).

In these few short words, Celano has left us his most profound observation on Francis. The Saint's prayer had such an effect on his whole being that he *became* what he was *doing*, as would be evident in a special way later, when he received the stigmata on Mount La Verna.

b) *To "set before our bodily eyes in some way ..."*

The physical or "bodily" element in Francis's prayer was related to his ability to externalize, to portray in word and gesture, his own inner, spiritual life and his desire to act out the Gospel — changing clothes with a beggar in Rome, stripping in the presence of the Bishop of Assisi, reenacting the first Christmas at Bethlehem. It was especially in this last incident, his well-known representation of the Nativity at Christmas, 1223, in Greccio, that he showed his spiritual sensitivity. "The humility of the Incarnation" (1Cel 84a) moved him so much that he wished to relive the events of Bethlehem. The fact that Almighty God had humbled Himself to become an infant in a manger had a profound effect on Francis. In turn, he moved the hearts of the people deeply by his reenactment of the scene at Bethlehem and awakened in them a new love for Christ (cf. 1Cel 86b). Francis himself tells us the reason for his renewal of the Nativity scene:

I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes is some way the inconveniences of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he lay upon the hay where he had been placed (1Cel 84b).

Besides appealing to the people's eyes by reconstructing the scene in the stable, Francis appealed also to their other senses:

He preached to the people standing about, and he spoke charming words concerning the nativity of the poor King and the little town of Bethlehem. Fre-

quently, too, when he wished to call Christ *Jesus*, he would call him simply *the Child of Bethlehem*, aglow with overflowing love for him, and speaking the word *Bethlehem*, his voice was more like the bleating of a sheep. His mouth was filled more with sweet affection than with words. Besides, when he spoke the name *Child of Bethlehem* or *Jesus*, his tongue licked his lips, as it were, relishing and savoring with pleased palate the sweetness of the words (1Cel 86a).

Francis's body and soul, his whole being, was taken over by, and totally immersed in, his love for Christ:

Indeed, he was always occupied with Jesus; Jesus he bore in his heart, Jesus in his mouth, Jesus in his ears, Jesus in his eyes, Jesus in his hands, Jesus in the rest of his members (1Cel 115b).

c) "*Prostrate on the ground*"

Francis prayed with everything in him — heart, soul, body and all his senses. When he saw a church in the distance, he would prostrate himself on the ground and pray: "We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, in all your churches throughout the world, and we bless you, for through your holy cross you have redeemed the world" (Test 5). He taught this prayer to his followers (cf. 1Cel 45a; L3S 37; Test 5), and, in his *Letter to the Entire Order*, he asked his brothers to adore the Son of God "with fear and reverence, prostrate on the ground" (EpOrd 4).

Prostration is an expression of deepest respect, of "humility," that is, closeness to the ground (*humus*, in Latin). Clare, too, used prostration in prayer, stretching out upon the ground, face down and arms outstretched in the form of a cross:

Very frequently while she was prostrate on her face in prayer, she flooded the ground with tears and caressed it with kisses, so that she might always seem to have her Jesus in her hands, on whose feet her tears flowed and her kisses were impressed (LegCl 19; Cf. PrCan 9:2).

Prostration has been used since biblical times and, like striking the breast, is employed especially to express our weakness, unworthiness and guilt.

d) *Fasting*

Fasting is also part of praying with one's whole body. Francis found his inspiration to fast in *the Gospels* and *the example of Christ*, who fasted for forty days in the desert. Judging by an instruction which Francis gave his brothers (2Cel 95), he seems to have regarded Christ's going out into the wilderness as a kind of voluntary imprisonment (*in carcere*, incarceration). This could explain the name, the Carceri, which was given to the hermitage near Assisi. In any case, Francis imitated Christ's fast:

As a sign of his special devotion to (Christ), Francis spent the time from the feast of the Epiphany through forty successive days — that period when Christ was hidden in the desert — secluded in a lonely place, shut up in a cell, with as little food and drink as possible, fasting, praying and praising God without interruption (LM 9:2a).

In both his Rules, too, Francis connects prayer and fasting, “*The Divine Office and fasting*” (RegNB 3; RegB 3), and goes on to quote the Gospel: “The Lord says: This kind of devil cannot come out except by *fasting* and by *prayer*” (cf. Mk 9:29)” (RegNB 3:1).

It is worth noting that, unlike the poverty movements of his time, Francis insisted on preserving the freedom of the Gospel: “They may eat whatever food is placed before them, according to the Gospel (Lk 10:8)” (RegNB 3:13; cf. RegNB 14:3). When the brothers were travelling, they did not have to follow special rules or put a limit on the goodness of God as expressed by the hospitality of the people.

III. An Outline of Franciscan Prayer

1. “*Keeping God’s word in our hearts and our hearts turned to God*”

a) *Francis’s teaching on prayer*

In a long exhortation on prayer, Francis urged his brothers to keep their hearts turned to God and to make those hearts a dwelling place for Him and His Word. The heart is usually regarded as the center of our being, the place where we make all our firmest decisions. It is in the heart that either the devil or God and His Word reside. As long as we live, we run the risk that “the devil (may) come and snatch up what was planted in (our) hearts and take the word out of (our) hearts; otherwise, believing, (we) might be saved” (RegNB 22:13). Hence the brothers’ only care must be “to serve, love, honor and adore the Lord God with clean hearts and pure minds” (RegNB 22:26).

It is obvious, then, that prayer is more than theoretical speculation about God and much more than “empty phrases” (cf. Mt 6:7). Instead, praying means remaining in the presence of God, whom we love: it is a continuous union with Him. And we should retain this contemplative attitude even while working “so that, avoiding idleness, the enemy of the soul, (we) do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion, to which all other things of our earthly existence must contribute” (RegB 5:2). This must also be the aim of theologians and preachers, as Francis urged in his short letter to St. Anthony.

b) *Canticle of praise*

Francis gave expression to the prayers arising in his heart by composing long canticles and exhortations, such as his Praises to be said at all the Hours;

his *Praises of God*; chapter 17 of his *Earlier Rule*, vv. 17f.; and his *Second Letter to the Faithful*, vv.61f. In these, he sometimes piled one synonymous word or phrase on top of another:

*Let all of us,
wherever we are,
in every place,
at every hour,
at every time of day,
every day and continually,
believe truly and humbly
and keep in our hearts
and love, honor, adore, serve,
praise and bless
glorify and exalt
magnify and give thanks to
the most high and supreme eternal God (RegNB 23:11).*

c) *Repeating short prayers*

At other times, instead of composing a long litany of praises, he expressed his love by repeating short verses, aspirations and exclamations. In the *Considerations on the Five Wounds*, we are told that, one night on Mount La Verna, Brother Bernard heard Francis praying by repeating over and over the question: "Who are you, my sweet Lord God, and who am I, a vile worm and your useless servant?" (ConPl 3). An early source, the *Fioretti* or *Little Flowers*, relates that, before Brother Bernard became Francis's first companion, he observed how the Saint used to spend the whole night in prayer, repeating the aspiration, "*Deus meus et omnia!*: [My God and my all!]" (cf. Fior 2). Celano describes how, on one occasion, Francis prayed for a long time by simply saying over and over again, "O God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (1Cel 26). This aspiration shows how Francis would take a verse from the Gospel (Lk 18:13) and, while repeating it, would meditate on it and make it his own.

He used to employ the same method with verses from the psalms which he knew by heart. Whenever he sent his brothers out to preach peace and penance, and also whenever he told a brother to do some task in obedience, he used to encourage them by saying: "Cast thy thought upon the Lord and he will nourish you!" (Ps 54:33; 1Cel 29). This quotation sums up the whole Franciscan way of life; and Francis used it to strengthen the brothers' confidence in God's providence during their travels.

d) *The name of "Jesus," the epitome of prayer*

Francis prayed with the greatest simplicity and fervor when he meditated upon and repeated the name "Jesus" (1Cel 82, 86, 115). By merely reiterating that one name, "Jesus," he was able to meditate on our Lord's whole life and particularly on His Passion.

2. *"Contemplating with the eyes of the spirit"*

The image of Christ, which Francis contemplated in the psalms, the Gospel and the liturgy led him to, and was completed by, his contemplation of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist. He was particularly struck by this *humble presence of God*. That is why he never tired of exhorting his listeners, over and over again and in every possible way, to venerate and reverence the sacrament of the Eucharist. But we need new vision to pierce the veil of the ordinary bread and wine which hides the Lord of the Universe after the consecration in the Mass. Our bodily eyes see only the outward appearances of the bread and wine, and so we must use the eyes of the spirit to see the Body and Blood of Christ.

Francis's exhortation "not to lose or turn away our minds and hearts from God" (RegNB 22:29) contains the essence of his teaching on prayer. And we find his instructions on the Eucharist in his first *Admonition*:

As He appeared to the holy apostles in true flesh, so now He reveals Himself to us in the sacred bread. And as they saw only His flesh by means of their bodily sight, yet believed Him to be God as they contemplated Him with the eyes of faith, so, as we see bread and wine with our bodily eyes, we too are to see and firmly believe them to be His most holy Body and Blood living and true (Adm 1:19-21).

Notice the progression from "seeing" to "contemplating," for here Francis is speaking precisely about contemplation with the eyes of the spirit, "the Spirit of the Lord, who lives in His faithful" (Adm 1:12). The Lord's dwelling in a pure heart (cf. RegNB 22:26f; 2EpFid 48) leads to union with God: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5:8):

The truly pure of heart are those who despise the things of earth and seek the things of heaven, and who never cease to adore and behold the Lord God living and true with a pure heart and soul (Adm 16).

The biographers record that Francis often had the happiness of enjoying this contemplation because he had "acquired in an inexpressible way familiarity with God by his constant prayer and frequent contemplation" (1Cel 91c).

3. "(Take) no pleasure or joy except in the most holy words ... of the Lord" (*Adm* 20)

The many biblical quotations found in Francis's writings show that he had a deep knowledge of Scripture, thanks to his own reading and to the liturgy. The Bible was an inexhaustible source of prayer for him:

At times he would read the sacred books and what he put into his mind once he wrote indelibly in his heart. His memory substituted for books, for he did not hear a thing once in vain, for his love meditated on it with constant devotion. This he would say was a fruitful way of learning and reading, not by wandering about through thousands of treatises (2Cel 102).

He knew the psalms almost by heart since he meditated on them especially and had learned to read from them in school. It was because of this that he was able to compose an Office of his own by going through the liturgical year, choosing appropriate verses from the psalms and other biblical quotations, and adding a few words of his own. In this mosaic of texts entitled the *Office of the Passion*, Francis contemplated our Lord's whole life, from His birth (the Nativity psalm, OffPass 15), to His Ascension (Easter psalm, OffPass 9). The longest section is a meditation on Christ's Passion, consisting of seven psalms in which the refrain, "You are my most holy Father, my King and my God!" (OffPass 2:11; 4:9; 5:15; 6:12) emphasizes Christ's confident, obedient giving of Himself into His Father's hands. Francis's meditation on the psalms often finishes with a call to follow Christ: "Offer up your bodies and take up His holy cross" (OffPass 7:8; 15:13). Prayer is perfected by *action*.

4. "The book of Christ's cross"

Even though Francis had the greatest reverence for "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Word of the Father" (2EpFid), he was also content to dispense with reading directly from the Bible. He knew many biblical passages so well that, for example, he was able to recall vividly the various events of Christ's life and to immerse himself in the mysteries of our salvation. His *Office of the Passion* shows that he meditated especially on Christ's Passion. The striking crucifix at San Damiano had spoken to him: and it was while kneeling before that crucifix that he had discovered his mission in life. From that moment on, he was a man marked with the cross; and on Mount La Verna he became a living image of the Crucified. The cross went everywhere with him, and, out of love for his Savior, he would pray: "We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, in all your churches throughout the world, and we bless you, for through your holy cross you have redeemed the world" (Test 5). The meaning of this basic prayer and its prominence in the life of the brothers lend support to St. Bonaventure's reference to the *graphic meditation* practiced by the

brothers during the first years of the Order, when they were living at Rivotorto:

They spent their time there praying incessantly, devoting themselves to mental rather than vocal prayer because they did not yet have liturgical books from which to chant the canonical hours. In place of these they had the book of Christ's cross which they studied continually day and night, taught by the example and words of their father who spoke to them constantly about the cross of Christ (LM 3b).

Even more than Francis, Clare concentrated on the cross of Christ:

In the depth of this same mirror, contemplate the ineffable charity that led Him to suffer on the wood of the Cross and to die there the most shameful kind of death (4LAg 23). Look to heaven that invites us, O dearly beloved, and take up the cross and follow Christ, who goes before us.... Meditate constantly on the mysteries of the cross and the agonies of His mother standing at the foot of the cross (LErm 9, 12).

Besides reciting the *Office of the Passion* composed by Francis, Clare "repeated more frequently the *Prayer of the Five Wounds of the Lord*" (LegCl 30c).

Francis and Clare's special love for contemplating the Passion of Christ was to be a determining factor in the future of the Order. The brothers initiated and spread the devotion of the Stations of the Cross; they founded confraternities named after the Five Wounds; and they conceived the idea of the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows as a consolation in pain and death. St. Conrad of Parzham († 1894) summed up this type of meditation by saying simply: "The cross is my book." One look at the crucifix taught him what he had to do in every circumstance.

5. "Use the things of the world"

Francis was far from despising the world. His prayer was always linked to nature whether he was meditating in caves and amid rocks or praising the Creator for the beauty of the flowers and fields around him (cf. 1Cel 80f). Thomas of Celano tells us of Francis's uncertainty about whether he should dedicate himself to the apostolate in the world or withdraw into solitude:

This blessed traveller was yet helped not a little by the things that are in the world. With respect to the world-rulers of this darkness, he used it as a field of battle; with respect to God, he used it as a very bright image of his goodness. In every work of the artist he praised the Artist; whatever he found in the things made he referred to the Maker. He rejoiced in all the works of the hands of the Lord and saw behind things pleasant to behold their life-giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he saw Beauty itself; all things were to him good. 'He who made us is the best,' they cried out to him. Through his footprints impressed upon things he followed the Beloved everywhere; he made for himself from all things a ladder by which to come even to His throne. He embraced all things with

a rapture of unheard-of devotion, speaking to them of the Lord and admonishing them to praise Him (2Cel 165 a-b).

We can find in Francis's own writings what Celano is referring to here. In the hermitage of Cesi di Terni, the Saint had various creatures drawn on a wooden panel upon which he then wrote some verses in the form of a psalm. This psalm was his *Exhortation to the Praise of God*, in which he invites his readers and all creatures to praise their Creator. His invitation to the whole cosmos to praise the Creator will find its highest poetic expression in the *Canticle of the Sun*, which he composed towards the end of his life. Since we shall study this canticle at length later in a special article, we shall simply say here that, for Francis, nature, too, was an object of meditation, because he saw God's hand in all creation. That is why he invited the whole world to praise God with him (*Exhortation to the Praise of God; Praises to be Said at All the Hours*; RegNB 23, etc.). For him, every part of creation was closely connected to God but even more closely to Christ. With St. Paul, he recognized the cosmic importance of Christ's redeeming triumph (cf. Col 1: 13-20), and hence, in his *Office of the Passion*, he often added the verse, "Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice, let the sea and all that is in it be moved" (Ps 95: 11f; Off Pass 7:4; 9:7; 15:9).

Francis saw the unity of the universe and knew that heaven and earth have been reconciled since God became incarnate in Christ and continues to be present among us in the Eucharist.

This is the reason why he asks all his brothers of all times to follow St. Paul (Col 1:20) and:

to show all possible reverence and honor to the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom that which is in the heavens and on the earth is brought to peace and is reconciled to the all-powerful God (EpOrd 12f.).

Every creature bears the mark of God's hand and, therefore, can lead us to Him. Of course, God is not bound to the world, but neither is He cut off from it. Accordingly, as St. Ignatius Loyola († 1556) also taught, we can seek God in everything.