

REVERENCE FOR THE CHURCH

Have on hand: O.F.S. Rule

Our Opening Prayer:

**O God, who from living and chosen stones
prepare an eternal dwelling for your majesty,
increase in your Church the grace you have bestowed,
so that by unceasing growth
your faithful people may build up the heavenly Jerusalem.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever. Amen.¹**

These words of Christ have echoed down the centuries. “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church ...” (*Matthew 16:18*)



Participants should take turns reading from our *Rule*, Articles #1, #5, #6b, and #8b.

Already as O.F.S. candidates, we were to focus on several areas of spiritual growth. We find this mentioned in our *General Constitutions* (Article #40.2): “The candidates are guided to read and meditate on Sacred Scripture, to come to know the person and writings of Francis and of Franciscan spirituality, and to study the Rule and Constitutions. They are trained in a love for the Church and acceptance of her Teaching. The laity practice living their earthly commitment in the world in an evangelical way.”

We know that Francis had a very high regard for all bishops, especially his own Bishop Guido of Assisi, and all priests, and had a close friendship with the Popes: Innocent III, Honorius III, and Gregory IX (while he was still known as Cardinal Hugolino during Francis’ lifetime).²

St. Francis of Assisi strongly promoted the sacramental life of the Church: the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Eucharist, the Mass, etc.

In *The Earlier Rule* we read: “Let all brothers be, live, and speak as Catholics. If someone has strayed in word or in deed from Catholic faith and life and has not amended his ways, let him be expelled from our brotherhood. Let us consider all clerics and religious as our masters in all that pertains to the salvation of our soul and does not deviate from our religion, and let us respect their order, office, and administration in the Lord.”³ “All of us lesser brothers, useless servants, humbly ask and beg those who wish to serve the Lord God within the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church ... who are and who will be to persevere in the true faith and in penance for otherwise no one will be saved.”⁴

In *The Later Rule* we find: “Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to our Lord Pope Honorius and his successors canonically elected and to the Roman Church.”; “Let the ministers examine them [those who wish to adopt this life] carefully concerning the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church.”; “Let the clerical [brothers] recite the Divine Office according to the rite of the holy Roman Church ...”; “The brothers may not preach in the diocese of any bishop when he has opposed their doing so.”⁵

In his *Testament*, St. Francis writes: “Afterwards the Lord gave me, and gives me still, such faith in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them.”⁶

In Francis of Assisi's *Admonition XXVI*, we read: "Blessed is the servant who has faith in the clergy who live uprightly according to the rite of the Roman Church. Woe to those who look down upon them ..."⁷

Celano writes in his *First Book*: "He [St. Francis] put the faith of the Holy Roman Church above and beyond all things, preserving, honoring and following it, since the salvation of all who would be saved was found in it alone. He honored priests and affectionately embraced every ecclesiastical order."⁸

In Thomas of Celano's *Second Book*, we find: "At that time Saint Francis approached the lord Pope Honorius, who was then at the head of the Roman Church, humbly asking him to appoint the lord Hugolino, bishop of Ostia, as father and lord for him and his brothers. The lord Pope bowed to the holy man's request, and kindly agreeing, entrusted to the bishop his authority over the Order of the brothers. ... The holy father [Francis] for this reason subjected himself to him in every way and venerated him with wonderful and reverent affection."⁹

Such attitudes are found again and again in the early writings about St. Francis and his behavior.

Q1. How do I actively respect the Church teachings as St. Francis did? How do I reconcile my personal opinions with the teachings of the Church?

Q2. How does the Holy Spirit speak through the Church today? Give examples.

Q3. Which do I prefer and choose: a) What the Church teaches, or b) What individuals prefer to teach and hold, contrary to the Church? Do I take time to figure out this difference? Which would St. Francis choose?

Q4. On November 26, 2000, Pope St. John Paul II appealed to the laity to read and practice the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Have we followed his fatherly advice and request?

Q5. Do I do any reading in the *Catechism*?

Q6. Do I have enough reverence for the Church to read and reflect on her teaching documents?

(Why else were they written and published?) Have I chosen to ignore them?

Q7. Do I agree with Pope St. John Paul II and the special Synod of Bishops in 1985 who said: "The Second Vatican Council was the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit in the 20th century"?

Q8. Do I know Catholics (even Franciscans?) who ignore the Church's documents? What would St. Francis be doing?



Interior of the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome
[At the time of St. Francis, the Pope resided at the Lateran]

¹ *Roman Missal*, Common of the Dedication of a Church on the Anniversary of the Dedication, II. Outside the Church that was Dedicated

² More details in FA:ED, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 1232-1235, Speyer, Vol. I, pp. 418-420, Chapter XIII, vs. 73-76

³ FA:ED, *The Earlier Rule: The Rule Without a Papal Seal*, 1209/10-1221, Vol. I, p. 77, Chapter XIX: That the Brothers Live as Catholics, vs. 1-3

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 83-84, Chapter XXIII: Prayer and Thanksgiving, v. 7

⁵ FA:ED, *The Later Rule*, 1223, Vol. I, pp. 100-101 and 104, Chapter I, v. 2; Chapter II, v. 2; Chapter III, v. 1; Chapter IX, v. 1

⁶ FA:ED, *The Testament*, 1226, Vol. I, p. 125, v. 6

⁷ FA:ED, *The Undated Writings, The Admonitions*, Vol. I, p. 136: XXVI: Let Servants of God Honor the Clergy

⁸ FA:ED, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 1228-1229, Vol. 1, p. 238, Chapter XXII, v. 62

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 270, Chapter V, v. 100