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# IN DEFENCE OF THE PORTIUNCULA INDULGENCE



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The «Tractatus de Indulgentia Portiunculae»  
by Francis Bartholi of Assisi,  
and other medieval documents regarding the Indulgence

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## Introduction

# THE PORTIUNCULA INDULGENCE

The Sources for the life of Saint Francis of Assisi are silent regarding the granting of the Portiuncula Indulgence by Pope Honorius III in Perugia in 1216. Indeed, there is no direct reference to this special favour, and the documentary sources that explicitly speak about the indulgence go back not earlier than the last quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Until nearly a century ago historians were sceptical about admitting the historical truth of this indulgence. Paul Sabatier, pioneer of the modern study of the Franciscan sources, did not include any historical note regarding the indulgence in the *Vie de Saint François d'Assise*, first published in 1893. However, in the 1931 edition of the same biography, Sabatier inserted a new chapter on the Portiuncula Indulgence, and justified it by the following footnote in the same chapter:

In the first editions of the *Vie de Saint François d'Assise*, I believed that I had to reject in block all the information regarding the famous indulgence of the Portiuncula. New studies undertaken in Florence, Assisi and Rome have helped me to discover a certain number of new documents and, in particular, have permitted me to conclude that the traditional documents in favour of the indulgence are, in general, authentic. Even though these documents have suffered much when they passed through the hands of incompetent copyists, who often had little scruple, one can, nearly always, discover the original text.<sup>1</sup>

Ever since then studies regarding the Portiuncula Indulgence have multiplied. The most recent and complete study, by Mario Sensi, contains a comprehensive and detailed bibliography of the material published regarding the Indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels.<sup>2</sup>

Before embarking upon the presentation of the various 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century documentary sources regarding the Portiuncula Indulgence, culminating in

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the Italian edition, reproducing a new chapter added to the biography by the author and published in the 1931 edition: PAUL SABATIER, *Vita di San Francesco d'Assisi*, Traduzione di Giuseppe Zanichelli, Introduzione di Lorenzo Bedeschi, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano 1978, 197-207.

<sup>2</sup> MARIO SENSI, *Il Perdono di Assisi*, Edizioni Porziuncola, Santa Maria degli Angeli 2002. Bibliography in pages 341-375.

the *Tractatus de Indulgentia Portiunculae* by Francis Bartholi of Assisi, which is the specific object of our study, we shall take a brief look at the Franciscan documentary sources that speak about the importance of the church of Saint Mary of the Angels or Portiuncula, and indirectly hint at the significance of this shrine as a place of pardon and remission of sins. This brief analysis will help us to understand the link between the living memory of the first companions of Saint Francis, who transmitted to the second and third generation Franciscan friars the information that has been preserved regarding this indulgence, as well as the reasons why for a number of decades these same companions kept the Portiuncula Indulgence a closely guarded secret. This apparent silence of the companions and of the sources coming from their own pen or even from that of the so-called “official” biographers of Saint Francis was broken when these same companions began to die and to hand over their information to their disciples, many of whom belonged to the *Zelanti* group, later on known as the Spirituals. It was a time when the same Portiuncula Indulgence was being criticised and rejected by detractors, and therefore we assist at the production of apologetic treatises in order to defend the historical truth of the same indulgence.

### **The Franciscan Sources and the Portiuncula Indulgence**

Thomas of Celano, the first biographer of Saint Francis, mentions the church of Saint Mary of the Angels, which Francis repaired in the period 1207-1208.<sup>3</sup> Arnaldo Fortini describes this church as very ancient.<sup>4</sup> He states

<sup>3</sup> THOMAS OF CELANO, *The Life of Saint Francis* [1C] 21, in *Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*, Vol. I, The Saint, ed. R.J. Armstrong, J.A.W. Hellmann, W.J. Short, New City Press, London – New York – Manila 1999, 201 [FAED I, 201]: “From there he moved to another place, which is called the Portiuncula, where there stood a church of the Blessed Virgin Mother of God built in ancient times. At that time it was deserted and no one was taking care of it. When the holy man of God saw it so ruined, he was moved by piety because he had a warm devotion to the Mother of all good and he began to stay there continually. The restoration of that church took place in the third year of his conversion.” Subsequent references to the three volumes of the Sources: *Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*, Vol. II, The Founder, 2000 [FAED II and page number]; *Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*, Vol. III, The Prophet, 2001 [FAED III and page number].

<sup>4</sup> ARNALDO FORTINI, *Francis of Assisi. A Translation of Nova Vita di San Francesco* by HELEN MOAK, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 370 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017, 1992, 249-250: “The chapel stood in a little clearing, an open expanse in the middle of thick woods. (“Porziuncola” means, in the old jargon used in the communes and the abbeys, “particella” or “particle”, the name that is still given to small pieces of land



that the chapel depended upon the monastery of Saint Benedict of Monte Subasio according to papal records going back to 1145, but that it was probably built during the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In 1045 the name ‘Porzucle’ appears in a document in the Assisi cathedral archives. A popular but unfounded legend states that the church was built by hermits coming from the Holy Land in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, during the time of Pope Liberius (352-366), who placed in it a stone from the tomb of the Virgin Mary in the Valley of Jehosaphat. The chapel had been held in veneration for many centuries, and was variously known as Santa Maria degli Angeli or Santa Maria della Porziuncola.

According to Celano it was at the Portiuncula that Francis discovered his evangelical calling to the *apostolica vivendi forma* on the feast day of Saint Matthias on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1208.<sup>5</sup> The Portiuncula was therefore considered to be the cradle of the Order, at least by the companions of Saint Francis and their disciples. The same Thomas of Celano, in *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, speaks in very clear terms regarding the importance that Francis himself attached to the chapel.<sup>6</sup> The chapel of the Portiuncula became

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separate from the principal body, for use in a particular situation or for the person of the proprietor, or for a particular kind of cultivation.) The forest there was tangled and wild, thick with oaks and holm-oaks; and once it was called the *cerreto* of Porziuncola (“oak woods of Porziuncola”) or simply the *cerqueto* (also, “oak woods”). A document of August 1045 in the Assisi cathedral, drawn up by the notary Grifone, records the fact that the priest Arso sold to Pietro, son of Berga, some land located *infra comitato asisinato in loco qui dicitur allo cereto de Porzucle, seu allo Cerqueto*. A pig keeper lived there to take care of the herds, which were fed with acorns. Perhaps one of these keepers was the “Gorzio della Porziuncola,” the only inhabitant of this place whose name was recorded in a census of the commune in 1232. The chapel, consecrated to the Virgin (Saint Mary of the Angels) was called Santa Maria degli Angeli, but it was better known as the Porziuncola church. It belonged to the Benedictines of Mount Subasio, who had abandoned it. Before it had fallen into ruin, someone would come down from the monastery to say Mass on feast days and to receive the offerings of candles. Then, nothing more.” For further history and description: A. FORTINI, *Nova Vita di S. Francesco*, S. Maria degli Angeli, Assisi 1959, Vol. 3, 92-99.

<sup>5</sup> 1C 22 [FAED I, 201-202]. Cfr. JULIAN OF SPEYER, *The Life of Saint Francis* [LJS] 14-15 [FAED I, 14-15].

<sup>6</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* [2C] 18-19 [FAED II, 256-258]: “Francis, the servant of God, was small in stature, humble in attitude, and lesser by profession. While living in the world he chose a little portion of this world for himself and his followers, since he could not serve Christ unless he had something of this world. Since ancient times, prophetically, the place was called ‘the Little Portion,’ since it was the lot ceded to those who wished to hold nothing of this world. In this place there was a church built for the Virgin Mother, who by her unique humility deserved, after her Son, to be the head of all the saints. It is here that the Order of Lesser Ones had its beginning [...] He commanded his brothers to venerate it with special reverence. He wanted it, like a mirror of the Order, always preserved in humility and highest poverty, and therefore kept its ownership in the hands of others, keeping for himself and his brothers only the use of it

not only the birthplace of the Order of friars Minor, but also indicated the place of forgiveness and reconciliation. This particular note is very important in the early biographies, and maybe provides the clue as to the intimate link between the original experience of Francis and the first companions regarding the Portiuncula as a church of pardon, and the subsequent development of the literature regarding the Portiuncula Indulgence.

It is Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio who provides us with a theological reflection on the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Angels as the “Mother of Mercy” (*Mater veniae*) in *The Major Life of Saint Francis*:

In the church of the Virgin Mother of God, her servant Francis lingered and, with continuing cries, insistently begged her who had conceived and brought to birth *the Word full of grace and truth* (Jn 1:14), to become his advocate. Through the merits of the Mother of Mercy, he conceived and brought to birth the spirit of the Gospel truth.<sup>7</sup>

This text is maybe one of the most important hints at the rising popularity of the Portiuncula Indulgence, although when Bonaventure wrote the *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci* in 1260-1263 it was still relatively unknown except within the inner circles of Francis’ companions. However, the same companions have given us maybe the oldest testimony as to the existence of a kind of pardon linked with the chapel of the Portiuncula, in *The Legend of Three Companions*, written before 1247 when Thomas of Celano wrote his *Remembrance in the Desire of a Soul*. The documentary material in the *Legenda trium sociorum* certainly comes from the pen of Francis’ early companions, of whom Brothers Leo, Rufino and Angelo, authors of the *Letter of Greccio* (11<sup>th</sup> August 1246) that accompanies most manuscripts of the same *Legenda* are the most qualified representatives.

After speaking about the hut of Rivotorto, where the first brothers lived for a time with Francis, the authors of *The Legend of Three Companions*, speak about the importance of the Portiuncula as the place where the brothers could find forgiveness and mercy on the part of Christ through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

They left that hut for the use of poor lepers, moving to a small dwelling near Saint

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[...] According to the stories of the old neighbours, that church used to be called by another name, ‘Saint Mary of the Angels.’ As the blessed Francis used to say, God revealed to him, that among all other churches built in her honour throughout the world, the blessed Virgin cherished that church with special affection.”

<sup>7</sup> ST. BONAVENTURE, *The Major Life of Saint Francis* [LMj] 3,1 [FAED II, 542].

Mary of the Portiuncula where they stayed from time to time before acquiring the church.

Afterwards blessed Francis, in accordance with God's will and inspiration, obtained it from the abbot of the monastery of Saint Benedict on Mount Subasio near Assisi. The saint, in a special and affectionate way, commended this place to the general minister and to all the brothers, as the place loved by the glorious Virgin more than any other place or church in this world.

A vision one of the brothers had, while in the world, contributed much to the commendation and love of this place. Blessed Francis loved this brother with unique affection as long as he was with him, by showing him extraordinary affection. This man, wanting to serve God – as he later did so faithfully in religion – saw in a vision that all the people of the world were blind and were kneeling in a circle around the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula with their hands joined and their faces raised to heaven. In a loud and sobbing voice, they were begging the Lord in his mercy to give them sight. While they were praying, it seemed that a great light came from heaven and, resting on them, enlightened all of them with its wholesome radiance.<sup>8</sup>

It is evident from such a description that Francis' companions were aware of the importance of the Portiuncula as a shrine in which one could receive pardon and enlightenment. The Portiuncula conveyed a special meaning to the early Franciscan fraternity. It was the church repaired by Francis himself out of his devotion to the Virgin Mother of God. In this church Francis discovered his Gospel calling to the apostolic life in 1208. It was here that he regularly convened the first brothers after their missionary expeditions in Italy. At the Portiuncula Francis welcomed Clare of Assisi on the night of Palm Sunday in 1211, when she decided to consecrate her life to God. The Portiuncula soon became the venue for the annual general chapters of the Order, where great decisions were taken, particularly from 1217 onwards, regarding the evangelising mission of the friars beyond the Alps and in the lands of the Saracens. Above all it was at the Portiuncula that Francis had died in 1226 surrounded by the same faithful companions who had followed their master ever since the beginning of the Order. The importance of the chapel of Saint Mary of the Angels was further enhanced by the granting of the Portiuncula Indulgence in 1216, which is not explicitly mentioned in the sources, but which is evident from various clues we have been noticing in the same texts which speak about the link between this particular church and the mercy that God bestowed in this place through the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

The *Assisi Compilation*, which is the fruit of the famous scrolls of the

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<sup>8</sup> *The Legend of Three Companions* [L3C] 55-56 [FAED II, 100].

companions of Saint Francis, sent from Greccio in 1246 to the minister general Crescentius of Jesi, gives us the full account of the donation of the Portiuncula chapel to Francis by the Abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Saint Benedict on Mount Subasio, and contains many indications to the form of life of the first brothers who lived at the Portiuncula, presenting this holy place as a model of evangelical perfection to the Order.<sup>9</sup>

A more detailed presentation of the importance of the Portiuncula comes from the pen of some disciples of the first companions, who refer to the authority of Brother Leo's own testimony, in *The Mirror of Perfection*, a document dating from 1318 but which contains material which is much older, and which probably comes directly from the memories of the first companions sent in the scroll of 1246, known as the *florilegium* of Greccio, as well as from the direct memories of Brother Leo, contained in *The Words of Brother Leo* and *The Intention of the Rule*, two scrolls that come from the pen of the secretary of Saint Francis. This document is very important since it dates from the same period in which the Portiuncula Indulgence was being publicly announced and defended against detractors of the same privilege granted by Honorius III to Francis in favour of the church of Saint Mary of the Angels. That is why an examination of the contents of the *Speculum Perfectionis* is important to provide a direct link with the object of our analysis, namely the documentary sources in defence of the Portiuncula Indulgence.

The Franciscan documentary sources coming from the pen of the Spiritual friars during the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century are full of praise to the Portiuncula chapel, but speak rather critically of the Basilica of Saint Francis,

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<sup>9</sup> *Assisi Compilation* [AC] 56 [FAED II, 154-158]. This section of the AC is sometimes referred to as "the *Testament* of the Portiuncula", since in it we find the following affirmation by Saint Francis: "I want to leave and bequeath to the brothers the place of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula as a testament, that it may always be held in the greatest reverence and devotion by the brothers." This idea of a kind of *Testament* involving the church of Saint Mary of the Angels has been proposed by RAOUL MANSSELLI, *From the Testament to the Testaments of St. Francis*, translated by Patrick Colbourne, *Greyfriars Review* 2 (June 1988) 91-99. Article in the original Italian: *Dal Testamento ai testamenti di san Francesco*, in *Collectanea Franciscana* 46 (1976) 121-129. In page 95, referring to the prescriptions regarding the poor dwellings of the friars in the *Assisi Compilation* 56-58, Manselli is of the opinion that these could not refer to the *Testament* as we know it, since there is nowhere in the *Testament* where Francis says: "I want to leave and bequeath to the brothers the place of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula as a testament." Thus Manselli is of the opinion that "we must conclude that there was another Testament, in which, as far as we may presume, instructions or at least detailed counsels were given as to what the dwellings of the friars should be."

in an evident reference to the growing tension between the Community of the Order and the Spiritual family. One of the most important sources is that of the *Mirror of Perfection* (Sabatier edition),<sup>10</sup> in the section on the praise of Saint Mary of the Angels, which calls the Portiuncula “the head and mother of the entire religion.” Now we know that the title *caput et mater Ordinis* had been given to the Basilica of Saint Francis by Pope Gregory IX in 1230.<sup>11</sup>

The same *Mirror of Perfection* draws upon a much older affirmation regarding Francis’ attachment to the Portiuncula chapel, taken from *The Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano, written 90 years earlier. Thus it assumes great relevance for a better understanding of why Francis attached such importance to the Portiuncula chapel:

Although blessed Francis knew the kingdom of heaven was established in every corner of the earth, and believed that divine grace could be given to God’s chosen ones in every place, he nevertheless knew from his own experience that the place of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula was especially full of grace and was filled with visits of heavenly spirits. So he often told the brothers: “See to it my sons, that you never abandon this place. If you are thrown out of one door, go back through another, for this is truly a holy place, and the dwelling place of Christ and His Virgin Mother. Here the Most High increased our numbers, when we were only a few; here He enlightened the souls of His poor ones with the light of His wisdom; here He kindled our wills with the fire of his love; here all who pray wholeheartedly will receive what they ask while offenders will be severely punished. Therefore, my sons, hold this place, truly the dwelling place of God with all reverence and as most worthy of all honour, particularly dear to Him and to His mother. In this place in cries of joy and praise with your whole heart here praise God the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Mirror of Perfection* (Sabatier edition) [2MP] 82-84 [FAED III, 328-332], especially 2MP 82 [FAED III, 328]: “As long as he lived, more than for other places in the Order, he always had a singular zeal and extraordinary attentiveness to preserve every perfection of life and manner of living in the holy place of Saint Mary of the Angels, as the head and mother of the entire religion. He intended and wanted this place more than all places to be the form and example of humility, poverty, and of all gospel perfection. He wanted all the brothers living there always to be, more than all other brothers, solicitous and cautious in all things to be done and to be avoided in view of the perfect observance of the Rule.”

<sup>11</sup> It was the Basilica of Saint Francis that was endowed with the title *caput et mater Ordinis* by Pope Gregory IX in 1230 in the Bulla *Is qui Ecclesiam* [22<sup>nd</sup> April 1230], in *Bullarium Franciscanum*, I, Roma 1749, 60-62; a title confirmed in the Apostolic Constitution of Benedict XIV, *Fidelis Dominus* [25<sup>th</sup> March 1754] and in the Apostolic Letter of Paul VI, *Inclita toto* [8<sup>th</sup> August 1968], in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 61 [1969] 553.

<sup>12</sup> 2MP 83 [FAED III, 329-330]. The source for this reflection is found in 1C 106 [FAED I, 274-275].

The affirmation that the brothers were not to leave the Portiuncula, but even to defend it physically by remaining there at all costs seems strange in the context of what Francis himself states in the *Later Rule*: “Let the brothers not make anything their own, neither house, nor place, nor anything at all.”<sup>13</sup> However, given the importance of the Portiuncula for the defence of Francis’ original Gospel calling and given the fact that such words had already been written down by Celano in 1228, it is plausible that Francis could indeed have uttered them.

One final note regarding the *Speculum Perfectionis* is that it contains an original poem of praise to the Portiuncula. This poem is not only important as a reminder of the profound meaning of this holy place for Francis and the brothers, but also because it ends with a very clear hint to the granting of the Portiuncula Indulgence. Indeed, the poem ends with these words: “Here was touted / the truth that might be doubted, / moreover it was given / whatever the father himself had bidden.”<sup>14</sup> What was the truth that was being doubted? What had Francis requested in this place that was given to him? For the friars who were writing in 1318, and who referred to the witnesses of Francis’ companions, the truth was simple: it was the Portiuncula Indulgence that was being doubted, but that was confirmed by Christ himself when Pope Honorius III granted it to Francis in 1216.

Indeed, although the Sources for the Life of Saint Francis, written between 1228 and 1318, that is between *The Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano and *The Mirror of Perfection*, do not mention the Portiuncula Indulgence in an explicit way, they do contain many references to the importance of the Portiuncula as a place of pardon and forgiveness, and as a most revered shrine of the Virgin Mary, Mother of mercy, for whom Francis nurtured a special devotion.<sup>15</sup> One could say that these veiled references all point to the

<sup>13</sup> SAINT FRANCIS, *Later Rule* 6,1 [FAED I, 103].

<sup>14</sup> 2MP 84 [FAED III, 332].

<sup>15</sup> References in the Sources to the Portiuncula chapel include the following: 1C 21-22; 1C 57; 1C 78; 1C 88; 1C 105-106; 1C 108; LJS 14; LJS 26; LJS 36; LJS 68; AP 14; *Anonymous of Perugia* [AP] 18; AP 24; AP 30; AP 37; L3C 14; L3C 32; L3C 34; L3C 41; L3C 44; L3C 57; L3C 61; AC 5; AC 11; AC 18; AC 27; AC 56; AC 60; AC 63; AC 74; AC 78; AC 93; AC 96; AC 98; AC 103; AC 105-109; 2C 18-20; 2C 57; 2C 63; 2C 65; 2C 67; 2C 76; 2C 100; 2C 115; 2C 160; 2C 171; THOMAS OF CELANO, *Treatise on the Miracles* 37-39; LMj 2,8; LMj 3,1; LMj 4,5; LMj 4,10; LMj 7,4; LMj 8,7; LMj 8,9; LMj 10,5; LMj 14,3; *The Mirror of Perfection* [Lemmens edition] [1MP] 9; 1MP 14; 1MP 27-28; 1MP 31; 1MP 32; 1MP 35; 1MP 38; 2MP 4; 2MP 7-8; 2MP 11; 2MP 14; 2MP 21; 2MP 25; 2MP 38-39; 2MP 55-56; 2MP 58; 2MP 82-84; 2MP 92; 2MP 99; 2MP 112; 2MP 124; *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions* [DBF] 7; DBF 10; DBF 15; DBF 18; DBF 20; DBF 25; DBF 26; *Little*

official recognition of the Portiuncula Indulgence on the part of the Church, and to the various attempts to publicise such an indulgence at a time when it was being doubted by certain sections of the clergy and religious, including the Friars Preachers, and at a time when indulgences had become more popular as a result of similar initiatives taken by Popes during the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

### **In defence of the Portiuncula Indulgence**

The fact that the Franciscan documentary sources of the 13<sup>th</sup> century are silent about the Portiuncula Indulgence can easily be explained with a reference to what are known as the *secreta ordinis*, the secrets of the Order. This expression refers to what the companions of Saint Francis jealously held as very dear and very intimate until the time when they realised that they were going to die, and so decided to pass their memories to the second and third generation disciples. One of these secrets involved the Portiuncula Indulgence.

In his *Testament* Francis wrote: “I strictly command all the brothers through obedience, wherever they may be, not to dare to ask any letter from the Roman Curia, either personally or through an intermediary, whether for a church or another place or under the pretext of preaching or the persecution of their bodies.”<sup>16</sup> These words are very strong, although we know that they were hardly ever observed by the friars Minor after the death of Saint Francis, particularly after Gregory IX’s interpretation of the juridical value of the *Testament* in the Bulla *Quo elongati* (28<sup>th</sup> September 1230). Francis, on his part, remained faithful to this ideal. Indeed, the words that Francis uttered in front of Honorius III when he went to Perugia to request the Portiuncula Indulgence, can be seen within the background of what we have seen in the *Testament*: “When the lord Pope saw that he was going out, he called him and said: ‘O simple man, where are you going? What document will you carry in order to show that you have gained this indulgence?’ Blessed Francis answered him and said: ‘Your words are enough for me. If this is truly the work of God He Himself will make it manifest. I do not want any written document, but let it suffice that the Virgin Mary be the parchment,

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*Flowers of Saint Francis* [LFI] 8; LFI 10; LFI 15; LFI 18; LFI 23.

<sup>16</sup> ST. FRANCIS, *Testament* 25 [FAED I, 126].



Christ the notary and the angels the witnesses.’<sup>17</sup> In other words, Francis did not pretend to have any documentary privileges regarding the church of Saint Mary of the Angels or the Portiuncula Indulgence.

This ideal was also observed to a certain extent, since the documentary sources regarding the proclamation of the Indulgence on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1216 clearly show that Francis was holding a written document in his hand while preaching. However, he was never in favour of defending the truthfulness of the Indulgence through documentary evidence. The witness of his first companions was enough for him.

This state of things continued unabated until the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, the details regarding the *secreta ordinis* jealously conserved by Brother Leo, who died in 1271, were being slowly revealed by other brothers. In 1268 Brother Francis of Fabriano (†1322) was the first to reveal that he had received the information regarding the Portiuncula Indulgence from the mouth of Brother Leo.<sup>18</sup> The same secret was revealed to the nobleman from

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. *Diploma of Theobald, Bishop of Assisi* [10<sup>th</sup> August 1310].

<sup>18</sup> LEONARD LEMMENS, *Testimonia minora saeculi XIII e s. Francisco Assisiensis*, Quaracchi 1926, 49, says that Brother Francesco Venimbeni da Fabriano, who entered the Order in 1251, went to the Portiuncula in 1267 and there met Brother Leo. Regarding the Portiuncula Indulgence he heard “the witness of Brother Leo, one of the companions of Blessed Francis, a man of a trustworthy life. I, Brother Francis, saw him in the year in which I visited the brothers when I went to the indulgence. Brother Leo also said that he had heard from the mouth of Blessed Francis that he had personally requested the indulgence. Brother Benedict of Arezzo and Brother Raynaldus, also of the same town, regarding the aforementioned indulgence, declared that they had received the information from the mouth of Brother Masseo.” Cfr. LUKE WADDING, *Annales Minorum*, ad. an. 1267, n. 5, Vol. 4, 276: “During his novitiate [Francis of Fabriano] was sent to Assisi to gain the famous indulgence of the Portiuncula. There he had a familiar meeting with Blessed Leo, who had been companion, confessor and secretary of Saint Francis, regarding the stigmata of the same saint, and regarding the way in which he had obtained this indulgence. This testimony has been written by the same [Francis] in the document regarding the truth and excellency of this same sacred indulgence. The document starts with these words: ‘For future memory. I Brother Francis of Fabriano, a worthless and unworthy friar Minor have read and seen the authentic document stamped with the seal of the lord bishop of Assisi [*Diploma of Theobald*] regarding the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula of the same town of Assisi, and now I am including it in this document.’ After having narrated the entire story and the way in which the indulgence was granted, as one can see from the letter of the aforementioned author, he added: ‘Brother Leo, one of the companions of Blessed Francis, a man of proven life, renders witness to all this. I Brother Francis have seen him during that year when I came to visit the friars on the occasion of the indulgence. The aforementioned brother Leo also said that he had heard Blessed Francis speak about this indulgence, and that he had preached and announced it.’” In another note the same author states: “In the year of the Lord 1216, on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the Nones of August, the church of Saint Mary of the Angels was consecrated by seven bishops. The lord Pope Honorius III granted it an indulgence from pain and guilt. And



Perugia James di Bonconte Coppoli, whereas Brother Masseo of Marignano (†1280), who had personally accompanied Francis to Perugia when he went to Pope Honorius III to request the indulgence in 1216, recounted the information to his nephew, Brother Marino of Assisi. In 1277 two friars Minor who resided in the friary of Monteripido in Perugia, gave their witness in front of a notary by the name of Giovanni *Canclasiastis*, according to the testimony of Benedict Sinigardi of Arezzo.

Many of the documentary sources of the Indulgence place the event of the granting of the Indulgence in 1216, saying that Francis went to Perugia to request it from Pope Honorius III (Innocent III had just died in Perugia on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1216). This is the position of Brothers Leo, Masseo of Marignano and Benedict of Arezzo. The testimony of Michele of Spello speaks of a visit of Francis to the Pope in Rome. These two traditions were then joined by the *Diploma* of Conrad, bishop of Assisi, who wrote in 1335 and stated that in Perugia Francis obtained the oral granting of the Indulgence, whereas later on he went to Rome where the Pope formally confirmed the Indulgence but limited it to just one day, from the vespers of 1<sup>st</sup> August to those of 2<sup>nd</sup> August, date of the consecration of the Portiuncula chapel. Francesco Venimbeni of Fabriano (†1322) affirmed in his *Chronicle* that the Indulgence was granted on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1216. Much later, Luke Wadding wrote that Francis received the Indulgence twice from Pope Honorius, once in Perugia in 1221 and again in Rome in 1223.<sup>19</sup>

Pierre Jean Olivi (1248-1298), the famous leader of the Spirituals in Provence, wrote a *Quaestio de veritate indulgentiae Portiunculae* circa 1279, in which he discussed the truthfulness of the Indulgence against its detractors.

Another important document regarding the defence of the Portiuncula Indulgence is that by the Spiritual Brother Ubertino da Casale in *The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus*, written on La Verna between 9<sup>th</sup> February and 28<sup>th</sup> September 1305. Ubertino speaks about the Portiuncula Indulgence in book 4, chapter 11. In this text Ubertino states, among other things that Saint Francis had obtained from Christ and His Mother, as well as from the Pope, the plenary remission of all sins for whoever visited the church of Saint Mary of the Angels on 2<sup>nd</sup> August.<sup>20</sup>

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Blessed Francis on that same day proclaimed the indulgence to the people.”

<sup>19</sup> Luke Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, ad. an. 1221, n. 21-24, Vol. 2, 20-21.

<sup>20</sup> UBERTINO DA CASALE, *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu*, lib. IV, cap. 11: “In the person of the Virgin Mother has started the sixth and seventh stage, which will be completed in Francis and his sons, as we shall see later on, since the foundation of the Church is to be accepted

One of the most important witnesses of the Portiuncula Indulgence, who is also quoted in various important documents defending this privilege, including the *Diploma* of Theobald, was called Pietro Zalfani. On a day in 1297-1309, in front of Brother Angelo of Perugia, minister of the province of Saint Francis, he declared that he had been an eyewitness on the day of the promulgation of the Indulgence. He was the first to note that seven bishops had taken part in the celebration of the consecration of the Portiuncula, and that Francis was holding a written parchment (*quamdam cedula*) when he was preaching to the people, telling them that he wanted to send them all to heaven by announcing to them the indulgence of all their sins.

The Portiuncula Indulgence is also mentioned in the mystical writings of two Franciscan female saints. Saint Margaret of Cortona (1247-1297) did not personally go to the Portiuncula, but had two visions regarding it. One vision regarded the bishop, whose name the author of the *Legenda de vita et miraculis Beatae Margaritae de Cortona*, Brother Giunta Bevegnati, does not mention. This bishop had pronounced an excommunication against those who went to the Portiuncula Indulgence. The other vision regarded Sister Adriana, who went to the Indulgence when she was seriously ill, and died soon afterwards, but assured Margaret of Cortona that she was freed from the pains of purgatory.<sup>21</sup>

The other Franciscan female mystic, Blessed Angela of Foligno, went on pilgrimage to the Portiuncula for the Indulgence in 1300, which was the jubilee year proclaimed by Boniface VIII. She first visited the tomb of Saint Francis on 1<sup>st</sup> August, and the following day she went down to the Portiuncula. She could not go in because of the great crowds, but she had a vision in which she found herself in a great basilica and could go in for the Indulgence, although she knew that the Portiuncula chapel was very small.

A very interesting vision in the Portiuncula chapel is that of the Spiritual Brother Conrad of Offida (1241-1306), who was living at Saint Mary of the Angels and during the night of the Indulgence he saw the Virgin Mary

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in the Blessed Virgin Mother, whereas in the place of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula began in a most perfect way the evangelical state for both sexes in Francis and Clare. In fact the most Blessed Virgin obtained from her Son in heaven and Francis obtained from the Pope on earth that on the second day of August one could receive the plenary indulgence of all his sins: therefore see how Christ joyfully glorified His Mother and how in his power He has triumphantly crowned her.”

<sup>21</sup> GIUNTA BEVEGNATI, *Legenda de vita et miraculis Beatae Margaritae de Cortona*, 49-50, Italian Translation by Lorenzo Lazzeri, Edizioni Porziuncola, S. Maria degli Angeli, Assisi 2003, 241-242.

holding the Child Jesus in her arms, who was blessing the crowds who came for the Pardon. The apparition of the Blessed Virgin and the Child Jesus to Brother Conrad of Offida on a different occasion is also described in *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions* 48 and in the *Fioretti* 42.

The most important witness regarding the defence of the Portiuncula Indulgence is the *Tractatus de indulgentia Sanctae Mariae de Portiuncola* by Brother Francis Bartholi of Assisi. This forms the ultimate object of our study, and the reader is referred to the introduction of our translation of this treatise. Here let it suffice to say that the *Tractatus* has 46 chapters, written on different occasions. After the first four introductory chapters on the shrine of the Portiuncula and on the role played by Saint Francis in the granting of the Indulgence, the author reproduces the privilege of Conrad, bishop of Assisi (chapters 5-10). Chapter 11 deals with the testimony of Pietro Zalfani. Chapter 12 regards the testimony of Brothers Benedict and Raynaldus of Arezzo, whereas chapter 13 regards that of James Coppoli of Perugia, chapter 14 the testimony of Brother John of La Verna, chapter 15 the testimony of Brother Otho of Aquasparta, who receives the information from Brother Masseo of Marignano. From chapter 16 the second part of the *Tractatus* begins. The first 24 chapters regard miracles that were linked with the Portiuncula Indulgence (chapters 17-40). Chapter 41 speaks about the testimony of Cardinal Matthew of Aquasparta when he was lector at the Papal Curia during the pontificate of Martin IV (1281-1285). Chapter 42 shows how Pope John XXII (†4<sup>th</sup> December 1334) did not want to interfere regarding the question of the Indulgence. Chapter 43 is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to Saint Francis who received the confirmation of the Pardon from Honorius III. The last three chapters regard the following themes: the great number of pilgrims from Italy and beyond the Alps who came to the Indulgence (chapter 44); the seven qualified witnesses (six brothers and Saint Clare) of the Indulgence (chapter 45); a letter sent from Siena that gives witness that Brother Francis Bartholi had written to various friaries to receive detailed information regarding the Indulgence before composing his *Tractatus de indulgentia*.



THE «TRACTATUS DE  
INDULGENTIA  
S. MARIAE DE PORTIUNCULA»  
BY FRANCIS BARTHOLI  
OF ASSISI

(1334-1335)

# THE *TRACTATUS DE INDULGENTIA* *S. MARIAE DE PORTIUNCULA* BY FRANCISCUS BARTHOLI DE ASSISIO (1334-1335)

## **Biography of Franciscus Bartholi de Assisio**

Francis Bartholi<sup>22</sup> was born in Assisi towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. His surname Bartholi is the Latin genitive of the Italian name of his father, Bartolo. In the codex 2697 of the University Library of Bologna he is registered as “Francesco de Bartolo de Scesi”. Papini, Faloci Pulignani and Sabatier, following codex 334 of the Library of the Sacro Convento of Assisi, add the nickname “Rubeo” (“della Rossa”) which seemingly was the nickname of his family.

In 1312 he entered the Order of friars Minor and was sent to Perugia to study theology. In 1316 he was sent for further studies in Germany, at Cologne, where he acquired the title of bachelor of theology. It was in Cologne that he collected various relics, and requested a document attesting their authenticity from the archbishop on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1317. He also visited Paris, where princess Blanche, daughter of Saint Louis IX, king of France, gave him some relics of the saint.

When he returned to Italy Francesco became a *lector theologiae* at the friary of the Portiuncula, from 1320 to 1326, and later on he was responsible for the *custodia castellana*. Michele da Cesena, minister general of the Order, nominated him lector of theology at the friary of Borgo Sansepolcro. In 1328 the Order of friars Minor, led by Michele da Cesena (1316-1328), entered into open conflict on the question of the poverty of Christ with Pope John XXII (1316-1334). Francesco supported the position of Michele da Cesena and of the procurator Bonagrazia di Bergamo and refused to bow down to the pressure of the papal curia at Avignon.

The open contrast between John XXII, who resided at Avignon, and the

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<sup>22</sup> This is an English free translation and adaptation of MARIO SENSI, *Francesco d'Assisi (Franciscus Bartholi de Assisio)*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, available online at the website [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francescod-assisi\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francescod-assisi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

leaders of the Order, began in 1322. During that year, in the general chapter celebrated in Perugia on 30<sup>th</sup> May, the Order of friars Minor declared that the doctrine that Christ and the apostles had no material possessions neither personally nor collectively was catholic and had been accepted by Pope Nicholas III in the Apostolic Constitution *Exiit qui seminat* (14<sup>th</sup> August 1279). John XXII answered with various Apostolic Constitutions, including *Ad conditorem* (8<sup>th</sup> December 1322), *Cum inter nonnullos* (12<sup>th</sup> November 1323) and *Quia quorundam* (10<sup>th</sup> November 1324). Michele da Cesena had been re-elected as minister general during the general chapter of Bologna of 1328 against the explicit wishes of the Pope. The Pope had imprisoned Michele and Bonagrazia in Avignon, but they managed to escape and took protection in the court of John's adversary, the Emperor Louis IV of Bavaria, who had been declared a heretic. In the meantime the same Emperor had crowned the Franciscan Pietro da Corbara as antipope in Rome on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1328. He took the name Nicholas V, but soon asked for forgiveness from Pope John XXII.

On 6<sup>th</sup> June 1328 Pope John XXII deposed and excommunicated Michele da Cesena. He also gave orders to the rector of the Duchy of Spoleto and to the inquisitors of the Province of Saint Francis and of the Roman Province to institute processes against all those who supported the deposed general. These dissidents were collectively known as “fraticelli”, “spirituals”, and “followers of the free spirit”. In this way the region of Umbria, where Francesco Bartholi was living, came under the control of the papal inquisition.

In the Secret Archives of the Vatican one can find a small pamphlet (*Instrumenta miscellanea*, n. 6466) containing the documents that were taken away from Francesco when he was arrested by the Inquisition in 1330. The documents include eight letters that Francesco had addressed to Michele da Cesena and to other friars; they also include two documents of the antipope Nicholas V dated 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> February 1329; three writings in defence of Michele da Cesena and another defence attributed to Bonagrazia da Bergamo. These documents help us not only to come to know the attitude taken by Francesco regarding his contacts with Emperor Louis of Bavaria and the antipope Nicholas V, and to reconstruct his activity since 1330. It also helps us to evaluate the connections between secular and ecclesiastical enemies of the time, and between the central papal power and the “fraticelli de opinione” (the disciples of Michele da Cesena), who were staunch opponents of John XXII and who were considered as heretics and rebels by

the Apostolic See, since they continued to support the doctrine of absolute poverty of Christ and the apostles as being the catholic foundation stone of Franciscan life.

During the autumn of 1328 the position of Francesco Bartholi in the friary of Borgo Sansepolcro, where he was lecturing sacred theology, became very difficult, since the majority of that community was contrary to his ideas and writings. On 1<sup>st</sup> September he addressed a letter from Borgo Sansepolcro to Michele da Cesena – whom Francesco calls “true general” of the Order. In fact Pope John XXII had placed Cardinal Bertrand de la Tour as vicar general of the Order, and in 1329 had indicated to the capitulars his candidate for minister general, namely the Frenchman Gerard Eudes (1329-1342), who implemented the Pope’s wish that the Order would have possessions in common and thus inaugurated what was to be called “conventualism” in the Franciscan Order. In his letter to the deposed minister general Francesco asks for permission to transfer to the court of Louis of Bavaria or somewhere in the territories controlled by the Emperor, since he affirmed that he could not teach the truth in Sansepolcro, except to two Brothers. He requested that, if his transferral to the Emperor’s territories were not possible, he would be allowed to retire to the friary of La Verna or to that of Città di Castello. He indicated Brother Isacco da Arezzo as his intermediary. Francesco was evidently afraid of being denounced to the Inquisition. On the following day he also wrote to the minister provincial of Puglia, Francesco di Madonna, asking him to convince Michele da Cesena to accede to his request, and promising that he would do great things for the “general” once he could transfer to a more secure place.

Michele da Cesena did not consider it opportune to welcome Francesco’s request. Maybe he could not do anything about it. Francesco remained in the friary of Borgo Sansepolcro until the summer of 1329, employing himself to his normal offices, as well as to the transcription of some texts, under the supervision of Brother Accursio Bonfantini, Inquisitor of Tuscia. During this time he continued to keep in touch with the supporters of the deposed general and of the antipope Nicholas V.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1329, from Borgo Sansepolcro Francesco sent a copy of the *Clypeus*, a work in defence of Michele da Cesena composed by Bonagrazia da Bergamo, to Brother Accursio Bonfantini, to a certain Ermanno, bachelor of theology, and to another bachelor of theology called Alamanno Donati, future bishop of Savona. He also send another copy of the *Clypeus* to another



Brother, Giacomo Ugurgieri da Siena, with an accompanying letter in which he expressed his sadness regarding the fact that all the friars in Siena were against Michele da Cesena. Some time later Francesco received a letter in which Accursio Bonfantini begged him to go to La Verna in order to meet him and Almanno Donati. Francesco answered to Donati, asking him to proceed with caution. He also included other letters with his own letter, of which we do not know the contents, and which were signed with mysterious symbols. We also do not know whether the meeting between these friars actually took place.

Francesco left the friary of Borgo Sansepolcro after 29<sup>th</sup> August 1239 and went to the friary of La Verna, waiting for the time when the friars at Borgo would pronounce themselves in favour of Michele da Cesena. He returned to Borgo Sansepolcro for just one day, on 16<sup>th</sup> September, but on the 17<sup>th</sup> he was back on La Verna. Francesco remained on La Verna during the autumn months, and then he left the mountain to the friary of Arezzo, with the consent of the minister general, in order to preside over the proceedings of the provincial chapter.

Another two letters that have been preserved in the Vatican document give us witness regarding the sinister plots in which Francesco took part during those years and regarding the close relationships he maintained with persons who were close to Louis IV and the antipope Nicholas V.

Francesco Bartholi was arrested by the Inquisition and kept under tight security on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1330. He had to appear in front of the bishop of Florence and the Inquisitor of Tuscany, Pietro da Prato. During the interrogations he confessed that he had supported Michele da Cesena; that he had opposed the Constitutions published by John XXII regarding the question of evangelical poverty; that he had regarded Nicholas V as being the legitimate Pope and Louis IV as being the legitimate Emperor, and that the Emperor, on his part, “had been encouraged by Michele da Cesena, Bonagrazia da Bergamo and Pietro da Siena.” He admitted that he had committed a grave mistake and finally asked for mercy and pardon. In spite of the full retracting statement on his part, and in spite of his declared will to submit himself to all conditions and penances that the ecclesiastical authorities would have imposed upon him in order to receive forgiveness, the process against Francesco Bartholi was not closed. On 15<sup>th</sup> March 1330 John XXII wrote to the bishop of Florence and to the elected bishop of Lucca, inviting them to take judiciary measures against Francesco Bartholi,

since he had submitted to obedience only because of his fear of punishment and in order to escape from sanctions. We do not know anything regarding this second phase of the process. It is certain that at the end the sincerity of Francesco's contrition was recognised. In a letter addressed to the bishop of Florence and to Pietro da Prato on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1331, John XXII granted absolution to Francesco, on the condition that he would publicly amend for his faults, in the presence of the clergy and the people, in the same Franciscan churches in which he had carried out his activity in favour of the deposed and excommunicated minister general of the Order. In those same churches, moreover, as an act of penance, he was obliged to deliver in the local tongue a series of sermons in order to expound and clarify the errors of the heresies in which he had fallen.

### **The “Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncola”**

A certain “Franciscus magister Bartholi”, also known by the name “Franciscutius” can probably be identified with Francesco Bartholi, since it is said that in 1332 he was guardian at San Damiano in Assisi. We know for sure that Francesco was living in the Sacro Convento of Assisi in 1334, when he was occupied with the writing of his *Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncola*. This work was almost entirely written while John XXII was still living (the Pope died on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1334), as we can conclude from chapter XLII, in which it is said that the Pope “non ponit os suum in ista indulgentia” (did not utter one single word regarding this indulgence).

According to a tradition conserved from time immemorial in the Order, in 1216 Saint Francis went to Perugia, where Pope Honorius III was residing, in order to ask him to concede a plenary indulgence, known later as the “pardon of Assisi” to all those who, in a state of grace, would visit the chapel of the Portiuncula in Assisi. In spite of the opposition of the cardinals, who were afraid lest such an indulgence would have diminished the value of the ancient indulgence given to the Crusaders – the “indulgence of Outremer”, of the Holy Land – the Pope agreed to Francis' request, but limited the indulgence to the day of the solemnity of Saint Mary Queen of Angels (from the vespers of 1<sup>st</sup> August to those of 2<sup>nd</sup> August). Francis did not ask for any public document as a proof of this exceptional concession.

The circumstances of the privilege of the “pardon of Assisi” had as their

only foundation the word of the Pope, which was confirmed only by oral tradition. This fact was the reason why the privilege of the indulgence was known only to the inhabitants of Assisi and surroundings, and therefore continued to be unknown to many. However, towards 1270 the crowds that visited the Portiuncula chapel in order to gain the indulgence began to grow. This fact prompted adversaries to start contesting the validity of such an indulgence. These adversaries also grew in number. Since opposition was not waning, the need was felt to demonstrate the legitimacy of the indulgence by gathering the oral testimonies regarding it. This is what Francesco Bartholi does in his *Tractatus*.

The treatise is divided into 42 chapters. It gathers not only the testimonies of the friars Minor, who had personally known Saint Francis, but also those of the “spiritual friars” who were known as “bizzochi” in central Italy. Among the first category we mention the testimony of Brother Benedetto d’Arezzo, who had been received in the Order by Saint Francis himself, and who then became minister provincial of the Marches of Ancona, and later on, of the Holy Land. His testimony was documented by a notary on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1277. Among the “spirituals” we mention the “mirabile testimonium” given by Giacomo di Bonconte Coppoli, “vir religiosus”, who maintained that he had heard the facts from the mouth of Brother Leo, and that on 16<sup>th</sup> (or 18<sup>th</sup>) August 1277 he had dictated to Angelo da Perugia, minister provincial of Umbria. It is certain that, in order to gather the necessary material, Francesco made accurate research in this camp. Many of the witnesses inserted in the *Tractatus* have been taken from an anthology or compilation of *exempla*, the work of a German Franciscan, Nicholas, who entered the Order around 1288-89 and who lived for a long time in Assisi between the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Nicholas had gathered and ordered miraculous facts that happened on the occasion of the indulgence of the Portiuncula, and he had been an eyewitness in many of them between 1300 and 1315.

The last information we possess regarding Francesco Bartholi is that he was still living in 1343. We do not know the date of his death, but the scholars place it generally after 1370.

Mariano da Firenze calls Francesco Bartholi “theologus magnus”. Luke Wadding places him among the most illustrious personages of the Order in those times and mentions other works besides the *Tractatus de Indulgentia*, including the *Sermones festivos et feriales* (lectures on the Sacred Scripture

which he delivered in the friary of Saint Mary of the Angels, and which are now lost), and the *De Passione Domini*, which is conserved in manuscript 556 of the Biblioteca Comunale of Assisi, which is a manual of concordances of evangelical texts on the Passion for devotional use.

The *Tractatus de Indulgentia* is conserved in the manuscript 344 of the Library of the Sacro Convento of Assisi. It has been described by M. Faloci Pulignani, *Le sacre reliquie della basilica di S. Francesco in Assisi nel sec. XIV*, in *Miscellanea Francesana* 1 (1886) 145-150, and by P. Sabatier, *Frati Francisci Bartoli de Assisi tractatus de indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncola*, in *Collection d'études et de documents sur l'histoire religieuse et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, II, Paris 1900, CII-CLVIII, 3-111 (critical edition). After Sabatier other manuscripts have been found, namely the manuscript of Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale, II. 2326, ff. 24v-64v (containing an anonymous *Vita sancti Francisci* and the treatise *Hic ponitur historia indulgentie S. Mariae de Angelis*); and the manuscript of Uppsala University Library, cod. C74, ff. 54v-59r (*Tractatus de indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncola*, with a brief note regarding the Portiuncula Indulgence, f. 59v).

# BROTHER FRANCIS BARTHOLI OF ASSISI

## *Treatise on the Indulgence of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula*

TO THE GLORY OF ALMIGHTY GOD AND OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AND OF OUR MOST HOLY FATHER FRANCIS. BEGINNING OF THE BOOK REGARDING THE HOLY INDULGENCE OF SAINT MARY OF THE PORTIUNCULA OR OF THE ANGELS.<sup>23</sup>

IN THIS BOOK I, BROTHER FRANCIS BARTHOLI OF ASSISI, HAVE PLACED ALL THAT I COULD FIND WITH CARE IN THE OLD AND NEW LEGENDS REGARDING THE BLESSED FRANCIS AND OF HIS OTHER COMPANIONS, REGARDING THE SAME PLACE AND THE COMMENDATION OF THAT PLACE AND ANY OTHER TRUE FACTS I COULD FIND REGARDING THE INDULGENCE OF THIS PLACE, NAMELY HOW IT WAS REQUESTED BY BLESSED FRANCIS AND HOW HE RECEIVED IT, AND ALL I COULD FIND REGARDING THE MIRACLES LINKED TO THE SAME INDULGENCE, WHICH ARE A DECLARATION OF ITS CERTITUDE AND TRUTH.

### Chapter 1

**We begin by seeing how Blessed Francis saw in a vision the place of Saint Mary of the Angels being espoused to the glorious Virgin Mary by her son our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Brother Hugo de Castello said that he had heard from Brother John of the Lord Morico of Assisi, how a certain peasant used to live close to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, and how for a long time he used to hear and was still hearing the voices of angels who would sing during the night in that place. The priest of the same church who came from the family of Mazancolli of Assisi heard this story from this peasant. That peasant told him: “Why do you not go and bring Francis here? He is staying with some other companions at Rivo Torto.” So the priest went immediately and brought Francis. When Francis was staying there, one night he had a vision. While he was sleeping he saw Christ coming to him with his Mother, and they both were standing

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<sup>23</sup> English translation by NOEL MUSCAT OFM from the original Latin critical edition: FRATRIS FRANCISCI BARTHOLI DE ASSISIO, *Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, nunc primum integer editit PAUL SABATIER, Paris (Librairie Fischbacher) 1900, 1-33.

in front of him. So Francis asked them: “Who are you?” Jesus answered: “I am Christ, and my Mother is with me.” Then Francis resumed: “Where are you coming from?” Christ answered: “We are coming from beyond the sea.” “Why have you come here?” Christ said: “I have come here in order to betroth this place to my Mother.” Having said this he immediately disappeared. Francis became excited and full of joy said: “I will never go back from this place. Go and bring here my Brothers who are staying at Rivo Torto.” So the other Brothers were led to that place. From that moment they stayed there. After some time that place was given to the Brothers by the monks of Saint Benedict, since that church belonged to them. Before conceding the place to the Brothers the monks used to come carrying candles on the feast day.

## Chapter 2

**Regarding how Blessed Francis left the first place of this Order, which was at Rivo Torto, according to the Ancient Legend of Blessed Francis. This place was distant from Saint Mary some one thousand footsteps and was found close to the Hospital of the lepers. This Hospital has the papal privilege of being called: «Hospital of the lepers where the Order of Saint Francis was founded».**

Blessed Francis<sup>24</sup> used to retire with his other companions in a place close to the town of Assisi called Rivo Torto. In this hovel the Brothers lived in the strictest contempt of great and beautiful mansions, and there they sheltered from the wind and the rain. As Saint Bernard said: “One ascends quicker into heaven from a hovel than from a palace.” In that same place the sons and Brothers of the blessed father used to live with great labour and lacking everything. They often could not have the comfort of eating bread, and in their need they had to be content with the turnips they begged in the plain below Assisi. That place was so cramped that one could hardly sit or even lie down to sleep. In all this there was no complaining or grumbling, but with a peaceful heart they conserved a spirit of patience and were full of joy.

Saint Francis continually used to examine his conscience and that of his Brothers daily, and he did not permit them to be lax in anything and drove

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<sup>24</sup> This chapter is taken from THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis* 42 (FAED I, 220-222).

away from their hearts all negligence. He was rigid in his own discipline, and besides guarding himself he also took care to be vigilant at all times. If, as sometimes happens, he would suffer from any temptation of the flesh, he would immediately throw himself into a ditch full of icy water in winter, and he would remain there until that carnal temptation would recede. His followers fervently followed his example in mortifying their flesh. He taught them not only to repress their vices and bodily lust, but also to keep under control their external senses, since it is through them that spiritual death enters into the soul.

During that time the emperor Otto was crossing the plain below Assisi with great pomp in order to go to receive the earthly crown of his empire. When the most holy father and his companions heard that the emperor would pass close to their hovel, they did not even venture out of their dwelling and not one of them went to see the him, except for one Brother who had to go and courageously inform the emperor that his earthly glory would soon pass away.

The glorious saint used to live an interior life and walk with an open heart in such a way that he could become a worthy dwelling for God. Therefore no external clamour or any other voice could interfere with or interrupt the great enterprise which he had undertaken. He lived with a sense of apostolic authority and therefore he avoided the company of kings or princes. He always gave himself over to the work of holy simplicity in order not to allow the strictness of that place to impede the breath of his heart. He therefore wrote the names of the Brothers on the beams of that hovel, in order that every one of them would know the place which he should occupy in order to pray or to rest, and the narrowness of the dwelling would not disturb in any way the silence of meditation.

One day while they were staying there it happened that a certain man came over with his donkey to the hovel where the man of God was living with his companions. In order not to be driven off that man was pushing his donkey and making it enter the hovel and was saying: "Go inside, since this place is useful for us." When Saint Francis heard these words he felt very sad, since he recognised the intention of that man, who was thinking that the Brothers wanted to dwell there in order to enlarge the place and add house to house.

That very moment Francis departed from that place, and he left the hovel because of what that rustic peasant had said. He therefore transferred to

another place, which was not far away, and which was called Portiuncula where, according to what we have stated above, he had repaired the church of Saint Mary.

### Chapter 3

**Regarding how this place of Saint Mary was given to Blessed Francis by the abbot of Saint Benedict of Assisi, and regarding how Francis wanted his holy family to live there always since that was the first place of the Order and it was to be an eternal mirror and example to our religion.**

When Blessed Francis<sup>25</sup> saw that God wanted to increase the number of his Brothers, he told them: “My dearest Brothers and sons, I see that the Lord wants to multiply our numbers. Therefore it seems to me to be religious and good to ask the bishop, or the canons of San Rufino, or the abbot of Saint Benedict to give us a small and poor church in which the Brothers can pray their liturgical hours. Indeed, if one of the Brothers should die, it is not convenient to bury him here on in a church of the secular clergy.”

These words seemed pleasing to the other Brothers. So Blessed Francis rose and went to the bishop of Assisi, and he expressed in front of him the same words that he had proposed to the Brothers. The bishop answered him and said: “Brother, I do not have any church that I can give you.”

He then went to the canons of San Rufino and told them the same words. They also answered him in the same way of the bishop.

He therefore went to the monastery of Saint Benedict of Mount Subasio, and he proposed the same request he had expressed in front of the bishop and of the canons. He also informed him regarding the way the bishop and canons had answered him. The abbot was moved by pity and he took counsel with his monks. According to God’s will he granted to Blessed Francis and his Brothers the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, since it was the poorest church they had. The abbot said to Blessed Francis: “Brother, we have given heed to your request. However we would like that if your congregation will increase in number, this place should be the head of all your other places.”

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<sup>25</sup> This chapter is taken from *The Mirror of Perfection (Sabatier Edition)* 55 (FAED III, 297-300).



These words pleased Francis and the other Brothers. Francis was overjoyed especially because the place granted to the Brothers was a church dedicated to the Mother of God, and because it was a poor church and because of the name with which it was known. In fact it was called Portiuncula: in this way its name foretold that it would become the head and mother of the poor friars Minor. It was called Portiuncula because the area in which it was found had been called by that name since antiquity.

In fact Blessed Father Francis would say: “That is why God did not will that any other church be granted to the Brothers, and that they would not build any other new church or possess any church except this one, in order that the prophecy regarding the arrival of the friars Minor in this place would be fulfilled.”

And although this church was poor and was nearly falling in ruins, nevertheless, for a long time, the people of the city of Assisi and of its neighbourhood showed great devotion to that church and still do so to this very day, and the fame of that church has spread in the entire valley of Spoleto.

In ancient times it used to be called Saint Mary of the Angels, and in that province it was known by the name of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, in such a way that after the Brothers had begun to repair it the men and women of that province would say: “Let us go to Saint Mary of the Angels.”

Although the abbot and his monks had granted that church freely to Blessed Francis and his Brothers, without any rent or annual tithes, nevertheless Blessed Francis like a good and expert teacher who wanted to build his house on the rock, namely his congregation upon the greatness of poverty, used to send annually a basket full of fish called *lasche*. He would do this as a sign of great humility and poverty, so that his Brothers would not possess that place as if it was their own, and would not remain in any place that was not owned by others, and in this way the same Brothers would not have the power to sell it or to alienate it in any way.

Each year, when the Brothers brought the little fish to the monks, they in turn, because of the humility of Blessed Francis, who had done this out of his own will, gave him and his Brothers one jar filled with oil.

We who lived with him render witness that he spoke in a very convincing manner of that church. He used to say that, because of the many prerogatives that the Lord revealed there, it had been revealed to him in that place that, of all the churches of the world that she loved, the Blessed Virgin Mary loved that church above all others.

Therefore, for the entire length of his life he showed great reverence and devotion to this church. And so that the Brothers would always keep its remembrance in their hearts, at his death he dictated in his testament that all the Brothers should do likewise. About the time of his death, in the presence of the minister general and the other Brothers, he said: “I order the Brothers that I bequeath to them the place of Saint Mary and leave it as a testament, so that the same Brothers would always show the maximum reverence and devotion to this place. The elder Brothers always did this: for although the place itself is holy, they preserved its holiness with constant prayer day and night and by constant silence. And if, at times, they spoke after the time established for silence, they discussed with the greatest devotion and decorum matters pertaining to the praise of God and the salvation of souls. If it happened, as it rarely did, that someone began to utter useless or idle words, immediately he was corrected by another Brother.

“They used to mortify their flesh not only by fasting, but also by many vigils, by cold, nakedness, and manual labour. In order not remain idle, they very frequently went and helped poor people in the fields, and sometimes these people would give them some bread for the love of God. By these and other virtues, they used to sanctify themselves and that place.

Afterwards, however, a great number of Brothers who came after them would come to that place more than was usual, and especially because the Brothers are colder in prayer and in other virtuous works than in the past, they are more careful about exchanging idle and useless words and even worldly news. This place is not held in such great reverence and devotion as much as it was and as I would wish.

“I want this place always to be under the care and jurisdiction of the minister general, that he may show greater concern and care in providing for it, especially in placing a good and holy family there. The clerics should be chosen from among the holies and most upright Brothers of the entire religion and who know how to say the office best. In this way, not only other men, but also the Brothers will gladly see and listen to them with great devotion. And some holy, discerning, humble and upright lay Brothers should always be chosen, who may serve them. I also wish that none of the Brothers or any other person enter that place except the minister general and the Brothers who serve them. And they may not speak to anyone except the Brothers who serve them and to the minister when he visits them. I likewise want the lay Brothers who serve them to be bound never to speak to them

either idle words or news of the world, or anything whatsoever that is not useful to their souls. And that is the reason why I particularly want no one else to enter the place, so that they may better preserve their purity and holiness. Let nothing at all be done or said there that is not edifying, but let this entire place be held pure and holy in hymns and praises of the Lord. And when any of these Brothers passes to the Lord, I want another holy Brother, no matter where he is staying, be sent there by the minister general to replace him. For even if some day other Brothers stray from purity and holiness, I want this place to be blessed and to remain always a mirror and a good example for the entire religion, a candelabrum always burning and shining before the throne of God and before the Blessed Virgin. Thus may the Lord have mercy on the faults and failings of all the Brothers and always preserve and protect this religion, His little plant.”

#### Chapter 4

**Regarding how a certain Brother had a vision before his conversion, which is narrated in the great legend of Blessed Francis, and which is seen to have foretold this holy indulgence.**

Before his conversion,<sup>26</sup> a certain Brother, dedicated to God had a vision about this church which is worth telling. He saw countless people who had been stricken with blindness, on their knees in a circle around this church, with their faces raised to heaven. All of them, with tearful voices and uplifted hands, were crying out to God, begging for mercy and light. Then a great light came down from heaven and, diffusing itself through them, gave each the sight and health they desired.

#### Chapter 5

**Regarding how the Blessed Francis, some years after his conversion and after having repaired this church of Saint Mary of the Angels, during one night had a vision of Christ and was comforted by his grace, and how he requested from the Lord Jesus Christ to grant him the indulgence for all sinners and for all those who would**

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<sup>26</sup> This chapter is taken from ST. BONAVENTURE, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, II,8 (FAED II, 541).

**come and enter the aforementioned church. And also how Christ accepted his petition and revealed to him to go to Pope Honorius in order to graciously request this favour.**

After Blessed Francis had repaired the church of Saint Mary of the Angels out of the great devotion that he had for the queen of angels, he lived there with maximum devotion and continual prayer.

One night he was praying most fervently to the Lord. It was revealed to him that Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary his Mother were in that church with a multitude of angels. So he immediately rose and with great devotion and spiritual joy and reverence he entered the church. There he saw the Lord Jesus Christ with a great multitude of angels, and he prostrated himself on the ground in front of him and the glorious Virgin. The Lord immediately told Blessed Francis: “Francis, ask me what you want regarding the salvation of the world and the honour and reverence of God, since the salvation of the nations and the reparation of the earthly Church are in my power.” Francis was lying there as if he was rapt in ecstasy.

Then he returned to his senses and said: “Most holy Father of ours, I am a miserable sinner but I beg you to grant this grace to the human race, namely that of conceding to all and single persons who come to this place and enter this church forgiveness and indulgence of their sins after having confessed to a priest and received their penance. And I beg the most blessed Mary your Mother, who is the advocate of the entire human race that she may help me in all ways and intercede in front of your most holy and clement majesty.” At this the same queen of heaven listened to the prayer of Francis and humbly reclined towards her Son and began to plead with him and to say: “Most High and Almighty God, I plead your divinity and I intercede with humility so that your majesty will condescend to give heed to the prayers of Brother Francis, your servant.”

Christ in his divine majesty immediately answered saying: “Brother Francis, what you are asking for is very great, but it is worthy of even greater favours, and therefore you will receive great rewards and I will listen to your prayers and accept your petition. In the meantime you should go to the Supreme Pontiff who is staying in Perugia, namely the Lord Honorius III, and on my part request that he grants you the indulgence you have mentioned.”

## Chapter 6

**Regarding how Blessed Francis, moved by divine revelation, went to Perugia to the Lord Pope Honorius, in order to request the indulgence, since the Pope was then living in the city of Perugia.**

Blessed Francis woke up the following morning and called to him Brother Masseo of Marignano, and went with him to present himself to the Lord Pope. He said: “Holy Father, out of devotion to the Virgin Mother of Christ I have restored a church; I hereby request your holiness to grant an indulgence without any money offerings on the anniversary of the consecration of this church.”

The Pope answered: “This request cannot be conveniently granted, since whoever requests an indulgence must merit it by helping the Church through an offering. However, indicate for how many years you would like me to grant this indulgence.” The Pope then asked him: “Do you ask for an indulgence of one year?” Again he asked Francis: “Do you want an indulgence of three years?” Saint Francis said: “What is this you are asking me?” Again the Lord Pope told him: “Do you want me to grant a six-year indulgence?”

The Pope arrived at the point of indicating a seven-year indulgence. Blessed Francis did not seem content with these words and answered: “Lord, what is this you are telling me?” The Pope again said: “What is the favour you are asking me to grant you?” Saint Francis therefore answered: “Holy Father, if it is pleasing to your holiness, I do not ask for years but for souls.” The Lord Pope said: “In what way do you want souls?” Francis answered: “If it is pleasing to your holiness, because of the graces that God has granted me, I would like to ask that whosoever comes to this church after having gone to confession and been absolved by a priest would be freed in heaven and on earth from the punishment and guilt of all the sins he committed from the day of his baptism until the day and hour in which he enters the aforementioned church, and that he has no other obligation to gain this indulgence except this.”

The Lord Pope answered him: “You are asking for much, Francis, and it is not the custom of the Roman curia to grant such an indulgence.” Blessed Francis answered: “Lord, I am not asking this out of my own initiative, but because the Lord Jesus Christ himself has sent me.” The Lord Pope therefore answered: “And therefore I grant your request.” He added: “It pleases me that I grant it to you. It is pleasing to me that you receive this concession. So may it be in the name of the Lord.”

When the lords cardinals who were standing there realised what the Pope had granted Francis, they asked him to revoke such a concession, since it would prejudice the indulgence of the Holy Land. The Lord Pope answered: "We cannot in any way revoke what we have promised him." The cardinals therefore answered: "Lord, be conscious that if you grant this indulgence you will destroy the indulgence granted to pilgrims who go beyond the sea (to the Holy Land) and you will nullify the indulgence of Blessed Peter and Paul and render it valueless in the eyes of all." The Lord Pope answered them: "We have given and granted him this favour, therefore we cannot, and neither is it fitting for us, to destroy what we have done." The lords cardinals said: "Try at least to curtail the favour as much as you can." The Lord Pope answered them: "We will modify it in such a way that it can last only for one day."

Therefore he convoked Saint Francis and told him: "Behold, we have granted the favour you have come to request from us and whoever enters the aforementioned church after having made a good confession, will be absolved from punishment and guilt of his sins. We will that this favour be granted every year, in perpetuity, but only for one day, namely from the first vespers including the night and up to the vespers of the following day."

At these words Blessed Francis bowed his head and began to go out of the papal palace. When the Lord Pope saw that Francis was going out he said: "O simple man, where are you going? What document are you going to take with you in order to prove that you have acquired this indulgence?" Blessed Francis answered: "For me your word is enough. If this is truly the work of God, it is up to Him to manifest the truthfulness of this initiative, and therefore I do not need any written proof, but only that the Blessed Virgin Mary be the parchment, Christ the notary, and the angels be the witnesses."

## Chapter 7

**Regarding how Blessed Francis returned from Perugia to Assisi. He rested in a place called Colle, and there it was revealed to him that the request he presented to the Pope had been confirmed in heaven.**

When Blessed Francis went out from the presence of the Lord Pope, after the concession of this indulgence, he left Perugia and took the road back to Assisi. Half way on the road, in a place called Colle, there was a leper

hospice, and he entered there with his companion in order to rest and fell asleep. During his sleep he was woken up by a voice telling him: “Francis, know that this indulgence that has been granted to you on earth has been confirmed in heaven.” After praying he called his companion to him and told him: “Brother Masseo, I tell you on the part of God that the indulgence that has been granted to me by the Lord Pope has been confirmed in heaven.”

One should note what we shall state further on: “Until this blessed day such a favour had not been granted neither by the Lord nor by the Pope.”

## Chapter 8

**Regarding how the day of the indulgence was determined and specified in the church of Saint Mary of the Angels, when Blessed Francis received in that spot the apparition of the high priest and pontiff Christ, together with his glorious Virgin Mother and a multitude of angels.**

Once Blessed Francis was staying in his cell, which was situated in the garden behind the church of Saint Mary. It was during the month of January. He was praying round about midnight, when Satan came over to him and said: “Francis, why do you want to die prematurely? Do you not know that sleep is very necessary for the health of the body? Why are you tiring yourself so much? Did I not tell you in the church known as the Four Chapels in the area of Todi that you are still young and that you still have a lot of time to make penance for your sins? Why are you punishing yourself so harshly in vigils and prayers?”

That very moment Francis went out of his cell and took off his clothes and entered into the thicket through a large round bush, which was full of thorns and thistles, and he brushed his body within it. He was saying: “It is better for me to experience and come to know and feel the sufferings of the passion of the Lord than to give in to the comfortable suggestions of the enemy.”

While his body was bleeding with the wounds he had suffered from the thorns, a great light appeared around him; and many red and white fragrant roses of great beauty were growing in that bush full of thorns. He also beheld a multitude of angels in that same light, which appeared in the church and around it.

The angels told Blessed Francis: “Come quickly to meet the Saviour and

his Mother in the church.” So he immediately put on dazzling clothes and ran to the church. He gathered twelve white roses and twelve red roses and came to the church. It seemed to him that the road to the church was strewn with silk vestments. He reverently entered the church and placed the roses upon the altar. Then he saw the Our Lord Jesus Christ and his Mother with a multitude of angels.

Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke to Blessed Francis and told him: “Francis, why do you not ask my Mother what you want me to grant to you?” So Blessed Francis understood that Christ was speaking about the salvation of souls through the indulgence linked with that church, and he answered: “Our most holy Father, you who order everything in heaven and on earth, condescend to command and indicate when you can grant the indulgence, out of your great mercy and with the assistance of the Blessed Virgin your Mother, who is also the advocate of the entire humanity.”

Thus Christ, in his divine majesty, ordered that whoever would come from vespers of the first day of August until vespers of the following day, and would be contrite and confess all sins he could possibly remember to have committed, would be forgiven from all his sins from the day of baptism until the day and hour in which he entered the aforementioned church.

Blessed Francis then said: “Our most holy Father, how will it be possible to announce such an indulgence in a way that all men would believe its truthfulness?” The same Lord said: “Francis, this also will be granted you by my grace. You therefore have to go to Rome to my vicar and he will indicate to you the best and most expedient way to make this indulgence happen.” Blessed Francis then said: “How will your vicar believe me? Maybe he will not believe me who am a sinner?” The Almighty Lord told Blessed Francis: “Take with you three among your companions who are listening to these words, and take also the red and white roses which you gathered in the thicket in the month of January, when you were afflicting your body with discipline, and offer him this number of roses according to what seems best to you.”

Brother Peter Cattanio, Brother Rufino Scifi, Brother Bernard of Quintavalle and Brother Masseo of Marignano together with other companions heard these words. They were all staying in their cells, and these cells were situated close to the church in the garden where the cell of Blessed Francis was found.

Blessed Francis went and from the roses that grew in the thicket gathered



three red roses and three white roses in honour of the most holy and undivided Trinity and to the praise of God and of the most Blessed Virgin Mary and he presented them to the divine majesty and to the Mother. While he was doing so he heard the singing of the angels who broke out in loud voices and sang the *Te Deum laudamus*.

## Chapter 9

**Regarding how, on the same day that Our Lord Jesus Christ determined and specified this most holy indulgence, Blessed Francis went to the lord Pope Honorius who was staying in Rome. He took with him the roses, together with some of his companions as witnesses to the truth. The lord Pope admired the beauty of those roses, and believed all the words of Blessed Francis. He wrote letters to seven bishops in order to convene on the day of the consecration of the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula or of the Angels, and requested them to announce to all the people this indulgence, according to the will and intentions of Saint Francis. This was done through a divine miracle, according to what was to be referred to those same bishops.**

The following morning Blessed Francis donned his tunic and went to three of his companions and told them: "Prepare yourselves to come with me to Rome." He imposed silence upon them regarding all they had heard; they were Brother Peter Cattanio, Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, and Brother Angelo of Rieti. So they left off on their way to Rome, leaving behind them their other companions.

When they entered the city of Rome they directed themselves towards the church of the Lateran, and there they found the lord Pope Honorius, who was the successor of the lord Innocent, vicar of Jesus Christ. Blessed Francis together with his few companions explained to him all we have already stated above. The three Brothers gave witness to the truth of the matter, as well as the six roses, namely three red roses and three white roses, which we have mentioned earlier. The same lord Pope said: "This is a marvellous event and is more fitting to divinity than to humanity, and now we know that it is true according to their testimony." Then the Pope added: "We shall now speak with our Brothers (the cardinals), and in a secret consistory we shall listen to their answers and we shall decide what is the best thing to do."

That same moment the Pope sent some servants to take Blessed Francis with his companions to a suitable and honest place, and to give to him the Brothers the clothes they needed. He also commanded Blessed Francis to present himself before him on the following day early in the morning. When, according to what the lord Pope had commanded him, Francis presented himself before him at dawn the following day, he told the Pope: “May the vicar of Christ condescend to take a decision as to what we are to do regarding this matter, according to the will of the King of heaven and of his Mother regarding the church known by the name of the Angels or of the Portiuncula.” The Pope answered him thus: “Brother Francis, here in front of all my Brothers declare what is the will of the King of heaven and of his Mother, so that we shall listen to what you and your Brothers have to say on the matter lest it will not be the same thing you requested earlier.” Blessed Francis answered him saying: “His will is that from vespers of the first day of August until vespers of the second day of the same month, whoever enters the church of Saint Mary of the Angels or of the Portiuncula, in the diocese of Assisi, will have all his sins forgiven from the day of baptism, namely all the sins he remembers and those he does not remember, with the condition that he will repent by going to confession and accepting the penance imposed upon him by the priest, with a contrite and humble heart, and will be absolved by the same priest after having accepted this penance.”

The lord Pope answered: “Brother Francis, you are requesting great favours, but after the King of heaven Our Lord Jesus Christ, upon the intercession of his Mother the Blessed Mary ever Virgin has listened to your prayers, we shall write to the bishops of Assisi, Perugia, Todi, Spoleto, Foligno, Nocera and Gubbio, in order that they may convene at the place of Saint Mary of the Angels or of the Portiuncula on the first day of the month of August, and publicly announce to all those present for the occasion this same indulgence which you have been pleased to request.”

Thus Blessed Francis together with his companions accepted the letters of the Supreme Pontiff addressed to the aforementioned bishops and went to present them to these same bishops. The same Blessed Francis arranged that on the first day of the Calends of August all these bishops should convene at the aforementioned church of Saint Mary.

## Chapter 10

**Regarding how Blessed Francis, in front of seven bishops and the entire crowd of people who had gathered, publicly preached the indulgence of all sins, as he had received it from the mouth of the Supreme Pontiff. He was standing on a wooden pulpit, of which five pieces still exist as part of the ceiling of his cell, as a memorial of this indulgence.**

The aforementioned bishops, together with Blessed Francis, took their place on the wooden pulpit prepared for the occasion. When a great crowd of people had gathered around the pulpit, during mid-morning after tierce, Blessed Francis asked the bishops: “Who among you would like to announce and preach the pardon?” The bishops took counsel together and said: “We want to follow your will, Brother Francis, according to what the papal letters indicate.” Blessed Francis said: “Although I am not worthy, nevertheless I would like to announce and preach in front of all the people gathered here, and I will proclaim the indulgence according to the command I received from the heavenly King, and which was granted to me through the intercession of his Mother. With the command of the Supreme Pontiff, who is his vicar, you are called to have authority to announce it with me.”

So Blessed Francis stood up and preached in such a sweet and useful manner that it seemed that he was an angel coming from heaven and not a man of flesh and blood. He explained the indulgence in a perfect way, saying that whoever would come to this church of Saint Mary of the Angels and enter it from vespers of that same day of the Calends of August to vespers of the second day of the same month, whether he would come in at night or during the day, all his sins would be remitted after he would have gone to confession, namely all sins committed from the day of baptism until that very day. This indulgence was granted in that place every year in perpetuity, to those who repented and accepted to do the penance which the priest imposed upon them, in order to expiate for the sins recalled and also for those they could not remember.

When the bishops heard Francis utter these words they were indignant and were scandalised by what he had preached. So they told him: “Although the lord Pope has commanded us to follow and support your will, it certainly did not come to his mind that we should follow and support you in things that are not fitting. Therefore we shall announce that this indulgence is

valid for ten years.” Thus the bishop of Assisi rose to tell the people that the indulgence was valid for ten years, but he ended up saying exactly what Blessed Francis had declared, and could not speak differently.<sup>27</sup> The same thing happened to each of the other bishops present.

There were present many witnesses from Perugia as well as from other cities and castles of the surrounding district, namely: Sir Suppolinus Ugolini, Sir Andrew of Monte Melino; from Assisi: Sir Neapoleo of Armenzano, Sir John Gualtieri father of Sir Jerome, Sir John Peter Tubalducci, Sir Blandus Lamanstri and Giles di Marco, Sir Bernarduccio Pauli, Peter Zalfani, Bonacursus Ugonis and many others from Assisi. There were also Peter of Bettona, Sir Conrad Monaldi, Sir Andrew of Bevagna, Sir Neapoleo of Foligno, Sir Matthew Benetense, and Sir Beccarius of Spello. There were many others from the surrounding district whom it would too long to mention, who gave witness to the proclamation of pardon preached by Blessed Francis and by the bishops we have mentioned above. Every single one of these witnesses was present during the proclamation by Blessed Francis and by the bishops we have mentioned, namely all those who were generally present in great numbers in that place.<sup>28</sup>

## Chapter 11

### **Regarding how a truthful witness among the ones we mentioned asserted that he had heard and seen Blessed Francis announcing the aforementioned indulgence.**

In front of Brother Angelo, Minister of the Province of Saint Francis, Brother Boniface, Brother Guidone, Brother Bartolo of Perugia, and other friars in the place of the Portiuncula, Peter Calfanus<sup>29</sup> said that he was present

<sup>27</sup> Manuscript 344 of the Library of the Sacro Convento of Assisi has the following additional information: “Afterwards the bishop of Perugia stood up and wanted to correct what Blessed Francis and the bishop of Assisi had said, but he also ended up saying what Blessed Francis had affirmed, and he could not say it in a different version. After him rose the bishop of Foligno who also wanted to correct what the others had stated, and he ended up by saying what Blessed Francis had said. After them the bishop of Spoleto wanted to correct them both, but he also repeated what Blessed Francis had said, and could not say otherwise. The same thing happened in the case of the other three bishops, namely those of Todi, Gubbio and Nocera.”

<sup>28</sup> Manuscript 344 adds: “This is the conclusion of the entire truth regarding the history of the aforementioned indulgence.”

<sup>29</sup> Manuscript 344 calls him *Petrus Zalfanus de Assisio*. His name in Italian would thus be

for the consecration of the aforementioned church, namely Saint Mary of the Angels or of the Portiuncula, and that he had heard Blessed Francis preach in front of the bishops we mentioned. He was holding a parchment in his hand and was saying: “I want to send all of you to heaven, and I am announcing to you an indulgence that I have received from the mouth of the Supreme Pontiff. All of you who have come here today, and all those who will annually come here on this day, with a good and contrite heart, will receive the indulgence of all their sins. I wanted this indulgence to be given for eight days, but I could not obtain it except for one single day.”

## Chapter 12

**Regarding the highly authentic witness of two holy friars. This witness was given publicly and in a solemn way in front of many friars, as will be shown.**

In the name of the Lord. Amen. I, Brother Benedict of Arezzo, was one of the companions of Blessed Francis when he was living, and the same most holy father through the divine grace working in him received me into the Order, and therefore I became one of his companions. During the lifetime of the same holy father I often had secret conversations with him regarding our Order, and after he had departed from this world to the Father I had the same conversations with my companions. I confess that I frequently heard one of the aforementioned companions of Saint Francis, who was called Brother Masseo of Marignano, and who was a man of a most truthful and trustworthy life, who said that he had been with Blessed Francis in Perugia when he went to present himself in front of the lord Pope Honorius, when he requested the indulgence of all sins for all those who came with contrition and after having received confession to the place of Saint Mary of the Angels from vespers of the first day of the Calends of August until vespers of the following day. This indulgence had been humbly and insistently requested by Blessed Francis, and the Supreme Pontiff therefore willingly granted it, although the same Supreme Pontiff said that it was not the normal custom to concede such a kind of indulgence.

I, Brother Raynerius of Arezzo, companion of the venerable Brother Benedict, also confess that I frequently heard Brother Masseo say these things, since I was his most special friend.

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Pietro Zalfani da Assisi.

These joyful testimonies were read and published in the cell of the aforementioned Brother Benedict, in the presence of Brother Compagno of Borgo (San Sepolcro), Brother Raynaldus of Castiglione, Brother Caro of Arezzo, and many other friars who were called and convened to that place. The Year of the Lord 1277, in which the Roman Church was in *sede vacante*,<sup>30</sup> on the fifth *indictio*, on the last Sunday of the month of October.

I, John notary, has taken note of all these things and have written them down and published them on the command of the venerable fathers and Brothers Benedict and Raynerius.

### Chapter 13

**Regarding the marvellous witness given by a certain knight of Perugia. I, Brother Francis Bartholi of Assisi found in the sacristy of our friary in Perugia. This testimony was written personally by the reverend father Angelo of Perugia, who was once minister of the province of Saint Francis, in a certain parchment, in which one also finds some miracles regarding this indulgence, which were written down in it. This parchment is very old.**

The lord James Coppoli of Perugia told me, Brother Angelo minister of the province of Saint Francis, in front of Brother Deodatus, custodian of Perugia, and Brother Angelo, my companion, that one day, together with his wife and Jacobino and another lay person, he had asked Brother Leo, companion of Blessed Francis, whether the indulgence of the Portiuncula was true or not. Leo answered that it was true, and that Blessed Francis had referred to him these words, which he had requested from the lord Pope, namely to grant an indulgence to that place without any money offerings on the anniversary of the consecration of the church. The lord Pope answered according to his will, and the lord Pope mentioned one year or three years. They both agreed on seven years. But Blessed Francis was not happy. So the lord Pope asked him how much time he wanted. Francis answered: “If it is pleasing to you, holy father, and for the graces that the Lord has bestowed upon me in that place, I desire the indulgence of all sins, without any other condition attached to it.” The lord Pope answered: “Therefore I grant you this favour and so may it be.”

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<sup>30</sup> The Roman See was vacant in 1277 from the death of Pope John XXI on 20<sup>th</sup> May until the election of Cardinal Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, who became Pope Nicholas III on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1277.

But when the lord cardinals came to know about the matter they asked the lord Pope to revoke this indulgence, which could prejudice the indulgence of the Holy Land. The lord Pope answered: “I cannot in any way revoke what I have promised him.” The cardinals then said: “At least try to curtail it as much as possible.” Thus the lord Pope told that he wanted the indulgence to be granted solely for one day and one night, from vespers to vespers.

When he had gone out of the presence of the Pope after the concession of the indulgence, and was returning to Assisi, Blessed Francis heard a voice telling him: “Francis, you should know that, now that this indulgence has been granted on earth, so it will be confirmed in heaven.”

Blessed Francis told Brother Leo: “Keep this a secret nearly until the day of your death, since it is not to be divulged yet: in fact, this indulgence will be kept a hidden secret for a time, but the Lord will then reveal it and it will be manifested to all.” Afterwards the lord James asked the aforementioned Brother Leo if he was willing to certify all he had said. Brother Leo answered that things had truly happened as he had narrated them. The aforementioned wife of the lord James confirmed all this information in front of all those present.

These acts were composed on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the Calends of September, in the friary where Brother Giles used to live before. Thanks be to God. The lord James of Santa Lucia del Colle, who is a priest, and who is called Jacobino, similarly confirmed all the information given by the aforementioned lord James.

## Chapter 14

**Regarding another witness given by the holy and eminent Brother John of La Verna, whom I had the privilege of knowing and of speaking frequently with him.**

Brother Benedict of Arezzo, companion of blessed Francis and who was led by him, and who was once minister of the provinces of Romania and of the Marches during the lifetime of Saint Francis, Brother Angelo of Borgo (San Sepolcro) who was a companion of Blessed Francis, Brother Conrad of Offida from the Marches, Brother Graziano, who was companion of the holy Brother Giles, who in turn was the third Brother in sequence after Blessed Francis, and who was a friar of great contemplation, Brother Raynerius

of Arezzo, companion of the aforementioned venerable Brother Benedict, Brother Andrew of Burgundy, Brother Matthew the knight, Brother Giles Capoccio of Assisi, Brother Thomas of Assisi, Brother Marino of Assisi, Brother John of Assisi, Brother Angelo of Perugia, Brother James of Fallerone, Brother James of Massa from the Marches, Brother Thomas of Trevi, Brother Augustine of Rome: all these friars and most excellent men in holiness and truth were among the oldest living friars in the Order and were all companions of blessed Francis. I Brother John of La Verna,<sup>31</sup> confess that I heard from all these Brothers and from other trustworthy persons, that they themselves had heard Brother Masseo, who was one of the most special companions of Blessed Francis and a most holy and proven man in all holiness and truth, that he was with Blessed Francis at the feet of the lord Supreme Pontiff when Francis requested the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, and the same Supreme Pontiff willingly granted it to him.

## Chapter 15

**Regarding another witness given by three friars who spoke with all solemnity in holiness and truth. I, Brother Francis Bartholi, have received this witness written down in an old parchment with very beautiful characters. It was given to me by Brother Angelo Gregorii of Gualdo who is a very elderly friar in the Order and who, like many others, saw and knew all the companions of Blessed Francis.**

I, Brother Oddo of Aquasparta, and Brother Raynerius of Arezzo, and Brother Marino of Assisi, have heard from the mouth of Brother Masseo of Marignano that Saint Francis requested this indulgence from the lord

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<sup>31</sup> John of La Verna was born in the town of Fermo in the Marches in 1258. The friars Minor had been present in this town ever since 1240, when they built there a large church dedicated to Saint Francis. As a Franciscan priest Brother John spent many years in the hermitage of La Verna, hence his name. The most important, if not exclusive, information about him comes from chapters 49-53 of the *Fioretti*, the translation in Tuscan language of the original Latin *Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Eius*, the work of Ugolino da Montegiorgio, which is also a town in the Marches very close to Fermo. He died when he was 64 years old, on 9 August 1322, at La Verna, where his body is still venerated in the main church of the friary. John of La Verna was one of the “Spiritual” friars of the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, who were the second and third generation Franciscans and who had known the early companions of Saint Francis. Many of the friars he mentions in this testimony were Spiritual friars, notably Brother Conrad of Offida, and Brother James of Massa.



Pope, so that all those who would come to the church of the Blessed Mary in Portiuncula after having confessed their sins and with contrition, would receive this indulgence. He also told us that he had been with Blessed Francis when the same Francis came to the lord Pope in order to beg him to concede this special great indulgence to the church of the Blessed Mary we have mentioned above. The lord Pope answered him: “Do you want the indulgence for three years?” Saint Francis answered and told him: “What does this mean?” The lord Pope again said: “Do you want us to grant it for six years?” Saint Francis again answered: “O lord, what do you mean by these words?” Again the Pope said: “What exactly do you want us to grant you?” Saint Francis said: “I desire that all those who come contrite and after having received confession would receive an indulgence of all their sins.” The lord Pope then answered: “So be it in the name of the Lord. Amen.”

## Chapter 16

**After these highly trustworthy testimonies now follows the praise and commendation of the aforementioned place of Saint Mary of the Angels, which Blessed Francis made in front of the Brothers some time before he died. I, Brother Francis Bartholi, have found this in the Old Legend of the same Blessed Francis, in order that everyone might be aware of how much this place of Saint Mary of the Angels was close to the heart of Blessed Francis, and so that all might come to know how many graces one can receive in this aforementioned place if he comes with reverence and devotion.**

God willed that when the holy soul of Blessed Francis was freed from the body, it would pass over to the kingdom of heaven where it enjoyed the heavenly good news and the unction of salvation that it had first experienced when it was still living in the flesh. Although Blessed Francis<sup>32</sup> knew the kingdom of heaven was established in every corner of the earth and believed that divine grace could be given to God’s chosen once in every place, he nevertheless knew from his own experience that the place of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula was especially full of grace and was filled with visits of heavenly spirits. So he often told the Brothers: “See to it, my sons, that

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<sup>32</sup> This section is taken from the *The Mirror of Perfection (Sabatier Edition)* 83 (FAED III, 329-330).

you never abandon this place. If you were thrown out of one door, go back through another, for this is truly a holy place, and the dwelling place of God. Here the Most High increased our numbers, when we were only a few; here he enlightened the hearts of his poor ones with the light of his wisdom; here he kindled our wills with the fire of his love; here all who pray wholeheartedly will receive what they ask, while offenders will be severely punished. Therefore, my sons, hold this place truly the dwelling place of God, and in cries of joy and praise with your whole heart here praise God.”

**Here begin some miracles regarding this sacred indulgence that have taken place during different times and were manifested in different places. Any devout inquirer of these miracles would be sure and can certify that any detail regarding this holy indulgence has been declared by the visions of holy persons and confirmed and preached once and for all by our rivals.**

## Chapter 17

**First of all we present a miracle in which Blessed Dominic and Saint Peter martyr affirmed that the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels is true and that in front of God it is greater than what it is normally considered to be.**

A certain devout lady from Germany came to the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels or of the Portiuncula. In front of some friars and many other persons, and Merlino of Assisi whose words we are interpreting, in front of the altar of Saint Francis she took an oath to narrate thus the following fact regarding the aforementioned indulgence of worthy memory.

“I have made a personal decision years ago to come to this holy indulgence, but I had to wait until this day since I was delayed by many distractions. When I had dedicated myself to so many things in life and I was preparing myself for the life to come, I went for confession in the place of the friars Preachers<sup>33</sup> who are in my country. So I requested confession and explained the reason for the journey I wished to undertake. The friar got angry and did not want to listen to my confession, neither did he give me permission to come, since he was denying the indulgence with all his heart.

“While I was returning back to my house in a confused state of mind, I saw two friars Preachers coming towards me and heading to their friary. They told me: ‘What is this worried look in your eyes?’ So when I explained to them the cause of my confusion, they told me: ‘Do not be so confused, but return with us to the friary and there we will arrange for your confession in order to console you.’

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<sup>33</sup> The reference to the Friars Preachers in this chapter and the two succeeding ones is meant to underline, on one side the tension between the two Mendicant Orders, fruit of the attitude of Pope John XXII (1316-1334) who applied Dominican theology to accuse the Franciscan Order of heresy during the poverty controversy between him and the Minister General Michele da Cesena (1316-1328), and on the other to underline the fraternal bond between the two same Orders, as shown in various Franciscan Sources which speak of meetings and friendship between Saint Francis and Saint Dominic.

“One of them called a confessor and therefore I could approach confession. After having done so the two friars called all the other friars in front of my presence. One of the two said: ‘Brothers, you should know without any doubt that the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi is true and certain, and that in front of God it is greater than it is normally esteemed to be. And you can ascertain the truth of what we are saying by the fact that the two friars you are beholding before you are myself, namely Saint Dominic, and my companion, Saint Peter Martyr.’<sup>34</sup>

“Having said this, I and all the other friars standing there saw that the two friars disappeared, and they both vanished from our sight. Having witnessed such a miracle I hurried even more to make this journey, and as you are now seeing, I have succeeded in fulfilling what I had proposed to do.”

## Chapter 18

### **Regarding another miracle in which a certain angel or the Blessed Dominic or another good spirit appeared dressed in the habit of the Preachers as a confirmation of this same holy indulgence.**

During the time when Boniface VIII was Pope and governed the Church of Rome,<sup>35</sup> a group of around one hundred and twenty pilgrims of both sexes came out of devotion to receive the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels or of the Portiuncula. They came from the parts of Slavonia and crossed the sea and arrived at the city of Ancona. Out of devotion they visited all the churches of the city, and lastly they entered the church of the friars Preachers. One of the friars saw them and asked them where they were going on pilgrimage and why they had gathered in such a large number. They answered that they wanted to travel to go to the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels which is in Assisi. The friar immediately scolded them and said: “O simpletons, why do you expose yourself to so much sweat and toil? There is no indulgence in that place as people normally say, and the

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<sup>34</sup> Saint Peter of Verona, Martyr (c.1205 – 6<sup>th</sup> April 1252). Dominican inquisitor who was murdered while on his way from Como to Milan out of hatred by the Cathars, whom he combatted during his life. His remains are venerated in the Basilica of St. Eustorgius in Milan.

<sup>35</sup> Boniface VIII was Pope from 1294 to 1303. Born Benedetto Gaetani in 1235 he remained famous because he proclaimed the first Jubilee Year in 1300. It is within the context of this event that one understands the growing popularity of the Portiuncula Indulgence during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

same friars Minor who live there have no letters or privileges to prove the same indulgence. In our church we can boast of a great indulgence and I will immediately show you the letters supporting it.”

He therefore brought some of the many letters in their midst and presented them and began to read them and said: “I advise you not to proceed in your uncertain initiative, but with this same indulgence you can now return to your homes.”

When those pilgrims heard the words of this friar and considered the hard journey ahead of them, they went back to the sea and started looking for a ship that would take them back home.

One woman in the group, however, began to say to those standing around her: “Even if all of you, after listening to the words of one man, are so afraid of such fatigue, I alone, even if there is nothing to this indulgence, will continue on the pilgrimage at least out of devotion to Blessed Francis.” So she left all the others and took the road leading to Assisi. After more than two miles she came to a certain hill. Looking up she saw an elderly and venerable man with a long beard, and who was wearing the habit of the friars Preachers. He stood close to her.

Then he spoke to her and said: “Do not be afraid, because you are undertaking a good journey, and all the members of your group will immediately return back to you.” When he was still speaking to her, behold all the group of men and women appeared coming back to her, since they had changed their minds. When she saw them coming she said: “Truly these are my companions, whom I left behind me.” When they arrived they were very happy to have found her. The old man, who was standing close to the woman, said: “Rest a bit, and I will tell you some words of exhortation.”

Among other things he began telling them: “You did a good thing to come back, since the indulgence of Saint Mary to which you have come and where you are journeying is certain and totally true in front of God, in spite of what ignorant men speak about it. I can explain this with more than just words, since I was present when the lord Pope Honorius granted it to Blessed Francis, and when God confirmed it to him in heaven.”

Having said this, all those present marvelled when they saw that he disappeared and vanished from their sight. After this, all those who saw and heard these facts began to speak to one another, and continued full of joy in their journey to Assisi, and when they arrived they told the Brothers what God had shown them in his favour.

The woman who had gone back from the group became seriously ill, and after having received the indulgence she died in that place. The other members of her group accompanied her to the burial and then began to return home. When they boarded the ship and began to sail back home, that woman who had just died appeared to her astonished companions, walking on the sea. Then she said: “Do not be afraid. I am your companion whom you have buried in Assisi, but at this moment God has sent me to make known to you the power of the indulgence that I have received, since through it I have entered the kingdom of heaven without having to undergo any punishment in purgatory.” When she said this, in front of all those who were listening to her, she vanished from their sight and was taken up to heaven.”

They returned to their homes and began to proclaim the marvels that God had worked in their midst. Some of them returned once more to the same indulgence in Assisi and narrated what they had witnessed in the apparition of that woman in the sea as a confirmation of the first miracle they had witnessed.

## Chapter 19

**Regarding another witness of this same holy indulgence, who said that it was certain and true. He was a certain lay Brother from the Order of Preachers, who was present when Blessed Francis requested the same indulgence from the lord Pope Honorius, since that lay Brother had been a servant of a certain cardinal, and in his quality of a servant he had heard the words of the lord Pope and of Blessed Francis.**

Around the year of the Lord 1301 a certain Brother Richard who had lived for many years in Assisi as a keeper of the guest's quarters, since the day of the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels was approaching, he was coming from Gubbio to Assisi. On the way he met about ten to twelve ladies from Venice, who were also coming to the same indulgence. When they saw the friars they said: “Brothers, we beg you to go at a slower pace together with us, and in the meantime let us speak about the things of God.”

Among other things those women narrated the following: “Brothers, listen what has happened to us who are coming to this indulgence. While we were still in the city of Venice and we met together in order to prepare ourselves

in everything that was necessary for the journey to this indulgence, when we were going through the same city, we entered the church of the friars Preachers along the road. We reverently prostrated ourselves before the altar of the convent and recommended ourselves to God and the journey we had undertaken. Behold two friars from that place came over to us and asked us: ‘Where are you going on pilgrimage?’ We answered them that we were going to the indulgence of Assisi, and that we intended to visit the place of Saint Mary of the Angels. The friars told us: ‘You foolish ladies, you are going through the hassle of such toil and you are going to expose yourself to so much hardship to go to a place where it is not certain whether such an indulgence actually exists.’

“We made an act of reverence and went in the middle of the choir. And behold in front of us there stood a certain lay Brother of the same Order, who turned to us and said: ‘What did those friars tell you?’ We answered him: ‘They told us that there is no such indulgence in Assisi as people say.’ That friar paused for a moment and then he said: ‘Permit me to tell you that those Brothers do not know what they are talking about. Indeed I know the truth regarding the fact that this is an indulgence from all sins. I was personally present when Blessed Francis requested this indulgence from the lord Pope Honorius. In those days I was still young and I was a servant at the house of a certain cardinal, and at that moment I was with him in the presence of the Pope, and I heard with my own ears all the words that Blessed Francis uttered regarding that indulgence and the answer that the Pope willingly gave him when he granted him the indulgence. Therefore I encourage you to proceed decisively on your journey, and not to pay heed to any words of contradiction, since I myself would like so much to visit the place if it were not for my old age and for the fragile health of my body which prohibit me from doing so.’

“When we heard these words we were greatly comforted and have come on our way to this place. We are ready to give witness to all the words that we heard from the mouth of that friar, and we want everybody to listen to them and to propagate them.”

## Chapter 20

**Regarding a certain miracle witnessed by a certain holy friar of our Order, when on the night of the same sacred indulgence he**

**saw the most Blessed Virgin Mary who was standing there holding her Son in her arms, who in turn was blessing the people who were gathered in that place.**

On another occasion, namely in the year of the Lord 1303, as is the custom, on the same night of the indulgence there was a great crowd of people standing around the church. At a certain moment a great commotion was heard among the people, in such a way that even those who were sleeping in the hut close to the door of that place woke up, because they heard so much noise and wanted to know the cause of all that commotion. All those who were looking around could not see anything except a snow-white dove that was circling with a rapid flight for five times above the church.

One of the friars there present, namely Brother Francis Cocti, who wanted to investigate further this fact, entered the church, and found Brother Conrad (of Offida) of holy memory, who is now resting in heaven and is buried in the place of Insula (Romana)<sup>36</sup>, was praying in front of the altar. So Brother Francis told him: “My most dear father, I suppose you have heard the great clamour and commotion among the people, as if they are witnessing a great miracle, but we do not know the cause of what has happened.” Conrad answered: “My son, I want you to keep what I am going to tell you a secret and you are not to reveal it to anyone until the day of your death.” Then he continued: “I have seen the Virgin, the glorious queen of heaven and earth, who was surrounded by an indescribable and most radiant brightness, who was holding the child Jesus in her arms. She was descending from the high heavens. That most sweet child was blessing all the time the crowds of people who are here present out of devotion, and was imparting his blessings to all of them. That is the reason of the commotion and agitation that you witnessed among the people.”<sup>37</sup>

## Chapter 21

**Regarding another miracle in which it clearly appears how this indulgence is valid for the faithful departed in purgatory for whom we pray.**

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<sup>36</sup> Insula Romana is Bastia Umbra, some 4 km away from Saint Mary of the Angels.

<sup>37</sup> The apparition of the Blessed Virgin and the Child Jesus to Brother Conrad of Offida (1241-1306) on a different occasion is also described in *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions* 48 (FAED III, 528) and in the *Fioretti* 42 (FAED III, 637). A similar vision is also famous in the case of Saint Anthony of Padua, and is described in the *Liber Miraculorum* 22.



In the city of Venice there was a certain cleric who nurtured a great desire to visit the church of Saint Mary of the Angels during the day of the indulgence. When he had practically prepared whatever was necessary to undertake the journey, in order to accomplish the desire of his heart, he immediately became ill and was on the point of dying. He called one of his friends, in whom he had more trust than in all others, and told him: “You know that I have loved you in a special way more than all the members of my family and my friends. Therefore, if God has decided to call me from this life, after having prepared whatever was necessary for the journey, I beg you to join the other pilgrims who are going to Assisi for the indulgence, and to go with them immediately in order to realise what I have promised God to accomplish.” His friend told him: “Be sure that I will do all that which you have told me, and I will do even more than you are begging me to do.”

After these things, that sick man shortly breathed his last and died. His friend seemed to have forgotten what he had promised, since when he had to prepare himself for the journey he began to be lazy and to linger, and began to think and say: “Since I cannot accomplish what I have promised now I can wait another year.” When he was having such thoughts behold his dead friend appeared to him during his dreams and told him: “Why are you acting so unfaithfully towards me, you who have always been faithful to me? Wake up quickly and join the group of pilgrims and accomplish my vow in a perfect way.”

He woke up immediately with a fright and full of fear he immediately departed on his way with the other pilgrims. When he had fulfilled the vow and returned from the indulgence, his dead friend appeared to him a second time, surrounded by a great light, and told him: “May the Lord be kind to you for your toil, since at the very moment when you entered the church I was freed from all the pains of purgatory.”

## Chapter 22

**Regarding another miracle in which it was clear that the saints were encouraging those who doubted this indulgence and comforting them in order not to have doubts but to believe.**

The reverend father and lord Illuminato, bishop of Assisi told me Brother Angelo, minister of the province of Saint Francis, that when he had

returned after visiting the lord cardinal John who had welcomed him as a guest at Morlupo, he had heard a certain person who told him that he came annually to the indulgence with many of his neighbours, some of these same companions began to dissuade him from coming, since they had heard from many persons that the indulgence was not true. Therefore he decided not to go as well. One night he was sleeping when he had the vision of one who appeared to him dressed in white like a deacon, and who told him that he should go by all means to the aforementioned indulgence. But he thought that it was an illusion and did not pay any heed to what he had seen.

He had the same vision another time, and again listened to the same words but did not take any notice of them. For the third time he had that vision. That person was shaking him strongly and telling him: "Wake up and go and do not be doubtful." So he woke up and invited his companions like he used to do before and comforted and encouraged them to come. He regarded that vision as having been the fruit of angelic words and he publicly announced the event.

## Chapter 23

**Regarding how the lack of faith of some persons in this holy indulgence was denounced by sensible and irrational creatures and as a consequence this indulgence was confirmed.**

Once a group of pilgrims of both sexes were coming to the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels. They were going through a certain place. Some young people asked them where they were going on pilgrimage. When they explained to them the reason of their journey one of those youngsters began to ridicule them and extending his arm towards them began saying: "This indulgence to which you are going on a pilgrimage is as true and certain as much as it would be possible to hold in my hand this swallow that is flying around me."

He had hardly finished saying these words when, behold, the swallow that before had been flying above him, in front of all the onlookers, came down and settled on his hand. Having seen this, those youngsters who were making fun of the pilgrims were covered with shame and became embarrassed and were astonished. The pilgrims were therefore comforted by the Lord and continued on their journey with joy and gladness.

## Chapter 24

### **Regarding how it was declared that this sacred indulgence is valid for the dead.**

In the kingdom of Sicily there was a certain woman who had a beloved son, who fell sick and died leaving his mother desolate. Among other good deeds she accomplished for his benefit, she also decided to visit the shrine of Blessed James (Santiago de Compostella). One night, while she was preparing herself for this journey, her dead son appeared to her and told her: “My most dear mother, the journey you are preparing to undertake is truly a good thing to do since what you are planning to accomplish for my benefit will be of great refreshment and consolation for me. But if you want to free me from all pains, when you come back from your journey, do not hesitate to go to the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels, and thus I will be soon freed from all pain in purgatory. In order that I may prove to you that what I am saying is true please do look at what I am now going to show you.”

He therefore showed his mother the place of Saint Mary of the Angels inside and outside and the entire district, namely Assisi and the Spoleto valley. After this the vision disappeared.

When that woman woke up she kept impressed in her memory all the things that had been shown to her, as if she had truly heard them with her ears and seen them with her eyes. When she accomplished her pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint James, after some time she also began to plan to go to Assisi for the indulgence that was due shortly.

When she was going through the valley of Spoleto she beheld the church of Saint Mary. At that moment she fell down on the ground in the midst of her companions and lost consciousness. In fact it seemed that she died because of the great excitement that she felt when she beheld that place. When her companions saw what had happened to her, they went to call an elderly friar from Assisi who during that time was guardian in that place, and begged him to come quickly so that the woman would not die without receiving confession.

When that friar spoke to her, the woman regained consciousness and said: “Brother I am not going to die but I have fainted because I marvelled how a vision that I had has become true and I have truly come to this place today.” She then recounted to him in an orderly way all the events we have mentioned above.

So she stood up and with the guardian and all that company she entered the place of Saint Mary and said: “Guardian, may all these companions know and I also desire that you may know that I never knew anything regarding this place and this district and had never seen them with my eyes, but in order to confirm to you the vision I have recounted to you check whether what I am saying is true even before I set foot inside this place.” So she extended her hand and said: “There is the refectory, and it is built and ordered in this manner, there is the kitchen, there is the cellar, there is the dormitory, there is the cell of Blessed Francis, and the garden is over there.” All the others were astonished to see that she was truly indicating everything with the utmost truth and precision.

When she had received the indulgence and returned to her home, her son appeared to her once again radiant with joy and told her: “My dearest mother, you should now know for certain that at the same hour and time when you entered the church of Saint Mary of the Angels in order to pray for my liberation I have truly been freed from all pain and I have now entered paradise.”

## Chapter 25

### **Regarding another miracle linked with the same indulgence, showing its beneficial and faithful effects on the faithful departed in purgatory.**

A certain noble lady from France came for the aforementioned indulgence in order to pray for the soul of her son. When she was going through Gubbio she went to confess to a certain friar, as she herself told me. This friar told her what to do for the benefit of the soul of her son.

When she had received the indulgence and returned home, on the following morning before her family had woken up she rose and was going through her house and looking at its state. When she was standing in the upper floor of her house, she looked down to the interior courtyard at the centre of which there was a well. She saw that there was a man sitting down on the opening of the well.

When she was diligently considering that vision she had the inkling that that man resembled her son who had died some time before. So she spoke to him and said: “Who are you who are sitting on the well?” That man looked at

her with a radiant face and answered: “Mother, I am your son.” So she said: “How are you?” He answered: “Up till today I was in the pains of purgatory, but through the merits of the indulgence of the Mother of Christ whom you visited with devotion, I have been freed from all pains and I can now already enjoy the joys of heaven. In order to confirm this sacred indulgence and to give you consolation, I have been permitted to come here and speak to you.”

After having said this he immediately disappeared from her sight. That lady was filled with great joy and consolation. The following year she returned to the indulgence and again passed through Gubbio and met that friar to whom she confessed and narrated to him the entire course of her vision.

## Chapter 26

### **Regarding how a solemn miracle revealed that the friars who were in purgatory desired this sacred indulgence.**

During the time of the lord Pope Clement V,<sup>38</sup> a certain lady from the northern regions of Germany, who lived in the city of Fribourg, came to Assisi with many other pilgrims. After having confessed her sins to Brother Peter the German, her confessor, she narrated to him in an orderly manner the following:

“Father, listen to what I have to tell you regarding this indulgence. In my hometown there was a certain friar by the name of Conrad, who was famous in the Order of Minors, since he was mature in his ways, conspicuous in his honesty, and who was confessor to me and to many other persons for many years. For a long time he had a great desire to come to this indulgence, but he could not since the Brothers of the friary where he lived needed him because of his great usefulness. For as long as he lived he could not obtain this permission from his superiors, until he finally died during this year. It was especially sad for many persons who knew that during his life he could not realise his pious desire.

“In the same friary there is another Brother, who is still alive, an old man, but similarly very devout to God. During his lifetime my confessor nurtured towards this friar a special affection. After the death of Brother Conrad this friar was walking along the dormitory of the Brothers one night, and came in front of the cell that used to belong to my confessor.

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<sup>38</sup> Clement V was Pope in Avignon from 1305 to 1314.

“When he looked inside he saw a certain friar who resembled the dead Brother. He was sitting down and was studying under the light of a lamp, reading a manuscript spread out before him. So that friar asked him: ‘Who are you?’ He answered: ‘I am Brother Conrad, your most special friend who recently died in this house, as you know.’ So that friar again asked: ‘How are you, and why are you here right now?’ He answered him: ‘I am greatly afflicted in the pains of purgatory because of the indiscreet zeal that I often showed in other people’s personal lives, while in my own life, namely in the things pertaining to my soul, I was very negligent and careless. I would certainly be freed from these pains if somebody would go to the indulgence of Assisi for my sake, since for many years, for as long as I lived, I had a great desire to go and was unable to succeed in my effort.’ Having said this he immediately disappeared.

“That friar, who was alive with the fervour of charity and inflamed by the light of compassion, the following day woke up with an anxious heart and immediately before the first light of day he ran to the door searching for the persons who would come to the friary, and asking whether he could find anybody who would accomplish the devout and compassionate desire of the dead friar for the repose of his soul.

“At that moment a large group of ladies arrived, who used to come for confession to the dead friar when he was still alive. Therefore he insistently begged them and exhorted them to remember that friar’s faith and the care he used to take of their souls when he was still alive, and now to consider themselves obliged by charity, in order to free him from the pains he was constrained to suffer, to go to the aforementioned indulgence in order to liberate him. But those ladies could not accede to his request because of many reasons, since they were impeded by other obligations, and they unanimously excused themselves in such a way that that Brother was gripped by a great sadness and anguish.

“In the meantime he saw me arriving in that place and spoke to me in this way: ‘My blessed daughter, come and remember the great care and spiritual blessings that your confessor Brother Conrad imparted to your soul when he was still alive with so much loving solicitude. And now repay his charity and go to Assisi to request the indulgence in his name, and therefore with his spiritual power in you go immediately to the church of Saint Mary of the Angels and enter it during the time of the well-known indulgence and thus liberate him without due hesitation from all the pains that are now afflicting

him.’ So I answered him: ‘Sir, you see and know that I am a poor woman and do not have the necessary things for the journey, and I am furthermore physically weak and fragile. That journey is very long and strenuous, and now, although out of the charity I have towards him I would most willingly do whatever you are asking me, because of the reasons I have outlined and especially because I lack the means for such a great expense I cannot do such a thing in any way.’ So he told me: ‘My blessed daughter, just promise me that you want to go, and I will immediately and most willingly procure sufficient means for your expenses.’ I therefore answered: ‘If, as you are saying, you will procure me the expenses of the journey, in spite of the fact that such an undertaking goes beyond my physical strength, because of the love I have towards him I will therefore journey to that place for his sake and to ask forgiveness for my sins.’

“Therefore that friar turned towards those ladies who were standing around him and begged them to contribute to the expenses of my journey. When I received their offerings, I promised him in front of all those present that I would undertake the journey in order to pray for the soul of the dead friar and for my own soul.

“I received the money that I had collected and went back home, where I remained to prepare myself for this journey, which I have undertaken with many others. On the third day following these events, which was a Tuesday evening, while I was in my bed and was sleeping after having prayed for some time, I saw in my dreams the aforementioned Brother Conrad, who had been my confessor and who had died, who was in the company of other ten dead persons. Among them there was one who had been a lector in the Order and had his eyes covered with his capuche. There was another young friar whom I knew but whose name I could not remember, who also entered my house and came over to me. He took down his capuche and humbly bowed down in front of me and thanked me for the great benefits that I was going to do to my confessor, sustaining such a strenuous journey full of dangers in order to liberate him.

“My confessor, namely Brother Conrad, told me: ‘Beloved daughter, go without fear since on the same day of the indulgence of that church, as soon as you enter it, I will be freed from all my pains, and you will nevertheless also totally gain your indulgence.’ I therefore asked him: ‘Tell me, father, is this indulgence true? If one cannot go to it personally and sends somebody else in his name will they both receive the indulgence just the same?’

“The young friar then came before all the others and told me: ‘I will now give you the answer for your doubts. First of all, I will tell you that this indulgence is true. Secondly, I tell you that if one sends another person for a legitimate cause because he is impeded from coming to the indulgence, he has to prepare himself beforehand through contrition and confession, if he died on that same day or on the following day, he will receive the indulgence. Thirdly, I tell you that if one sends somebody else to the indulgence with the principal aim of gaining money or other riches, he will not receive the indulgence. On the other hand, if one would like to come willingly to the indulgence making use of his own means, but cannot do so because of his poverty, if he has true contrition and makes penance and is well disposed to go or looks for other persons to help him to go, he will legitimately receive it as has been stated above if he has been well disposed to receive the indulgence.’

“Having said this the friary bell rang for matins, and when it rang those persons I had seen and heard in my vigil disappeared. Thus I received the assurance that I had to prepare myself to come to this indulgence together with other companions, and to pray for the soul of the aforementioned dead friar and for my own sins, and therefore I came.”

Having heard these words, Brother Peter the German who heard her confession in Assisi immediately narrated to Brother Nicholas the German all the words that the lady had told him. Brother Nicholas similarly wanted to listen to the same story from the mouth of this lady and in order to be more certainly informed he called her to meet him privately. He wanted to check whether she was really saying the truth regarding what she had narrated of the vision, since some things could be false or she might not be stating the entire truth regarding the arguments upon which she was asserting that she was totally informed.

After this that lady took an oath that she was ready to receive the sentence of damnation on the day of judgment from God the strict judge, if she would utter any false statements with the aim of pleasing the friars or any other person, or if she was searching for any temporal comfort or for any other cause, except for the only cause of manifesting the truth regarding this sacred indulgence. At the end she placed her hands on the altar above the spot where the body of Saint Francis is resting, and there she took an oath that she was stating the unique and naked truth and that she would inform with greater detail regarding all that had happened.



When she had done all these things, and the friar had listened to all that we have related regarding this matter, he led her to the choir in front of the main altar of the upper church, and there in front of a great number of religious and other men worthy of respect and trust who had been convoked for the occasion, and in front of Brother Alvaro, an expert doctor of canon law, and in front of me Brother Francesco who was also present when this lady was narrating her story, as well as in front of the aforementioned confessor of hers Brother Peter the German and many other friars she publicly declared in an orderly manner what she had seen in her vision. These persons diligently listened to what she had to say and they diligently observed whether there were any discrepancies between what she had stated first in front of her confessor and then when she was led away separately, and whether she had changed any words or any other details, so that everyone might know whether she was guilty of falsehood or had a malicious intention in whatever she was narrating, or whether she was found cautiously paying attention to try to hide facts in her narration. When she had told every single detail in an orderly manner to her confessor who had called her in private, and without changing anything in her story, or adding or subtracting any detail to it, as we have noticed above, the same events were faithfully written down in the presence of all those present as a third proof of the truthfulness of the events.

These acts were written and examined in the basilica of Saint Francis at the time of the indulgence during the time when Pope Clement V was governing the Roman Church.<sup>39</sup>

## Chapter 27

### **Regarding a marvellous vision in which a certain lady saw Christ and the Virgin in procession in the company of angels during the time of the pilgrimage to this indulgence.**

In the year of the Lord 1326 Brother Gregory from Santo Severo told Brother Andrew from Piciliano that when he had been a chamberlain in the town of Assisi, a certain priest, who was a devout man and who lived a praiseworthy life, and who was the confessor of this friar, had told him that during confession

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<sup>39</sup> Papini adds the following note present in Manuscript 344: “This story was narrated around the year 1310 in the presence of Brother Francesco Bartholi Rubeo, and I am certain of this fact which is narrated further down by decree of Cardinal Ægidius and Pope Gregory XI and added to this historical narration in the years 1368 and 1370.

he heard a very devout lady who, among other things, had said that on the day of the indulgence she was standing beneath an oak tree close to the open space of Saint Mary of the Angels. She was looking at the friars who were going in procession singing, when she beheld Christ and the Blessed Mary who were preceding the same friars with a great multitude of joyful angels singing with a loud voice. Christ and the Blessed Virgin then entered the church together with the angels. Then she saw the friars entering behind them. At that moment the vision disappeared and she did not see anything further.

## Chapter 28

### **Regarding a marvellous vision in which a certain lady on the same night of the indulgence was assured of having been purified of her sins thanks to the aforementioned indulgence.**

Around the year of the Lord 1336 a certain noble lady from Bologna came to the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels. While she was staying in Assisi for some days waiting for the day of the indulgence she went for confession to Brother Ugoccione from Cerreto.

On the same day of the indulgence she witnessed the following miracle on that same morning and narrated the event after taking an oath and signing the document in which she stated: “Yesterday evening I was afraid of the immense throng of people and I therefore decided to remain in the pilgrims’ hospice together with my maid. I decided to go to visit the church of Saint Mary of the Angels in peace early in the morning, when the crowds of worshippers would have disappeared, in order to obtain the indulgence. While I was sleeping in my bed during the night, I heard a voice calling me and saying: ‘Wake up, it is time to go down to the indulgence.’ I woke up astonished, since I imagined that my maid had called me, and I told her: ‘Why are you calling me? Don’t you know that it is not yet time for us to go down to the indulgence?’ She answered me: ‘My lady, I have not called you, and it is not yet time for us to go.’ Therefore I went back to sleep. But I heard that voice calling a second time: ‘Wake up, it is time for you to go to the indulgence.’ As before, I called my maid. She again answered that she had not called me and that it was not yet time to go. The voice however called me a third time. This time I did not ask my maid whether she had called me, but I told her: ‘Wake up, let us move, it is time for us to go.’”

“While I was going down from the town of Assisi to Saint Mary of the Angels, along the way it seemed to me that there was nobody walking on the road. When I entered the doorway of Saint Mary I saw there standing a certain friar, who was an elderly man with a white habit and a venerable face. That friar immediately told me: ‘If you want to receive this grace and the indulgence, take off your clothes, otherwise you cannot enter.’ Since I was standing there astonished and was feeling ashamed to have to undress, since I am an adult and a married woman, that same friar took me by the girdle that I had tied to my waist, and I realised that not my soul but my body had been changed as if I had become a two-year old small girl. When I looked at myself I began to ponder and say: ‘What has happened to me? How could I have become so small and travel along this road when I am small child, and how will I return to Bologna after having undressed without feeling any shame?’ That same friar introduced me in the church. He showed me the baptismal font on the right-hand side and said: ‘Just as you have been washed and cleansed from all your sins in baptism, so now in this church you will be washed and cleansed from all the stains of sin.’

“Having said these words that friar who was talking to me immediately vanished from my sight. Then I realised that I was wearing my clothes and that I had entered the church of Saint Mary in the midst of a great crowd of people who were surrounding me on all sides and whose presence I had not been aware of before that moment.”

That lady therefore realised that she had gained the indulgence from God and the Blessed Mary and that through the merits of Blessed Francis she was assured of the remission of all her sins. So she gave thanks and immediately the following morning she narrated to Brother Ugoccione from Cerreto, her confessor, all these things that had befallen her.

## Chapter 29

**Regarding a miracle that occurred when a certain dead man from Apulia appeared to be freed from the pains (or purgatory) as a result of the indulgence that his Brother bought for him from a certain servant who was his labourer.**

Around the year of the Lord 1308 a certain noble knight from the kingdom of Apulia, whose name was Francesco, prepared himself to go with his

companions during that same year in order to visit the Portiuncula and gain the indulgence. While he was making preparations for his journey he said to a certain servant who was his mercenary labourer, and who used to gain his living by working for him in his house: “Why don’t you also work for the benefit of your soul just as you work so willingly for the wellbeing of your body?” He answered: “How can I work for the benefit of my soul?” That knight told him: “Come with me to the indulgence of Saint Francis on the Calends of August and there you will gain the forgiveness of all your sins.” That servant answered: “I will willingly come with you if you will pay for me with the money you reserve for my labour.” So that knight immediately gave him all the money he was keeping in order to pay him for his work.

Therefore that knight, with his servant labourer and other friends in their company, came to Assisi with the devout intention of coming to the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels. They made contrition and confessed their sins and received that indulgence with joy.

While they were on their way back from Assisi to return to Apulia, after they had toiled along their journey for some days, the aforementioned servant labourer contracted a serious illness and felt great pain in his foot. He began to repent of the good deed that he had done and told the knight: “I should never have undertaken this journey with you since now I have spent all my money and all of you will return and I will be left abandoned in exile as a poor and sick man.”

That knight answered him: “Do not feel sorry for the good deed you have accomplished, but if you are truly sorry for this effort that has worn you out, give me the indulgence in the same way you acquired it in Assisi, so that I will offer it for my recently deceased brother. On my part, together with all our companions, I will pay you the entire sum of money you spent for this journey. Moreover I will carry you at my expense on a horse and accompany you back to my house.”

That servant joyfully made the deal with the knight. He immediately accepted the money according to the agreement, and he gave the indulgence to the knight as he had acquired it in Assisi, for the benefit of that knight’s dead brother.

On the following day the knight proceeded along his journey together with the servant labourer on the horse and the other companions. At a certain moment the dead brother of that knight appeared to him in a resplendent light and told him: “Most dear brother, today I announce to you the great

sense of thanksgiving on my part since the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels which you have devoutly bought for the benefit of my soul has freed me from all the pains of purgatory. In order that I may prove to you that what I am saying is true I will now explain to you what has happened at home, since you are ignorant of these events. Know then that your house has been robbed and left standing with just its bare walls, and that one of your strongest oxen has had its foot amputated and your family is waiting for you to see what you can do. Your family and your friends are coming to meet you some miles ahead, and do not be sad because they are afraid to tell you these things. On your part, however, ask them immediately in order to find out whether things have truly occurred as you heard me tell you. In this way you may know that I have been freed by this holy indulgence of the Portiuncula through the merits of the Virgin Mother of Christ, and thus I will now go to God.”

Having said this the vision disappeared. That knight despised the material possessions which he had lost and continued joyfully on his way home. When he was nearing his district his dear ones came to meet him joyfully and to accompany him for the final three miles of the journey. But as the dead man in the vision had revealed they were afraid to tell him what had happened. So he immediately asked them: “What has happened to our house?” They told him: “When you will enter the house and rest we will be able to tell you what has occurred in the meantime.” But he said to them: “Tell me everything confidently and without fear, since what I will hear will not confuse me, but rather console me.”

Thus they immediately narrated to him everything just as the dead man had done. That knight hurried forth with joy in front of all those present and said: “Now I have truly understood and know without any doubt that the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels is true and certain, and that it has been approved by God, since through it my most dear brother has joyfully entered into heaven.”

### Chapter 30

**Regarding how a man certified that the dead are freed by this holy indulgence, since it is true and it is good to be prepared to receive it even though one could be the greatest and most wicked among sinners, as long as he makes restitution to others.**

A certain man from San Severino in the Marches of Ancona was a relative

of one of our friars who is now sacristan in the friary at San Severino. He wanted to come to the aforementioned indulgence and made a general confession of all his sins to Brother Guarnito at Piorago. Some time had elapsed from his return from the indulgence, when that man died.

The friar who was his relative was full of solicitude for that man's soul and often prayed to God for him. One night that friar woke up before matins and remained in prayer while thinking about the soul of that dead relative. He beheld a certain light which was coming and going in front of him.

The dead man appeared to him in that light and told him: "Do not be afraid since I am your brother." Since that friar was gazing at the vision and was still afraid, that dead man again told him: "Do not be afraid." The friar then added: "Are you not dead?" He answered: "Yes." So that friar asked: "How are you faring?" The dead man answered: "I am fine. Through the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels to which I went, all my sins have been forgiven, and I am not suffering any pain for them. However, because of a repayment that I have to make I have been handed over to be afflicted by a certain demon and I have to suffer a small pain because of this. Go therefore, and tell my mother to take the money that she will find on a certain window-sill where I have left it, and then make restitution of the money in order that I will be immediately freed from all pains. Now do not keep me here any longer with your words, my brother, since my time limit will immediately expire and the demon will take me back with him."

He also added: "This demon cannot do anything to the Brothers gathered for the lauds of matins, and therefore he will take me with him. This will be for you the sign that if the money restitution is made I will be freed, and I will never appear to you in the future."

This aforementioned friar went to the mother of that dead relative and after having found the money as he had been told, he made restitution and the dead man did not appear to him any longer.

### Chapter 31

**Regarding another miracle which probably testifies that through the merits of this sacred indulgence a certain person was freed from the devil; this liberation is a proof that this most holy indulgence is certain, approved and true.**

In Piorago, in the province of the Marches, where there is a friary

belonging to the friars Minor, a certain simple woman was obsessed by the devil who was continually bothering her in a cruel manner. Brother Guarnito from San Severino, who was guardian in that place, together with his brother who was a holy and venerable friar in the Order, often went to speak to that obsessed woman, who was illiterate. But she, as if having become an acute instrument in the hands of the devil, became literate and could answer both of them in an intelligent way. When the friar handed over erudite documents to her she would read and explain them as if she was a professional notary.

Moreover the friar wrote many tiny pieces of parchment and in some of them he wrote down the names of Christ, the Hail Mary, the names of saints, while in others he wrote the names of devils. Then he mixed them up all together. The same friar then took them all together and, in order to test the devil, who did not know which parchment the friar was keeping closed in his hand, he would tell the obsessed woman: "Take one." If in that parchment there was the name of the Virgin or of another saint still closed in that friar's hand, that woman would spit and would look away with the corner of her eyes and say: "No, no, this is not mine." When the friar would offer her the parchment with the name of the devil, her eyes would sparkle and she would violently snatch it and say: "It is mine, it is mine."

In the meantime the same demon, who was furious because of the shedding of the blood of the Saviour, answered that there was no moral sin in that woman, but that the devils had received the command to bother her so that it would be more clear how great was the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels at Assisi, where even through the merits of the same Mother of Christ, during the time of that indulgence and without the remedy of the intercession of other saints, she would be completely liberated. In this way this truth would have to be forcibly uttered to the praise of the Virgin, for the usefulness of the people and for our own confusion, who have lost the merits in favour of our souls that we have gained in that indulgence and have kept dear for so much time.

When the devil had uttered these words he intensified his vexations on that woman and said: "Alas! Alas! How shameful it is for us and how dangerous is the fact that we have been compelled to announce and divulge these things, while those who should preach them do not want to do so." He continued to add with admiration that there does not exist a greater indulgence that can be preached and in which one should believe. In this way the pilgrimage to the indulgence would grow so much that the people would need a long time to go there and return back.

After the time of the indulgence that woman's friends took her to the church of Saint Francis in Assisi, but she was not freed. Then they led her to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula.<sup>40</sup> When she was violently pushed into the church the devils immediately attacked her and drove her high up to the ceiling, and then dropped her violently on the floor, in such a way that those who had brought her thought that she would break her bones to pieces and die.

But she immediately rose, without knowing where she was, and she asked to have food and marked herself with the sign of the cross. Through the merits of the Mother of Christ and through the power of this most holy indulgence, she obtained the most complete health of both soul and body. Her relatives and friends came back to meet her, and they announced the grace given to her by God and the Blessed Virgin Mary, when she had been liberated from such a grave danger.

Indeed she could not remember anything of what had happened, and neither could she remember how she could speak in such an erudite way, nor how she could read and explain those documents. Since she was completely illiterate, she could hardly remember anything. When she imagined what happened after listening to the narration of those who were present at those events, and came to know that she had been able to read and understand those documents, she was filled with so much fear and terror that she could not dare to remain by herself in lonely places.

## Chapter 32

### **Regarding another miracle in which Saint Margaret of Cortona was assured by one of her companions who had been freed from the pains of purgatory because of the aforementioned indulgence.**

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<sup>40</sup> The fact that the obsessed woman was not freed from the devil in the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi, but at the Portiuncula is significant. The Franciscan documentary sources coming from the pen of Spiritual friars during the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century are full of praise to the Portiuncula chapel, but speak rather critically of the Basilica of Saint Francis, in an evident reference to the growing tension between the Community of the Order and the Spiritual family. The *Mirror of Perfection* (Sabatier edition) 82-84 [FAED III, 328-332], in the section on the praise of Saint Mary of the Angels, calls the Portiuncula "the head and mother of the entire religion", whereas it was the Basilica of Saint Francis that was endowed with the title *caput et mater Ordinis* by Pope Gregory IX in 1230 (Bulla *Is qui Ecclesiam* [22<sup>nd</sup> April 1230], in *Bullarium Franciscanum*, I, Roma 1749, 60-62; a title confirmed in the Apostolic Constitution of Benedict XIV, *Fidelis Dominus* [25<sup>th</sup> March 1754] and in the Apostolic Letter of Paul VI, *Inclita toto* [8<sup>th</sup> August 1968], in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 61 [1969] 553).



A certain religious woman, who was striking for the honesty of her way of life, and whose name was Sister Adriana, on the day of the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels suffered a stroke and lived for just a few more days. The servant of God (Margaret) of Cortona<sup>41</sup> was weeping and suffering greatly and praying for the repose of her soul, when she heard a voice telling her: “Do not weep any longer for the sake of your daughter Adriana, since through the merits of the indulgence that she received in Saint Mary of the Angels she has been freed from all pains of purgatory and has already entered the glory of heaven.”

Blessed Margaret of Cortona joyfully recounted all these events in front of all her other sisters.

### Chapter 33

**Regarding how it is of benefit to those who are in purgatory to go devoutly and faithfully to the indulgence, since as is evident, its grace is so great as to draw out of the pains of purgatory all those souls for whom one goes to pray.**

On another occasion, in the time of the feast of the same indulgence, while the friars were occupied in hearing confessions, a certain woman came to confess to one friar and said: “Father, listen to this famous miracle which I will now narrate to you and which regards this indulgence. Once it happened that my brother who was very ill became to lament in his bed with a sorrowful voice and weeping and was saying: ‘Alas for me! I am not feeling sure, but I am greatly confused and desolate, since I have not received the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels, which I had firmly resolved to go and visit.’ So I told him: ‘Brother, do not be afraid but be comforted in the Lord with all your heart, since if you will live you will surely be able to fulfil your vow; if the Lord will call you from this life, I personally will go during the next feast of the indulgence, and I will fulfil the vow on your behalf.’ After I had told him these words my sick brother died shortly afterwards. I have personally come to this indulgence as I had promised him. Now behold that on the same night in which I entered the church of Saint Mary, as is the usual custom, my dead brother appeared to me and told me: ‘My most dear sister, I give you

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<sup>41</sup> Saint Margaret of Cortona (1247-1297), a famous Franciscan Tertiary penitent, who had close contacts with the Franciscan Spirituals, particularly Ubertino da Casale, and who died just three years before the great jubilee year of 1300.

infinite thanks since in the same hour in which you entered this church for my sake, as you had promised me, I have been freed from the most painful sufferings of purgatory and have now entered into heaven. Blessed are those to whom God gives the grace to visit in a devout way this holy indulgence!’ Having said this he disappeared and I did not see him again.”

#### Chapter 34

**Regarding a noteworthy miracle that occurred to certain female pilgrims from Germany, through the merits they acquired because of this indulgence, and which are totally useful so that others might believe.**

During the time in which the lord Pope Clement V was head of the Church of Rome, two ladies from the kingdom of Germany came to Assisi in the company of many other pilgrims. One of these ladies made the journey after she accepted money for the expense from a certain lady of her own town, who could not come personally to the indulgence because of family impediments. The other lady came to the indulgence at her own expense.

These two ladies made a mutual agreement, as it is customary among pilgrims, not to abandon one another for any reason whatsoever and not to leave one another alone during the journey. These two ladies with all their companions came fifteen or more days before the indulgence and arrived at Assisi, when the one who had paid the expenses of her journey became seriously ill. When her other companion, namely the woman who had been sent by the lady who paid her expenses, saw what happened, she became bored of having to stay in Assisi and occupy herself with serving her companion, even because the company of pilgrims thought it would be opportune for them in the meantime to visit the tombs of the apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul before receiving the indulgence. Thus that woman broke her promise and pact of friendship with her companion, and although it went against what they had agreed she abandoned her sick companion and with all the other pilgrims went to Rome so that she could return to Assisi to gain the indulgence for which she had been sent when the time for the same indulgence would arrive.

Her sick companion was very annoyed and scandalised, but nevertheless she went with difficulty to her confessor who managed to convince her to

pardon her friend for this injury, and when her companion returned she reconciled herself with her and they remained friends as before. After having received the indulgence they resolved to return to their own province together with the other pilgrims. But the one who had come to the indulgence with her expenses paid by others, and who had gone to Rome and left her companion sick in Assisi, also fell sick on the way back. She ended up in bed a certain hospital which was one league distant from her town and was on the verge of dying. When she was close to death and had to receive the sacrament of extreme unction, when she saw the priest and all the others who were standing nearby, she began to laugh heartily and after having received the sacrament she died after a short while. When she was buried, her other companion who had been sick in Assisi, returned safe and sound to her homeland and to her town with all her other companions. When that lady who had sent the dead woman to gain the indulgence for her noticed that the pilgrims had returned, she went in a hurry and began to inquire with great care and ask the other woman who was still alive where had her companion remained and why she had not returned with her.

That woman indicated to the lady the manner in which her companion had died in that certain place, and when she had died, and also told her that during the extreme unction she had laughed heartily and after laughing, as we have said, she had died. The following night when that lady wanted to lie down in bed to sleep, but was feeling miserable because of what she had heard, the dead woman appeared to her with a very radiant look on her face.

That lady asked her and said: "What has happened to you, and how are you right now, my sister?" She answered her: "My lady, I am fine." Then the lady asked her once again: "Why did you laugh during extreme unction before you died, as your companion has told me?" So she answered: "I had no choice but to laugh, since I saw more than twenty angels who were coming to me at the moment of my death, and they immediately took my soul and introduced it in the joys of heaven."

Having said this she disappeared. So that lady to whom she had appeared during that night, on the following day went to the other companion who was still alive and told her every single thing she had seen and heard. So that woman returned to Assisi once more, and went to the confessor to whom she had gone before for confession, and who had encouraged her to reconcile herself with her dead companion as we have said before. She therefore confessed her sins once again and after confession she narrated what had

happened to her dead companion, and how she had appeared to the lady who had sent her to Assisi. She also told the confessor what that dead companion had answered regarding her laughing, as we have already said, and narrated every detail in an orderly manner.

The aforementioned confessor then noted and transmitted all the events he had heard from the mouth of that woman and made a faithful note of everything in front of all those present.

### Chapter 35

**Regarding a vision of a certain friar in which he saw Christ and the glorious Virgin during the time of the indulgence, who were standing outside the same church in order to confirm the same indulgence.**

In the year of the Lord 1326 Brother Gregius from San Severo de Civitavecchia told Brother Andrew from Piciliano from the province of Toulouse that when he went out of devotion to Saint Mary of the Angels he went to the friary in Assisi and made confession to Brother Alvarus the Spaniard,<sup>42</sup> who was a doctor of theology, and that during that confession he sensed a great spiritual consolation.

Then he went to the church of Saint Mary, and in the door of the church he saw Christ, who was standing in front of the door of the same church together with the Blessed Virgin Saint Mary, who was standing beside him. She reclined towards her son and was begging him to be merciful to those sinners who were approaching that same church. He also saw the Blessed Virgin who was looking inside the church and who was saying the following words: “In this place there is the treasure of eternal life.”

After uttering these words, Christ and the Blessed Virgin immediately disappeared.

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<sup>42</sup> Alvarus Pelagius (Pelayo) was a doctor of canon law in Bologna. In 1304 he entered the Franciscan Order and studied under John Duns Scotus. He became penitentiary to Pope John XXII at Avignon. In 1333 he was created titular Bishop of Coron in Achaia and then became Bishop of Sylves in Portugal. He remained famous for his work *De Planctu Ecclesiae*, which he wrote in Avignon in 1330-1332. He was also involved in the poverty controversy between the Order and the Fraticelli.

## Chapter 36

**Regarding how a certain devout man was assured in a true way that this indulgence pardons both pains and guilt, when Saint Francis and the Pope and cardinals appeared to him in a vision.**

In the year of the Lord 1326 Brother Francis Bartholi of Assisi was a lector in the sacred place of Saint Mary of the Angels. During the night of the indulgence, when he was feeling very sleepy while standing in front of the door of the same church of Saint Mary, which overlooks the living quarters of the friars, he saw a certain Beghard or Beguin<sup>43</sup> who was a religious with a long and black beard going out of the same church with great joy and happiness. Upon going out this man did not follow the other persons along the normal way but deviated to the left hand side towards the sacristy.

When he saw that this Beghard was so happy, he went close to him since he wanted to know the cause of his immense joy. So that Beghard told him: “Brother, there was a certain person who could not believe that this indulgence is valid for the remission of both pains and guilt, and remained in the agony of this unbelief while praying in his small garden. Behold in that place Saint Francis appeared to him, together with the Pope and some cardinals. Blessed Francis saw this person and made a sign to him and indicated that he himself, Francis, wanted that person to understand what he did not want to convince himself of regarding the privilege of this indulgence. At that point one of the cardinals rose to read from a certain book that he was holding in his hand, and he began to read. In that book he was reading these words: ‘The indulgence from the pains and guilt has been given here on earth and in the same way it has been confirmed in heaven.’ Then he turned over the page

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<sup>43</sup> The Beghards or Beguins were lay persons who took a commitment to live in penance and brotherly charity. They were a common phenomenon of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. They originated in Flanders, but spread to other parts of Europe. There were both male and female Beguins, but the women were more widely known. They would live in close-knit communities, but they were not exactly religious and did not take vows. They supported themselves by manual work and caring for the sick, lepers, and the poor in general. A famous female Beguin was Marie d’Oignies (1177-1213) from Liège in Belgium, whose spiritual director was Jacques de Vitry, who documented the presence of the Friars Minor already in 1216 in a letter he wrote while he was departing from Genoa to Acre in the Holy Land, after he was consecrated bishop of this Crusader stronghold. The Beguins had also close contacts with the Franciscan penitential movement, as well as with the Fraticelli and other sects that were considered heretical in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, like the Brothers of the Free Spirit. For this reason they were sometimes accused of heresy.

of the same book, and continued to read the same words. For a third time he turned over the page and he did not read any other words but the same words we have already mentioned, and he continued doing so by going over other pages.”” The Beghard then said: “The soul of that man was sensing so much consolation that it seemed that he had never experienced such a thing in his whole life.”

The aforementioned Brother Francis asked him curiously from where he was coming, and the Beghard answered that he came from Siena. And since that same Beguin or Beghard had been speaking with the same Brother Francis as if he wanted to change his words to refer to the third person, but could hardly do so, it was evident that Brother Francis could well understand by those words that the Beghard himself was the one who had been hesitating in his belief and who had witnessed that vision. Since Brother Francis was very pleased with that revelation on that night, he insisted that the Beghard recount the event to him for three times, in order to be sure of the marvellous things that we have been narrating.

### Chapter 37

**Regarding a witness given by a demon regarding the fact that this indulgence is true and why Saint Francis did not want to receive a privilege. It also regards the reason why those who deny this holy indulgence are punished and how the friars Preachers said that no one should prohibit anybody to come to this same holy indulgence, but that he should rather be forced to come to it.**

In the year of the Lord 1328, on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, which is the vigil of Saint Matthias, Brother James from the Order of Continents,<sup>44</sup> who was a priest and chaplain in the church of Saint James de Sancto Raphaello near Bologna, a very trustworthy and truthful man for his great devotion and honesty, together with Brother Benvenuto and Brother Lawrence of Sant’Agnese, who were members of the same Order just mentioned, and the lord Peter Bello and Paul who was a pharmacist, all of them devout and trustworthy men, joined company and travelled to Bologna to go to Ravenna in order to gain the indulgence of Saint John the Evangelist.

When they arrived there they were welcomed as guests in the house of a

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<sup>44</sup> The Order of Brothers and Sisters of Penance, or Third Order of Saint Francis.

certain rich lady who was honoured and well known by the citizens and by many other persons, and whose name was Santesa. With them in that house there were another thirteen good men from the town of Bologna.

While all those men together with the aforementioned lady were having dinner, she became to speak in a clear way, in such a well versed, ornate, wise and profound manner, regarding many and various arguments that all those who were listening to her remained very attentive and they were marvelling in their hearts. One of the diners, namely James of Bologna, who was the brother of James the priest whom we have already mentioned, looked at her with great admiration and told his brother: “Are you not noticing the way in which this woman is talking?” His brother answered: “I am hearing her and I am greatly admiring her, but since I am ignorant I cannot understand her and I cannot give any answer to her profound words.” That woman instantly answered: “Well I think that you do not want to answer me, and I do not wonder at this since if all the wise members of the Order of Minors who are better and wiser than those of the Order of Preachers were here present today, I alone would confound them regarding the Scriptures.”

At that moment the priest said: “Is it true that the Order of Minors is greater and better than the Order of Preachers?” She answered: “Yes and in three ways.” When she was asked where she had come to know all this, she answered: “In the school of the highest heavens, from which I had been thrown out together with Lucifer and many others, because of one single knowledge in which all of us were in agreement. In fact, Saint Michael immediately went out in battle against us and finally won over us and expelled all of us out of heaven. Then some of us were thrown in the air of this world, where we cause many persons to sin. Others were thrown in the lower regions of the earth; others still were thrown directly down in order to be submerged in hell.”

The priest told her: “Who are the ones who have been thrown down in the lowest regions of hell?” The demon answered him: “Not all have been thrown down there, but only the false Christians are there and especially the infidels who tread upon the heads of the false Christians with their feet. They are continually being submerged by mud and dung, and by every kind of impure substance that floats over them, since they did not appreciate the grace of their (Christian) calling. Since they had been elevated through their unique vocation to a higher degree than any other creature, in the same way in hell they are thrown into the deepest recesses and they suffer greater pains than some of the devils and some of the infernal beasts.”

In this way everyone present realised that that woman was speaking the truth. After dinner Brother James the priest called her to him and invited her to sit for some time close to him. But she declined and told him: "I am not worthy to do this since you are a consecrated priest of the Lord." The priest therefore told her: "How do you know that I am a priest?" The demon answered him: "Around the feast of Saint Michael you sang your first Mass in Bologna and I was there present. In that same place Brother James of Pozali of the Order of Minors preached in the house of devout persons and Brother William of Curtimilio was your master in the same Mass and Brother Peter of Ravenna and Brother William of Bertinoro were the cantors." Then she continued to list in a most truthful way all the ministers and the whole ceremony of that Mass with all the accompanying circumstances. She also told the priest: "You went eleven times to a certain indulgence that is held in the valley of Spoleto close to Assisi, and for three times two of your sisters were with you and you also with them were greatly afflicted during that journey."

Then she added: "You also heard more things from the aforementioned Brother James of Pozali who preached in Bologna regarding Saint Macarius who wanted to make peace between God and the Devil. The Lord said to Macarius: 'If the Devil will be willing to admit his fault, I will forgive him.' Macarius then went back to the Devil and told him what the Lord had said to him. The Devil answered: 'I will never admit my fault. The same Crucifix has to kneel down in front of me and admit his own guilt, namely the fact that for so many years he has compelled us to stay in hell.' Then Macarius told him: 'Stand back, Satan!' And he expelled him. The Devil never again appeared to him."

Thus this demon continued to expound in a most truthful manner all that it knew regarding those priests. After this, in front of all those present who were listening, the priest told her: "Is the indulgence for which we have come in Ravenna true?" The demon answered: "You very well know that you heard a sermon on that indulgence in Bologna. It was preached by the lord Brother John of the Order of Preachers, a doctor of theology and bishop of Bologna, and it was held in Saint Peter, which is the main church of the city. He also said that it was an indulgence of three years and one hundred and twenty days. And what he said was true, but now this indulgence cannot be received except at midnight, and thus I have called you to it at this time. Then the canons solemnly show the relics and preach the indulgence from



pains and guilt, but they lie because of their greed, because the indulgence is not so great as you hear them preach in Bologna. Therefore I announce to you that I would like to come after you to the indulgence.”

According to what the demon had foretold, it had summoned them and went after them; they also saw and heard everything exactly as she had told them.

Then the priest told her: “Do you consider it a trivial thing that Saint John personally consecrated that church during that night?” The demon answered him: “It is true that Saint John consecrated the church; nevertheless this is not the greatest thing regarding the indulgence. Do not consider it a trivial thing, since if one has to stay for such a long time in purgatory because of that indulgence he would be liberated from the pains.”

While uttering these words to them, one of the companions who were present in that place took an oath on the blood of Christ that his soul was not in peace. Immediately that woman began to shake terribly and it seemed that she was languishing inwardly in all her body. So that priest asked her: “Why are you shaking so much and wailing aloud?” That woman slapped his hand and told him: “Do not offend a Christian.”

The demon then immediately ceased to tremble and to cry out and said: “I am terrified and astonished that a sinner irreverently names the blood of the Crucified, who has loved sinners to such an extent that for their redemption and salvation he wanted to shed all his blood and was bathed in his own blood, when it was enough that he would wash away the sins of all mankind if he would shed just one drop of his blood, since this would have been sufficient for the redemption of the entire human race. Therefore when one mentions the blood of the Crucified, and when the cleric preceding the priest rings the bell in order to announce that the priest is carrying the body of Christ to a sick person, all the infernal demons kneel down as it is written: *In the name of Jesus every creature kneels down*, etc. Therefore the one who irreverently and with scorn mentions this blood is truly a great sinner. Of such persons we demons make a great massacre in hell, since they defile the blood of the Crucified.”

Then the priest told her: “I now want you to speak to me regarding that indulgence to which you said that I have gone eleven times, and you have truly said so. You now tell me whether it is so important and so great according to the manner in which the friars Minor preach it.” The demon answered: “You do not know this truth from me; you yourself have heard

for three times Conrad of Offida of the Order of Minors speaking regarding this indulgence, for the merit of which he raised five persons from death, and you were present when he raised one of these dead persons, and you have also visited the tomb of the third dead person who was raised. He is a great lord in heaven,<sup>45</sup> and the things he said regarding the indulgence are exactly truthful as he asserted.” The priest again said: “I want nevertheless to know the truth from your own mouth, since I am not satisfied with these words.” The demon answered with a loud cry and said: “You will never know these things from me not even if the Crucified will come down once again on earth and the whole earth will have to perish.” So the priest asked her once more: “What is it that frightens you so much above all else?” The demon answered: “The passion and the blood of the Crucified.” So the priest told her: “I adjure you for the same Crucified and for his passion and most precious blood, of which a single drop would have been sufficient for the salvation of all the world, that you should tell us in an clear way whether that indulgence is true as everyone says.”

When the demon heard this severe command coming out of the mouth of that devout priest, it became very rigid and violent, and with intense angry and fury answered him: “Up till now I have rendered you honour by speaking to you, but from this moment onwards I will not tell you anything else, but you have to speak.”

After having said this the demon seemed to want to destroy the body of that woman; in fact she was emitting such horrible howls that all those who were standing there were terrified and began to say: “The earth and the benches are trembling beneath us.” It seemed as if the earth wanted to open up and swallow everybody within it. Therefore all those present immediately marked themselves with the sign of the cross, and they immediately felt more secure, since through their intense fear they were ready to escape from that place.

The demon then gave a very loud cry and said this to the priest: “You have made violence upon me. I therefore cannot keep silent. The Crucified has now forced me to speak. In that place there is an indulgence from pains and

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<sup>45</sup> Conrad of Offida (c.1237-1306) was one of the most popular among the *Zelanti*, or Spirituals. He entered the Order after having met brother Leo before this companion of St. Francis died in 1271, and is thus one of the qualified witnesses of the first Franciscan fraternity. He is also author of a small work entitled *The Words of Brother Conrad*. Thus he is here mentioned as an important defender of the Portiuncula Indulgence. See MARIO SENSI, *Il Perdono di Assisi*, Edizioni Porziuncola, S. Maria degli Angeli (Assisi) 2002, 75-77.

guilt, from pains and guilt, from pains and guilt.” Thus she repeated these words with great violence and a shrieking voice for four times and then said: “That indulgence is so powerful that if a man murders all persons in this world with his own hand, and will come truly contrite to that place on the day of the indulgence after having gone to confession, as soon as he enters that place his soul will be cleansed from all stains of sin, and become just like the soul of a child who as just been cleansed in the waters of baptism. And if one keeps just one piece of money which belongs to another person, well knowing with malice that he wants to keep it, it would be useless for him to go to that indulgence.”

The demon then added: “The Crucified wants that out of the love that he has for Christians, this indulgence would be as great as the indulgence on this part the sea,<sup>46</sup> and that God wanted that furious man to be united in such a friendly way with the Crucified and transformed in him to such an extent as to have all Christians saved.”

The priest then answered and denounced the demon saying: “Why do you call Blessed Francis furious?” The demon answered with a loud voice and said: “Because he was conceived through the union of a man and a woman like all other human beings, but then he humbled himself to such an extent that, because of the unique assimilation between his soul and his body, he merited to be exalted more than any other human being. Therefore although John the Baptist is the greatest saint in heaven after the Mother of the Crucified, so that furious man with his brothers, displaying the sign (of the cross), in heaven precedes all the other saints after the apostles. He has obtained that glorious seat that was reserved to Lucifer our prince, and therefore we cannot even call him by his name, but we hate him more than we do hate all the other saints. Since we know that he has been raised to such a glory as to occupy the throne that had been reserved for Lucifer, we suffer and afflict ourselves so much, knowing that our prince fell from those heights of glory to the fires of hell.”<sup>47</sup>

The demon also told the priest: “I have since now lived in this woman with great peace and tranquillity, and I do not prohibit her from going to

<sup>46</sup> The *indulgentia citra mare* refers to the indulgence gained at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul in Rome, which became very popular during the jubilee celebrations of 1300. During the Middle Ages, the most arduous indulgence was that *ultra mare*, namely the indulgence of the Crusader pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

<sup>47</sup> The fact that Saint Francis occupies the throne of Lucifer in heaven is taken from an episode narrated in the *Assisi Compilation* 65 (FAED II, 167-171), regarding the vision that Brother Pacificus had in the church of Saint Peter in Bovara.

Mass and to sermons and to the indulgences, nor will I molest her before I will separate myself from her in death. I will separate myself from her on the fourth day before she dies. And I have never manifested to anyone else but to you alone that I am present in this woman.” In fact that demon had been present in that woman for over eighteen years, and this fact had never been examined by anyone else. Therefore that priest said to the demon: “Why have you told to me all these things?” The demon answered him: “Since the Crucified has forced me to do so, namely to manifest myself to you and to reveal to you in a unique way the truth of this indulgence.”

After this the priest asked the demon: “Why did Blessed Francis not accept the privilege of this indulgence?” At that moment the woman, through the power of the demon working in her, slapped herself with her hand, and the palms of both her hands, namely the palm of one hand with the fingers with the other hand and feet. The priest was marvelling at this and told her: “What do your actions mean?” The demon answered: “Only two persons have the marks (stigmata) in heaven, namely the Crucified and that furious man. I know that the Crucified has stamped the furious one with the seal of his stigmata, and did not permit him to accept any other privilege or any other bulla that is written by men. Now just as a king will not stamp a bulla with the seal of his ring if not in the case of a very great issue, so when the Crucified wanted to save his people he did not want to concede any other seal to the furious one except the bulla of his own stigmata.”

The priest told her once again: “What therefore will happen to those who deny this indulgence and hinder many others who want to go to that place, just as the friars Preachers and the friars Hermits<sup>48</sup> and many others are doing?” The demon answered him: “It would be better for them to drag a donkey by its tail from Ravenna to Milan, since we shall make a greater massacre in hell of these persons than the slaughtering of sheep and other animals in Bologna.”

After this many priests and other companions wanted to go to rest, but when they drew close to their sleeping quarters they began to feel disgusted and say: “We cannot stand this stench in this place.” The demon immediately began laughing and answered them: “Do not be amazed at such a thing, since

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<sup>48</sup> The friars Preachers are the Dominicans and the friars Hermits are the Augustinians (*Ordo Eremitarum Sancti Augustini*), both members of mendicant Orders born during the same century as the Franciscans. In 1244 Pope Innocent IV joined various hermits in Tuscany under the Rule of Saint Augustine, and in 1256 he instituted this mendicant Order of Augustinian Hermits.

in that room all the demons of this quarter of the town are gathered under the guise of various animals, and they are trying to see what they can gain from those who have come here with the aim of going to the indulgence.” So those devout men, with all the fervour of their faith, made the sign of the cross over all those demons, and all of them immediately escaped and with them they took away their stench.

During that same year in the following month of August, the same priest was coming back from the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels and he was going through Ravenna. When he arrived at a certain place one of his companions who was a friend of the friars Preachers took him with all the other companions to the friary of the same Preachers. When they entered the cloister they found sixteen friars Preachers who were speaking with one another. They asked them where they were coming from, and the pilgrims answered them: “We are returning back to Bologna from Assisi, where we have gone for the indulgence.”

So some of those friars Preachers told them: “Saint Francis was a good man, but we do not know whether the indulgence of that place is true or not.” One among the same friars Preachers immediately answered: “If it is true that God is in heaven, then that indulgence is true. If it is not true, than God is not in heaven.”

At that point the other Preachers got angry at him, and told him: “Why do you speak in such a futile way, and what do you know regarding these things?” That Preacher answered them: “I know this because of the certain witness I received when I saw with my own eyes that Blessed Francis obtained this indulgence from Pope Honorius, since I was present there.” When that priest saw that those friars Preachers were all out against the truth that he was asserting, he told them: “Why are you so upset regarding the truth and why do you deny that this indulgence is true? After all the friars Minor do not interfere with that indulgence that you call the indulgence of Perugia.”<sup>49</sup> The same Preacher then continued to say: “All the friars of Perugia lie because of their greed when they say that there is an indulgence to be gained over there, since that is only an indulgence that is valid for the paved streets of that town. They rather introduced it in order to destroy

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<sup>49</sup> This was an indulgence given to the conventual church of the friars Preachers in Perugia by Pope Benedict XI for the occasion of the feastday of the Finding of the body of Saint Stephen (3<sup>rd</sup> August). For a good presentation of this indulgence *ad instar* to that of the Portiuncula, cfr. MARIO SENSI, *Il Perdono di Assisi*, Edizioni Porziuncola, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi 2002, 73-82.

the true indulgence which is to be gained in the place of Saint Mary of the Angels.” The other Preachers were at this point strongly scandalised by his words, and they all rose up angrily and went away speaking against that friar and telling him: “May your words today bring disgrace upon you.”

When that priest heard these words he called them back and told them: “Come and listen to a notable fact that I have experienced this year regarding this indulgence.” So the friars who were retreating came back, and that same priest narrated to them the entire story we have just documented and all the words he had heard from the demon during that same year. Those Preachers were very much amazed by what he was saying and they became very afraid and contrite for what they had said before. So they told the priest and his companions: “We truly believe now that there is truly an indulgence from pains and guilt as you are saying. And this truth should be preached in all Christendom in all the streets and open spaces.”

Then the priest told them: “Why therefore do you hinder the salvation of so many souls by telling them not to go and receive so much good from this indulgence?” Those Preachers answered him and said: “We promise to God and to you that from now onwards we shall not deny anything regarding this same indulgence, but inasmuch as it is in our power to do so we shall even convince the people to go faithfully to that place in order to gain this indulgence.”

## Chapter 38

**Regarding how the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to a certain man from Germany, and consoled him regarding the aforementioned indulgence and regarding the perfect mercy that he had shown to his neighbour.**

In the year of the Lord 1326 on the first day of the Calends of August, a certain devout man from Trier in Germany came with great fervour and desire to the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels. He arrived on a Thursday evening in the town of Assisi. Since the indulgence was to be gained on the following Saturday, he wanted to enter Assisi and receive hospitality. Since it was already late he could not do so. So he went out to the fields, namely in a certain wheat field, and there he slept during that night.

When the time of Matins arrived he heard the bell of the friars calling them for the hour of Matins, and he himself immediately woke up since

he wanted to go and pray the hours. When he was there standing behold a most beautiful lady appeared to him. She had the child Jesus in one of her arms, while she was holding a lighted candle in the other. The light of that candle was illuminating the entire place in such a way that one could see very clearly all around him.

When this man saw this lady keeping watch in such a marvellous way he immediately recognised her as the lady queen of heaven. So he told her: “O lady, I beg you to pray for me to your son.” That lady did not answer him anything. So he again begged her insistently with his prayers, saying: “O lady of mercy, have mercy on me.” That lady then told him: “I will not answer you now, but I will answer you in three days time in this church of mine.” Having said this that lady disappeared from sight.

The following morning that devout man entered full of consolation in Assisi, and came to the church of Saint Francis. After having heard Mass, he went for confession to Brother Englebert. The same Brother Englebert, who was well known and an intimate friend of Brother Francis Bartholi of Assisi, narrated these events with great faith and devotion to Brother Francis. The same Brother Francis saw that devout man who came on pilgrimage from Trier, and spoke to him directly and in a familiar way regarding these events.

### Chapter 39

**Regarding how a certain friar Minor entered into heavenly glory thanks to this indulgence after having paid a visit to acquire it, and how after his death he appeared visibly to his companion in the friary of Saint Francis in Assisi, where the body of this friar who appeared still rests in peace.**

A certain friar from the Order of Minors from the district of Perugia, whose name was Simon, narrated to me Brother Francis Bartholi of Assisi, who was at the time living in Perugia in the theological *studium*, that the same Brother Simon had been responsible for the guests in the friary of Perugia. Two of our friars once came over from far away and arrived in Perugia with the aim of going to the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels. One of them became seriously ill in the friary of Perugia, because of the strenuous journey he had undergone, since he had been travelling for nearly half a year coming on foot.



The doctor came to visit the sick man and, as soon as he saw that sick friar in that condition, being an expert professional in his art, he said: "This friar is already dead, in the sense that it is impossible for him to escape death in such a serious illness."

That friar heard what the doctor had said, and since he did not want to die in Perugia without having taken the indulgence he had so much desired to receive, he began to cry aloud and to shed tears asking to be taken to Assisi. The guardian of the friary of Perugia, who was a good and pious man, namely Brother Francis of the lord Peter of Perugia, took pity on this sick friar. So he brought over a horse in order to carry him, and made this sick friar ride the horse.<sup>50</sup> But since that friar was very weak and was getting weaker by the minute, and therefore could not ride on the horse, Brother Simon rode on the back side of the horse, and sitting down behind the saddle he held on fast to the sick friar with his arms. In this way they arrived at the friary of Isola Romana<sup>51</sup> close to Assisi. There they found the friars who were preparing themselves as usual to go for the procession to the indulgence of Saint Mary. So that sick friar was accompanied to Assisi, where he rested for some time. The following day he was taken to the indulgence as he had desired and vowed to do, and the same day he died and his companion buried him.

While that companion who was alive was still awake after Compline and kept vigil during the night hours, and was praying devoutly behind the grates of the altar of our father Francis, he was telling the Lord in a tearful voice: "Shall I now return without my dear companion?" And behold the companion who he had just buried on that same day appeared and stood close to him. When that friar saw his companion he was amazed and said: "Are you not my companion?" He said: "Yes I am." That friar then said: "How are you? Have you entered into eternal life?" The dead friar answered: "Not yet." The friar immediately asked him: "So the indulgence for which we have come is not true after all?" The dead friar said: "On the other hand it is more true than people say it is. But because of a certain money restitution that I was obliged to conclude, and which I did not succeed in paying while I was still alive, God does not permit me to enter paradise until someone

<sup>50</sup> A touching gesture, contemplated even in the *Later Rule* 3,12 (FAED I, 102): "They should not ride horseback unless they are compelled by an obvious need or an infirmity." The Guardian was obeying the precepts of the Rule in being so kind to this sick friar, since the same *Later Rule* 6,9 (FAED I, 103) states: "When any brother falls sick, the other brothers must serve him as they would wish to be served themselves."

<sup>51</sup> Isola Romana is nowadays Bastia Umbra, just 4 km. away from Saint Mary of the Angels.



compensates for me. Therefore I beg you, my most dear brother, that you will try to acquire as soon as possible this quantity of money and give it to the poor as compensation, and you will see that afterwards I will appear to you once again.”

Having said this that dead friar disappeared. His companion immediately went running to the Custos of the Sacro Convento of Assisi,<sup>52</sup> who at the time was Brother Henry of Sciola, and began to call him aloud at the door of his cell: “Father Custos! Father Custos!”

Since the Custos believed that something had happened to that friar, and since the hour was not appropriate, he woke up suddenly from his sleep and answered with an impatient voice and a rather angry look on his face. The friar narrated to the Custos in an orderly manner what he had seen and heard from the dead friar who was his companion. Since the Custos was a generous and pious man he immediately called a servant who took care of the altar of our blessed father Francis, and whose name was Bruno. According to what that friar had asked the Custos of that holy place, the same Custos ordered his servant to give to the friar the amount of money that the dead friar had asked for, and during that same night the servant went out of the door of the friary and distributed the alms among the poor people.

On the following day during the evening after Compline, the same friar hurried to go to pray in front of the altar of our father Francis and spent the night over there as before. When he was dedicating himself to prayer behold, in the central aisle of the church of Saint Francis he saw three men who were shining with a great light, and they were coming towards the altar. They were illuminating the whole church with their splendour and it seemed to be on fire. When they drew closer that friar recognised our father Francis together with Saint Anthony, and between them both his beloved companion.

That friar who had just died then said to his living companion: “My most dear brother, I render you infinite thanks for having taken care to make compensation on my behalf, since behold through the merits of this indulgence I will now be led to the glory of heaven. And you will also follow me in thirty days’ time, as the Lord has willed.”

After the dead friar said these words the vision disappeared. Since that friar heard that he would soon die he did not want to remain any longer in Assisi, but prepared himself to go back to his friary. After having started his journey back he arrived at the friary of Milan and there he rendered his spirit to the Creator.

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<sup>52</sup> The father superior or Guardian of the Sacro Convento in Assisi is known as *Custos*, *Custode* in Italian, since he is guardian of the tomb of Saint Francis. Cfr. SBARALEA, *Bullarium Franciscanum* I, 288; II, 26.

## Chapter 40

### **Regarding how God punishes in a horrible way those who do not believe in the indulgence or those who are detractors of this sacred indulgence.**

Once Brother Donato of Arezzo was preaching in Siena during the octave of the feast of Saint Francis. He was speaking about the miracles of the same saint, and was especially mentioning a marvellous miracle regarding the detractors of Saint Francis, and how a certain priest died instantly when he was denying Saint Francis. When Brother Donato descended from the pulpit he called to him a certain friar from the Order of Continents during the chapter of the friars in Siena and told him: “Brother, regarding what you told me about the vengeance against those who are detractors of Saint Francis, I beg you to listen to another wonderful story that I will now tell you. Once there was a group of ladies who were on pilgrimage and were coming to this town of Siena from the province of Padua. They had to pass from here in order to proceed to the indulgence of Assisi, which is celebrated in the first days of August. A certain person asked them to where they were heading. They answered that they were going to Assisi to receive the indulgence of Saint Francis. One of the aforementioned pilgrims immediately added these words: ‘In order that you may know that this indulgence is certain and true listen to what I have to say. In my district of Padua I went to my parish priest in order to go to confession, and I tried to confess my sins to him in as diligent a way as I possibly could. When I had finished my confession, that priest told me: ‘O lady, why did you make your confession in this way?’ So I answered him: ‘Since I want to the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels near Assisi.’ That priest answered: ‘If that indulgence you are mentioning is really true, then may I not arrive at the end of this day alive!’ As soon as that priest had said these words in front of me who had just confessed my sins to him, he immediately lost his speech and died on the spot. He just dropped down dead in front of me, whom am now going to this aforementioned indulgence.’”

The aforementioned Brother Donato of Arezzo narrated these facts to me Brother Francis Bartholi of Assisi, in the refectory of Assisi, in the year of the Lord 1334. Then the same Brother Donato left and went to the Holy Land.

## Chapter 41

**Regarding how Pope Martin (IV) confirmed and newly granted this indulgence and wanted to grant the privilege of the same indulgence to brother Matthew of Aquasparta, who was then lector at the Curia. However since Saint Francis himself did not want such a privilege during his own lifetime, the same Brother Matthew did not dare to follow the will of the lord Pope in this matter.**

During the time when the Roman Curia was residing in Civitavecchia, some days before the Calends of August, Pope Martin was having a private audience with Brother Matthew of Aquasparta, who was at the time lector at the Curia, and afterwards became cardinal.<sup>53</sup> At that moment the chamberlain of the same Pope arrived and said: “My holy lord and father, what shall I do, since many members of our household are asking me to give them permission to visit the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels near Assisi?”

The lord Pope did not answer him, but soon turned towards Brother Matthew and told him: “Brother Matthew, what do you think regarding the indulgence of Saint Mary, about which our chamberlain has been asking us?” Brother Matthew answered: “Holy Father and lord, I consider it to be a holy, true and just indulgence, since Saint Francis, whom the Roman See has included in the catalogue of Saints, because of all his just words and actions, had requested it from Pope Honorius. Afterwards he publicly announced this indulgence and preached it in front of all the people. Nowadays many of the companions of the same saint, as well as men and women who were present during the time of the proclamation of this indulgence, remain as public witnesses of its truthfulness.”

The lord Pope immediately intervened and said: “Brother Matthew, it is good that you say that it is a just and true indulgence, since it is not probable that so great a saint in the Church of God could have publicly acted and preached about it if he was not certain regarding its stable foundation. And

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<sup>53</sup> Martin IV was Pope from 21<sup>st</sup> February 1281 until 28<sup>th</sup> March 1285. Matthew of Aquasparta was born in 1240 in this Umbrian town. He entered the Franciscan Order in Todi, became Master in Paris and lectured theology in Bologna. He also became *lector sancti palatii* after John Peckham, who was chosen as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1279. He was elected Minister General of the friars Minor during the Chapter of Montpellier in 1287. On 15th February 1288 the Franciscan Pope Nicholas IV (Girolamo of Ascoli Piceno) made him a cardinal and penitentiary. Matthew continued to govern the Order until 1289. He died on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1302 and was buried in Aracoeli in Rome.

we, on the part of God and Saints Peter and Paul his apostles, confirm it and if it has not been confirmed to this day, we hereby confirm it and so wish it to be declared. And therefore we give our consent and concede to all the members of our household who request and so desire, that they can safely go to this indulgence in order to receive remission of all their sins. And you, Brother Matthew, can publicly announce this indulgence with our authority through letters and other public documents.” Brother Matthew answered: “Holy Father and lord, how can I dare do such a thing, namely to order the publication of letters and other documents regarding this indulgence, when Blessed Francis, for as long as he lived, was only content to receive the simple words and concession of the Pope?” The lord Pope answered him: “Brother Matthew, you are saying a good thing, namely that you will not request official letters regarding the indulgence, and therefore may this indulgence be confirmed, as we have already said, through our words and concession.”

I, Brother Peter the German, have received all this information with the authority of the same lord Matthew, who is now a cardinal, and who at the same time is occupying the office of general minister, from the mouth of Brother James, companion of the same cardinal, exactly as he has learnt them from the same lord cardinal. I have heard all these things and therefore I am faithfully writing them down for future memory.

## Chapter 42

**Regarding how priests and prelates should be afraid to publish any sentence against this sacred indulgence, since if they presume to do such a thing, they will displease Christ and will not be able to escape from the discipline of his punishment.**

During the time of the lord Pope John XXII, in the year in which the war between the citizens of Perugia and Assisi began, two well-known friars from England came to the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels. One of them told me, Brother Francis Bartholi of Assisi, that a certain cardinal was speaking and interrogating Pope John XXII regarding the constitutions of the lord Pope Clement, namely regarding that law which prohibited the preaching of inappropriate indulgences. He was telling the Pope: “Holy Father, what do you say regarding the indulgence of Saint Mary of the

Angels near Assisi?” The lord Pope John answered: “We shall not utter a single word regarding that indulgence.” This is what he said.

However I say that if the lord Pope John did not utter one single word regarding this holy indulgence, neither publicly nor secretly taking away or decreasing anything, but rather encouraging the publication and the charitable offerings for the same indulgence that the same Pope transmitted as if he were approving it, how much more should be careful that prelate who is inferior to the Pope, so as not to dare subtract the merits of or speak against this sacred indulgence, and thus persuade the devout people not to go to the indulgence even by changing their penance or prohibiting them from going to it. Let these prelates be careful, since they will certainly not avoid God’s judgment, since they will undergo the storm of a most arduous punishment for the sins of the world.

How great must be the constancy and fearful deliberation of those prelates who declare a sentence of judgment, when they are aware of the secrets that Jesus Christ revealed when the most holy Margaret of Cortona, who was at the time a recluse in her cell, was lamenting and praying fervently, recommending the Order of the Minors of Christ, when he told her in a familiar tone: “Daughter, know that those who issue sentences of excommunication and thereby suggest their opposition against the indulgence that exists at Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi, and do so moved by an inner urge and following their sentiments of jealousy, will be bitterly punished, and there will be no attenuation to their sentence. Indeed, in that church sinners place ointment on my wounds and alleviate them more than they do in all the other churches under heaven. In that place, in fact, there is a greater profit for souls, and many are moved to lament over their sins and to make penance and go to confession more than in all the other churches. There my faithful who are found in a state of grace are strengthened in it in order to love me even more fervently, and they are inflamed to abhor even more strongly their vices and sins. There in a similar way sinners weep over their vices and sins.”

These words of Christ are found in the Legend of Saint Margaret of Cortona, in chapter IX: regarding secret revelations.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> FRA GIUNTA BEVEGNATI, *Legenda de vita et miraculis Beatae Margaritae de Cortona*, IX,49. Italian translation by LORENZO LAZZERI, Fra Giunta Bevegnati, *S. Margherita da Cortona. Vita – colloqui – miracoli*, Edizioni Porziuncola, S. Maria degli Angeli (Assisi) 2003, 241-242.

### Chapter 43

**A thanksgiving and heartfelt prayer to Saint Francis, who instantly and humbly obtained the such an abundant mercy and grace from Christ and his vicar Pope Honorius, so that sinners who are up to their necks in the mud of this world may not drown into the profound abyss of hell. May any friar Minor who is burning with zeal for souls and who loves Christ from the bottom of his heart say this prayer.**

O Blessed Francis, who is worthy to give you thanks and to praise you, since through your unique petition, intercession and prayers in front of the most high God, Our Lord Jesus Christ, and his vicar on earth Honorius III, you have come to such an aid of those who otherwise would drown and be lost in the flood of vices? Who can give praise you with the fragility of our human race, when through the intercession of this sacred indulgence you have found the occasion to restore life and grace to men who are nearly dead in their sins and vices? In fact, through this same sacred indulgence that you have begged in your supplication to Christ who gave it to you directly through his own mouth when he marvellously appeared to you in the church of Saint Mary of the Angels, and through the express concession of the same indulgence that Pope Honorius gave to you in Perugia, and that was afterwards confirmed in heaven by God and that you have familiarly revealed to your companions, regarding the day of the same indulgence specified and determined by God, through divine inspiration, you have most joyfully accepted it, and you have preached it with your own mouth in front of all the people and in the presence of seven bishops.

Certainly, no one should criticise you because you were not content to receive a material seal of the same indulgence. Rather you wanted to consider yourself as a servant of Christ to whom you were affectionately devoted, in such a way that you did not only carry the arms and standard of the most glorious king, but you also had the merit to receive the true seal of Christ the high priest, since through his words and deeds all things regarding you should be accepted as blameless and authentic. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified for the salvation of all men, was aware that he was giving to you, o wonderful man, the bulla of his own stigmata, and he did not permit that you would accept any other privilege or bulla that is written by human hands. Just as a king does not place the seal of his ring on a bulla without

wanting to confirm some great deed, so Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he wanted to save the Christian people through this most holy and most certain indulgence, did not concede to you, most holy father Francis, any other bulla except that of his own stigmata, certainly in order to inflame the hearts of the faithful to charity.

#### Chapter 44

**Regarding how people from all over Italy and from beyond the Alps come to visit this aforementioned indulgence, and through their faith and hope they gain the forgiveness of their sins.**

This sacred indulgence has been revealed to us truthfully by the aforementioned companions and brothers of the most holy confessor, the Seraphic father Francis. We should believe these witnesses with undoubting faith, since this indulgence is considered by the entire community of the Order of friars Minor as being true and certain, as is evident by the arrival of thousands of friars, who come every year to visit the indulgence suffering from fatigue, physical hardships, dangers, sickness and even death.

The Supreme Pontiffs as well, namely: Martin (IV), Boniface (VIII) and John XXII, have directly approved this same sacred indulgence, declaring it to be true and certain, and have sent their ambassadors to our friars with their gifts through papal permission and consent.

Besides, many of the cardinals of the holy Roman Church, together with archbishops, bishops from various regions, abbots, priors, and other members of the high clergy, doctors, masters in sacred theology and religious, have all personally and with greatest devotion visited the indulgence and have publicly also preached some of the things we have already stated regarding the same indulgence in front of the devout people.

To them we add the dukes, counts and barons, and all men and women from Germany, France, Spain, Apulia, Rome, the Patrimony of Saint Peter, Tuscany, Marches of Ancona, Marches of Treviso, Romagna and Lombardy, who personally visit the indulgence every year, as is evident from their hope to attain pardon.

The most illustrious and most wise king Robert, together with his most illustrious and devout wife and mother of the Seraphic Order of Saint Francis, queen Sancha, have enriched this same indulgence with their gifts

and charitable donations, which they have destined in haste for the friars as well as for many others, and they have certified, praised and publicly shown the truth of this indulgence in a most clear and open manner.

Above all, God himself renews, multiplies and shows forth every year in a new and marvellous way the greatness of this indulgence through wonderful miracles, by the merits of his Virgin Mother and to the glory of our most sweet Seraphic Father Francis. Amen. Amen. Amen.

#### Chapter 45

**Here follow the names of the friars who heard the full and pure story in all truth from the mouth of Saint Francis and his companion;<sup>55</sup> these same friars have narrated the exact and same truth regarding this sacred indulgence to their other brothers. The following are their names.**

BROTHER LEO FROM THE DISTRICT OF VITERBO was the confessor and secretary of Blessed Francis. He similarly accompanied Blessed Francis on La Verna, when the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him under the form of a seraph, and Francis received from the same Jesus the glorious stigmata. In this place Blessed Francis referred to Brother Leo the words regarding this sacred indulgence.

BROTHER BENEDICT OF AREZZO received his habit from Saint Francis. Afterwards he was minister provincial of the Marches and Romagna. He was a companion of Blessed Francis. This same Brother Benedict heard Brother Masseo da Marignano of Assisi, companion of Saint Francis narrate to him the words we have referred to above regarding this sacred indulgence.

BROTHER PETER CATTANIO of Assisi was the third companion after Saint Francis. He was among the first twelve companions who were present in the place of Saint Mary of the Angels when Christ and the Blessed Virgin with many angels appeared to Blessed Francis and Christ granted him the indulgence and sent Blessed Francis to the Pope as we have written above.

SAINT CLARE VIRGIN, who is now rejoicing in heaven, was generated in Christ to the life of the Gospel by Saint Francis. She heard our same father Francis speak about this indulgence and about the day prescribed for it as has been referred to above.

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<sup>55</sup> Manuscript 344 adds the words: “namely brother Masseo of Marignano, a lay brother from Assisi.” Masseo was the one who accompanied Francis to Perugia, when he went to ask for the approval of the Indulgence from Pope Honorius III.



BROTHER RAYNERIUS OF AREZZO, companion of the aforementioned Brother Benedict of Arezzo, heard Brother Masseo speak about this indulgence all the words that have already been written.

BROTHER OTHO OF AQUASPARTA, a holy man, who was once minister provincial of the Province of Saint Francis, and who was the nephew of the cardinal (Matthew of Aquasparta) heard the information regarding this indulgence from the mouth of the aforementioned Brother Masseo, according to the holy words written above.

BROTHER MARTIN OF ASSISI, a holy man who shed many tears, and whom I, Brother Francis Bartholi have personally seen, was the nephew of the aforementioned Brother Masseo who accompanied Blessed Francis to Perugia when he went at the feet of the Pope to beg him to grant the indulgence. He often heard the information regarding this indulgence from the mouth of his uncle, who narrated the words we have written above.

BROTHER JOHN OF FERMO, known also as Brother John of La Verna, was a man of great holiness and good example. He heard the companions of Saint Francis speak about this sacred indulgence according to the words we have written above.

All these seven friars were most perfect men in their life of holiness and in their truthfulness. As seven witnesses they render testimony to this indulgence, often declaring it to be credible, discreet, to be preached and accepted, true, agreeing with the truth, and unable to be denied by anyone who has a malign and rival intention.

#### Chapter 46

**This is the copy of a letter that Brother Francis Bartholi of Assisi sent from the town of Siena regarding the matter of the concordance of the history of the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels of the Portiuncula, near Assisi, etc.**

*To the Reverend in Christ Brother John of Camollia of Siena, the reverend father and brother Francis Bartholi of Assisi recommends himself with devotion.*

I am writing to you regarding what you have asked of me in your letter, so that you may know that a certain very elderly brother, who according to my knowledge came from Perugia, told me that when he was chaplain of the monastery of Saint Clare in Assisi a certain holy nun of the same monastery

referred to him the words she had heard from Saint Clare and which Saint Clare had heard from Blessed Francis: namely that when Blessed Francis was one night in his cell in the place of Saint Mary after he had received the indulgence, it was revealed to him that Christ was in that church, just as he had been present in the revelation when Francis had found the roses and entered in the church to see Christ and the Blessed Mary, etc. according to facts that are well known to you. Christ told Francis: "Francis, why are you so afflicted?" Blessed Francis answered: "Because of what you have taught me when you came to this world." So Christ immediately said: "Why don't you distribute the gifts of my Mother, as you are obliged to do?" So Blessed Francis understood that Christ was speaking about the salvation of souls through the indulgence of that church, and therefore he said: "You who command in heaven and on earth, please condescend to indicate to me that special day." So Christ told him: "It is a good thing that Peter should loosen one of the bonds."

In this way Christ was telling Francis that he should go to Rome and that he should take with him some of the roses as a witness, and thus he would ask an official declaration to be pronounced by Saint Peter who binds it, and the rest of the story as you know it.

May you always be well in the Lord and pray for me. I have written this letter in haste.

This is the end of the copy of the letter that the same Brother Francis sent. If one diligently examines the contents of this letter he would find no incoherence with that we read in the story that states that Blessed Francis went to Perugia to request the indulgence, and that he went once again in order to request the publication of the same indulgence. Indeed there is complete agreement in this story and it is useful for our greatest devotion and so that we render infinite thanks.

**In the name of the Lord and of the most holy Virgin Mary and Saint Francis. The following are the rubrics concerning the history of the sacred indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi and regarding the miracles that have occurred and that are linked to the same indulgence.**

(1) Regarding how Saint Francis saw the place of Saint Mary of the Angels espoused by Christ to his Mother the Virgin Mary.

(2) Regarding how Saint Francis left Rivotorto that was the first place of the friars of this Order and came to Saint Mary of the Angels.

(4) Regarding how Saint Francis repaired the same church of Saint Mary of the Angels and regarding a vision that one of our friars had regarding the same church.

(3) Regarding how Saint Francis received the place of Saint Mary of the Angels from the abbot of Saint Benedict.

(5) Regarding how after repairing the church Saint Francis requested Christ who appeared to him in that place to grant an indulgence from all sins to all those who would enter the aforementioned church.

(6) Regarding how Saint Francis went to the lord Pope Honorius in Perugia in order to request the indulgence.

(7) Regarding how Saint Francis, who was returning from Perugia and was going through a place called Colle, received a revelation assuring him that the indulgence he had requested in Perugia had been confirmed in heaven.

(8) Regarding how Saint Francis was called by an angel who told him to come to the church of Saint Mary of the Angels, where he saw Christ and his Virgin Mother together with a multitude of angels, and how the day of the indulgence was decided in that place.

(9) Regarding how Saint Francis went to the Pope and how the Pope wrote to seven bishops convoking them for the consecration of the church of Saint Mary of the Angels.

(10) Regarding how Saint Francis publicly preached the indulgence in front of seven bishops and proclaimed it as a pardon of all sins.

(11) Regarding the witness of a certain noble man from Assisi who was present in the consecration of the same church and how he heard Saint Francis proclaim the indulgence.

(12) Regarding a very authentic witness given by two holy friars in a public document regarding this most holy indulgence.

(13) Regarding the testimony of Brother Leo, confessor of Saint Francis, who spoke regarding this indulgence to a certain knight from Perugia.

(15) Regarding the testimony of three holy friars about this holy indulgence.

(14) Regarding the witness of Brother John of La Verna, who was a man of great perfection and holiness, regarding this indulgence, as he heard it from the mouth of sixteen friars who were famous during their lives.

(16) Regarding how Saint Francis praised and commended the place of Saint Mary of the Angels to his friars before he died.

**Regarding the wonderful miracles of this indulgence that show how it is true.**

(17) Regarding how Saint Dominic and Saint Peter martyr affirm that this indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels is true.

(18) Regarding how an angel in the habit of the friars Preachers appeared affirming that this indulgence is true.

(19) Regarding how a certain lay brother of the Order of Preachers rendered witness that he had been present when Saint Francis requested this indulgence in Perugia, since at the time he was a young man who was living as a servant in the house of a certain cardinal.

(20) Regarding how the Virgin Mary was seen with her Son in her arms blessing the people who came to this indulgence.

(27) Regarding how Christ and the Virgin Mary were seen with a multitude of angels preceding the friars who were going on procession one evening.

(35) Regarding how the Virgin Mary was seen giving thanks to her Son for the abundant graces conceded to the Christian people.

(36) Regarding how Saint Francis was seen with the Pope and cardinals certifying what a certain man was saying regarding this sacred indulgence.

(38) Regarding how the Blessed Virgin Mary was seen assuring a certain trustworthy man regarding the mercy he received through this indulgence.

(22) Regarding how a certain angel appeared encouraging one to come to this sacred indulgence.

(28) Regarding how a certain lady was assured of the perfect purification of her sins because of this indulgence, and she became as pure as a newly baptised little girl.

(37) Regarding how Saint Francis did not want any privilege regarding this indulgence and how those who are detractors of the same indulgence are severely punished.

(31) Regarding how a certain woman through this same indulgence was marvellously liberated from the devil, and how the demon agreed and said that through this indulgence the devils lose many of the souls that they had once gained.

(21) Regarding how this indulgence is valid for the faithful departed who died charitably and how they are quickly liberated from the pains of purgatory.

(25) Regarding how the son of a certain noble lady was freed from the pains of purgatory through this indulgence.

(26) Regarding how our friars who are in purgatory desire this indulgence in order to find a remedy for their sins.

(29) Regarding a certain knight who was freed from the pains of purgatory through this indulgence that he acquired after his death.

(32) Regarding how Saint Margaret of Cortona was assured during prayer that one of her companions had been freed from the pains of purgatory thanks to this sacred indulgence.

(30) Regarding how great sinners are freed through this indulgence as long as they have made restitution of all things they were still keeping as their own.

**Regarding how this indulgence is valid for the dead if one journeys to it for their sake and goes to that place with devotion.**

(24) Regarding how this indulgence was shown to be valid for the dead as a certain son had devoutly requested from his mother, and for this reason he had shown her the layout of the place of Saint Mary of the Angels and the surrounding district.

(33) Regarding how this indulgence is valid for the faithful in purgatory, and for those who faithfully assume the responsibility of going on pilgrimage to it for their sake, and how from this it is clear that the grace of this indulgence frees one from all pains of sin.

(39) Regarding how a certain friar entered in the glory of heaven because of this indulgence and how he appeared after his death in the church of Saint Francis in Assisi.

(23) Regarding how the birds of heaven give witness to this sacred indulgence, to the confusion of some who do not believe in this indulgence.

(34) Regarding how the angels rejoice with the soul as it leaves the body, in the case of those who visit this sacred indulgence during their lifetime.

(40) Regarding how God punishes harshly and judges the unbelievers and especially the malicious detractors of this indulgence as is evident in a terrifying example.

(45) The names of seven holy friars and the words they said to others, since some of them had seen Saint Francis and others had seen his companion Brother Masseo.

(43) Thanksgiving to Saint Francis for giving acquired this sacred indulgence for the sinners of this world.

(42) A lamentation addressed to Christ against some prelates who pass judgments against this blessed indulgence.

(41) A confirmation of this indulgence by the lord Pope Martin, in front of Brother Matthew of Aquasparta who was at the time a *lector* in the Curia.

(44) Regarding how persons from all over Italy and other parts of Germany and the regions beyond the Alps visit this most holy indulgence with the hope of gaining pardon for their sins.

HERE WE CONCLUDE THE HISTORY OF THE MOST HOLY INDULGENCE OF THE CHURCH OF SAINT MARY OF THE ANGELS OR OF THE PORTIUNCULA, WHICH IS NEAR ASSISI. TO THE PRAISE AND GLORY OF THE ALMIGHTY GOD AND OF THE MOST GLORIOUS VIRGIN MARY, HIS MOST SWEET MOTHER, AND OF HIS MOST HOLY CONFESSOR SAINT FRANCIS, THIS INDULGENCE HAS BEEN APPROVED BY NUMEROUS AND TRUSTWORTHY TESTIMONIES.

## APPENDIX

### ADDITIONS TO MANUSCRIPT 344

#### Chapter 47

**Regarding how all those who come out of devotion to the church of Saint Francis in Assisi from remote regions can be absolved from their sins, if they entrust themselves to the friars through the authority of the custodian of that place according to the following privilege written by the lord Pope Alexander IV.**

Alexander, bishop and servant of the servants of God, to his beloved son the custodian of the friars of the Order of Minors of the church of Saint Francis of Assisi, greetings of health and apostolic blessings.

Out of reverence for the confessor Saint Francis, to whom we cherish the devotion of a special affection, we gladly welcome at the opportune time all your desires that conform to piety and are useful for the good of souls and we willingly agree to accept them. It has come about that we have listened to the petitions made by you and by our beloved sons the friars of the church of this same saint of Assisi. With the present letters we grant you the authority to listen to the confessions of all those who come from remote regions to the same church out of devotion, but do not have an occasion to have a priest accompanying them, and who request your service and that of the other friar priests of your Order, both those who dwell in that place, as well as those who come from all other places on the occasion of the aforementioned solemnity, and who you convene and invite to come in that place. We also entrust you to impose upon them a saving penance, except in those cases when such an act pertains to the spiritual credit of the Apostolic See that should be consulted in such matters.

Given at Viterbo, on the sixth day of the Calends of October, the fourth year of our pontificate [26<sup>th</sup> September 1258].<sup>56</sup>

*The above privilege is conserved with the bulla in the sacristy of Saint Francis in Assisi.*

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<sup>56</sup> SBARALEA, *Bullarium Franciscanum* II, 307, n. 443. This bulla is addressed to the community of the Sacro Convento in Assisi and has nothing to do with the Portiuncula Indulgence, but regards the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi.



## Chapter 48

**Regarding how the glorious lady who is above all the other queens and ladies of this world and who excels and is sublime in love in the Order of Saint Francis, and who is the mother of our Order, its helper and protector, namely the most illustrious lady queen Sancha, although she did not visit this sacred indulgence personally because of her numerous and arduous commitments, nevertheless through her affection, desire, benefices and solemn ambassadors that she sent, it is as if she expressly came to visit the indulgence. Through this letter she approved this indulgence and did her best to help those friars who wanted to come to find all the comforts needed. The following is the text of the letter.**

To the reverend fathers, brothers and sons in the whole world and to the single friars who have gathered to this present indulgence of the Portiuncula near Assisi, all of whom are beloved by her, Sancha, for the grace of God queen of Jerusalem and Sicily, recommends herself to the blessing of the common Father and to the grace of Christ in order to be saved.

Since my childhood my soul has been so full of sincere love and unique devotion towards the holy father of your friary and your Order, and with the grace of Christ such love continually grows within me as if I want to generate all of you in charity, and in sincerity I love all the friars of the Order wherever they may be, in such a way that I would like to see the Order renewed in the same love every day. In such a way I certainly consider my sentiments to be issuing from the source of charity that of its nature assiduously asks to be received with greater love. Therefore, my dear and unique fathers and sons, for my consolation and yours, if it is possible in any way I willingly offer you all and the other friars all the affection of my soul, and in the same affectionate way I want to show you how close I feel to you in the solemnity of the present indulgence. It is true that, since I am occupied with many other commitments, I cannot realise my great desire to visit that place, and instead I intend to send you this brief letter as a sign of my presence. I beg you on behalf of the lord king my husband, who is your own father and a unique son of Saint Francis, that you commend me and our daughters and the others whom we intend to recall to our mind, and that in your prayers you always commend us to God and that it may be pleasing to all the other friars in your provinces to do likewise. In the same way that I continually pray for the entire Order and for each and every single friar, so may you and the other friars of the Order do

the same for the lord king who is a unique arm protecting your Order, since this obligation has bound us since the time of the celebration of the general chapter in Naples. During that chapter it was evident that my soul was united with the bound of charity with the soul of each and every friar.

I am sure that since you are coming from remote regions and lack the necessary means of sustenance, we shall provide for you by sending you sixty florins that we shall hand over through the services of the merchants of the society of Bonacursi to the care of your Brothers Arnald *de Stagellis*, Raymond of \_\_\_\_ and Inardo of Capri, who are our beloved chaplains and who will come to this indulgence. Our lord the king will also send you for the same cause an alms offering of another sixty florins through the services of the same merchants.

Given in Naples under our personal signet ring on the thirteenth day of July on the vigil of the *indictio*.

*End of the letter of the most devout mother of the Order queen Sancha who addressed it to the friars coming during the time of the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels. The letter was publicly read in the friary of Saint Francis in front of all the friars there present.*

## Chapter 49

**Regarding how, in order to provide for the needs of the friars of Assisi, the lord Giles cardinal and bishop of Sabina<sup>57</sup> relaxed the interdict in the church of the friars during the time of the indulgence in the city and district of Assisi as well as in the surrounding region, from the twenty-eighth day of July until the third day of the month of August. The same cardinal died in the city of Viterbo, on the ninth day of the Calends of September in the year of the Lord 1367 during the time of the lord Pope Urban V, who was residing with the Roman curia in the same city. The cardinal was honourably buried in the church of Saint Francis in Assisi, in the chapel of**

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<sup>57</sup> Gil or Ægidius Albornoiz was born in Spain in 1310. In 1338 he became archbishop of Toledo and on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1350 Pope Clement V in Avignon created him cardinal priest with the title of Saint Clement. He became Papal Legate for the retaking of the Papal States and the future return of the Pope to Rome. In this way he reconquered Lazio, the Duchy of Spoleto, Marche and Romagna. He became bishop of Sabina circa 1356 and died in Viterbo on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1367. During that same year he had rebuilt the Rocca Maggiore above Assisi.

**Saint Catherine, the same year on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the Calends of the same month. For the repose of his soul the friars of the convent were obliged that every month for one whole year, namely on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the month, they were to celebrate the vigil and Mass of the dead reciting and singing the prayers, and similarly every year they had to celebrate solemnly the anniversary of his death on the ninth day of the Calends of September. This obligation was published in a document written by Stephen the Spaniard, a servant in the household of the lord Gometius, nephew of the same cardinal. The following are the contents of the document.**

Giles, for the mercy of God bishop of Sabina, legate of the Apostolic See, and vicar general of the provinces and lands of the Roman Church that are found in those regions belonging to the same Church, to all and every one of those who read this letter, I wish you health in the Lord.

Although all those who have received from the hands of the Lord the palm of supreme blessings are worthy of being revered with great devotion, nevertheless the glorious Virgin is more worthy of being venerated than all others, since as Mother of God she has been exalted in a higher glory above all the choirs of angels.

Therefore, since in the town of Assisi, Blessed Francis founder and author of the sacred Order of Minors has instituted a solemn festivity in honour and reverence of the same Virgin to be celebrated annually in the Calends of the month of August, to which a great number of faithful gather from many places, on our part we wish that for the praise of the Virgin and glory of the same Blessed Francis this most famous feast be celebrated with more devotion by the faithful who want to visit that place for their consolation. Therefore we are inclined to give heed to the requests of our beloved brothers in Christ the friars of the saint of Assisi of the aforementioned Order, and with our authority and in spite of whatever has been officially decreed to the contrary by the officials of the Roman Church regarding the ecclesiastical interdict in place in that town and the surrounding region and district, we hereby lift such an interdict in the entire town [Saint Francis] and in the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Angels which is situated close to the same town where the convent of the same friars is to be found, and we hereby declare that [this interdict] be suspended in this festivity which is particularly celebrated in these churches from the twenty-eighth day of the

present month of July until the third day of the next month of August. We also grant the suspension of the prohibition during these days, namely that it will be allowed to the ministers of the Lord to play the organ for the divine offices in the churches and to sing the hymns of joy and salvation. We also want that from the end of the aforementioned third day of August in the same churches the interdict should be observed as before.

Given in Ancona on the Ides of July of the ninth year of the pontificate of the lord Pope Innocent VI (15<sup>th</sup> July 1361).

## Chapter 50

**Regarding how the lord Pope Gregory XI, nephew of the lord Pope Clement VI, sent a bulla with a seal of lead containing a privilege to the church of Saint Francis in Assisi, in which he ordered both the minister, and the custodian and guardian of Assisi not to permit, but rather to prohibit the selling of any merchandise in the church of Saint Francis during the time of the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels or of the Portiuncula. In this document it is evident that he also confirmed this sacred indulgence.**

Gregory bishop, servant of the servants of God, to the beloved son and minister of the province of Saint Francis and to the custodian and guardian of the Order of friars Minor in Assisi, to both of them wishes health and imparts his apostolic blessing.

We have heard the unpleasant news that during the time of the indulgence of the Blessed Mary of the Portiuncula in the diocese of Assisi, in the church of Saint Francis in Assisi it is permitted to sell and buy objects of merchandise and the same church of Saint Francis is full of tables as if it were a store in such a way that those who visit the church can only squeeze with difficulty in the cramped space in order to pass through the church, and this generates much scandal among a great number of pilgrims. We therefore request that, at your discretion you will agree that such things are intolerable, and by this apostolic document, which we are sending you we hereby strictly command that, if these things are truly occurring you will not permit them in any way to continue in the future.

Given at Avignon on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the Nones of July, of the second year of our pontificate (4<sup>th</sup> July 1372).

DIPLOMA OF THEOBALD  
DIPLOMA OF CONRAD  
AND OTHER DOCUMENTS  
RELATING TO THE  
PORTIUNCULA INDULGENCE

(12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries)

## THE DIPLOMA OF THEOBALD, BISHOP OF ASSISI (10<sup>th</sup> August 1310)

We have seen that Franciscan Sources of the 13<sup>th</sup> century speak about the importance of the Portiuncula chapel as the place where the Order of friars Minor was founded, but they never mention in an explicit way the granting of a plenary indulgence in favour of this church. It was only at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century that the question of the Portiuncula Indulgence came to the forefront, particularly with apologetic writings in order to defend this particular pardon that Francis had acquired from Pope Honorius III in favour of this church, after a vision of Christ and the Virgin Mary.

The occasion arose as a result of the events surrounding the last decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and particularly the occasion of the first great jubilee instituted by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300.<sup>58</sup> Already in 1294 Pope Celestine IV had instituted an indulgence at Santa Maria di Collemaggio in L'Aquila. Since this Pope soon resigned, his successor, Boniface VIII tried to annul the *bull*a that had instituted this indulgence. His efforts were futile. On his part, Boniface VIII thought it best to institute a most special indulgence to be received during the jubilee year 1300 in the Basilicas of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Rome, by publishing the *bull*a *Antiquorum habet* on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1300, making the indulgence retroactive from 25<sup>th</sup> December 1299. This first "Anno Santo" in the history of the Church was an immense success, with crowds flocking to the Basilicas of Saint Peter in the Vatican and Saint Paul outside the walls. This fervour for gaining a plenary indulgence spread like wildfire. The Dominican friars in Perugia also succeeded to acquire a plenary indulgence in 1304 from Pope Benedict XI, who was also a Dominican friar, and who was in Perugia from 2<sup>nd</sup> May to 7<sup>th</sup> July 1304, when he died, in favour of the church of Santo Stefano del Castellare, which was being rebuilt with the name San Domenico Nuovo. This indulgence was granted orally (*vivae vocis oraculo*) *ad instar Portiunculae*, namely similar to the Portiuncula Indulgence. Such an action on the part of the Pope meant that there could be rivalry between the Franciscan pardon in Assisi and this new

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<sup>58</sup> For a thorough analysis of this new season of plenary indulgences, cfr. MARIO SENSI, *Il Perdono di Assisi*, Edizioni Porziuncola, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi 2002, 49-82.

indulgence in Perugia. Indeed there was, and this state of affairs prompted Franciscan friars to write treatises in favour of the truth of the Portiuncula Indulgence, against the detractors of the same indulgence.

The first Franciscan to do so was Teobaldo (Theobald) *de Ponte* or Pontano who came originally from Todi. He entered the Order of friars Minor and became first bishop of Castellamare di Stabia, Terracina and then bishop of Assisi (13<sup>th</sup> February 1296 - 1329). The year of his death is uncertain, but Theobald must have died before 1329, since from a bulla *Cura pastoralis* of 11<sup>th</sup> October 1329 we know that Pope John XXII confirmed the election by the cathedral chapter of Assisi of Conrad d'Andrea as the successor of Theobald in the Episcopal See of Assisi (*bonae memoriae Theobaldi*). Otherwise one would have to accept that Theobald occupied the Episcopal See of Assisi for 33 years. According to the testimonial letter of the same Theobald written in 1310, Pope Boniface VIII, who had declared the first jubilee year in 1300, had already sent preachers to Saint Mary of the Angels probably in 1295 to speak publicly regarding the Portiuncula Indulgence.

In 1310 Theobald published the Diploma *Propter quorundam linguas detrahentium*. This is the oldest surviving document regarding the institution of the Portiuncula Indulgence, and which speaks explicitly about the granting of a special pardon in favour of the church of Saint Mary of the Angels near Assisi by Pope Honorius III in 1216, when Saint Francis went to request such an indulgence at the Papal Curia residing in Perugia.

### **Text of the Diploma of Theobald, Bishop of Assisi<sup>59</sup>**

Brother Theobald, for the grace of God Bishop of Assisi, to all the Christian faithful who will read this letter, wishes you all health in the Saviour.

Because of those who, out of the zeal of jealousy or maybe because of ignorance, are detractors of the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels that is near Assisi, and because they contradict it hard-heartedly, we would like to send this letter in order to convince all the faithful in Christ regarding the way and form in which Blessed Francis, while he was still alive, requested this indulgence from the lord Pope Honorius.

When Saint Francis was living at Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, one

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<sup>59</sup> English translation by NOEL MUSCAT OFM from the original Latin critical edition: FRATRIS FRANCISCI BARTHOLI DE ASSISIO, *Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, nunc primum integer editit PAUL SABATIER, Paris (Librairie Fischbacher) 1900, LXXV-LXXIX.

night the Lord revealed to him that he should go to the Supreme Pontiff, the lord Honorius, who at the time was living in Perugia, and ask him for an indulgence in favour of the same church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula that he had just repaired. When he woke up the following morning he called his companion Brother Masseo of Marignano who lived there with him, and they both went in front of the aforementioned lord Honorius. Saint Francis presented himself to him and said: “Holy Father, recently in honour of the Virgin Mother of Christ I have repaired for you a church. I plead your holiness to declare an indulgence in favour of the same church without any money offerings.” The Pope answered: “Such a thing is not fitting to do since whoever asks for an indulgence should first merit it by giving a money offering. However, indicate to me how many years are you asking me for regarding such an indulgence?”

Saint Francis then answered: “Holy Father, if it is pleasing to your holiness, do not give me years but souls.” The Lord Pope then asked him: “What do you mean by souls?” Saint Francis answered: “Holy Father, if it is pleasing to your holiness, I desire that whoever comes to this church after having confessed and shown contrition for his sins, and after having been absolved by a priest, should be pardoned from the pains and guilt in heaven and on earth, from the day of his baptism until the hour in which he enters this aforementioned church.” The lord Pope answered: “Francis, you are asking for too much, and it is not customary for the Roman Curia to grant such an indulgence.” Blessed Francis then answered: “Lord, what I am requesting does not come from my initiative, but from the one who sent me, namely the Lord Jesus Christ.” So the Pope immediately pronounced for three times: “It pleases me that you receive this favour.”

The lords cardinals who were present there answered: “Lord, be careful of what you are doing, since if you will grant such an indulgence you will destroy the indulgence beyond the sea<sup>60</sup> and the indulgence of the apostles Peter and Paul will be of no service whatsoever and will be considered as nothing.” The lord Pope answered them: “We have granted and conceded this indulgence to him, and therefore we cannot, nor is it fitting for us, to undo what we have already decided to accomplish. However let us modify it in such a way that it would extend only for one natural day.” Therefore the

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<sup>60</sup> The *indulgentia ultra marina* refers to the indulgence given to the Crusaders who during the Middle Ages went to the Holy Land. This was a special indulgence since it entailed a very arduous and dangerous journey, which was considered to be the mark of the most perfect penance of sin and even a preparation for martyrdom in the hands of the infidels.



Pope recalled Saint Francis to his presence and told him: “Behold, we are granting you the favour that whoever comes and enters the aforementioned church after having confessed in a correct way and shown contrition for his sins, he will be absolved from the pain and guilt. We want this indulgence to be gained every single year, forever, but only for the length of one natural day, namely from the first vespers, including the night until the vespers of the following day.”

At that moment Blessed Francis bowed his head and was going out of the palace. When the lord Pope saw that he was going out, he called him and said: “O simple man, where are you going? What document will you carry in order to show that you have gained this indulgence?” Blessed Francis answered him and said: “Your words are enough for me. If this is truly the work of God He Himself will make it manifest. I do not want any written document, but let it suffice that the Virgin Mary be the parchment, Christ the notary and the angels the witnesses.”

Francis therefore went from Perugia and began to return to Assisi. Half way he arrived in a place called Colle,<sup>61</sup> where there was a leper hospice, and he stopped there with his companion to rest a while and fell asleep. When he woke up, after having prayed he called his companion to him and said: “Brother Masseo, I tell you on the part of God that the indulgence that has been granted to me by the Supreme Pontiff has also been confirmed in heaven.” Brother Masseo transmitted this information to his nephew Brother Marino, who often heard these words from the mouth of his uncle. This Brother Marino we have just mentioned died recently in the Lord around the year of the Lord 1307, full of days and holiness.

After the death of Blessed Francis, Brother Leo who was one of his companions, a man of a most trustworthy life, and who had heard this same information from the mouth of Saint Francis, together with Brother Benedict of Arezzo, one of the companions of Blessed Francis, and Brother Raynerius of Arezzo, both of whom had heard this information from the mouth of Brother Masseo, referred these events regarding the indulgence to many others, both friars and seculars, and many of these are still living today and can render witness to all these facts.

We do not intend to write the facts regarding the solemnity of the celebration when this church was consecrated by seven bishops and the

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<sup>61</sup> Collestrada, half-way between Perugia and Assisi, although closer to the former, marks the same place where the battle of 1202 between the Assisians and Perugians took place, in which Francis was captured as prisoner.

indulgence was proclaimed, except only to refer what Pietro Zalfani, who was present for the same consecration, said in the presence of Brother Angelo, minister provincial, and Brother Bonface, Brother Guidone, Brother Bartholo of Perugia, and other friars in the place of the Portiuncula, stating that he was personally present for the occasion of the consecration of the aforementioned church that was celebrated on the fourth day of the Nones of August,<sup>62</sup> and that he heard Blessed Francis who preached in front of seven bishops, and was holding a small parchment<sup>63</sup> in his hand and saying: “I want to send all of you to heaven, and I am announcing to you all an indulgence that I have received from the mouth of the Supreme Pontiff. All of you who have come here today, and all those who will come every year on this day with a well-disposed and contrite heart, will receive the pardon of all their sins.”

We have therefore communicated these facts regarding the indulgence, so that nobody will now excuse himself because of ignorance, and especially in order to dispel the doubts perpetrated by those who are jealous and detractors and who want to destroy, suppress and condemn this truth, which is proclaimed all over Italy, France, Spain and the other provinces both below and beyond the mountains, and which God Himself for the honour of His most holy Mother, for whom this indulgence is dedicated, continues to praise, glorify and spread every year through famous and manifest miracles.

In fact, how can these persons hinder through their pestiferous insinuations the facts that have remained so strong and vigorous for so many years in the face of the entire Roman Curia? In fact the lord Pope Boniface VIII has sent his own ambassadors even in our days to this same [indulgence], in order that they might preach it in a solemn way on the day of the indulgence. Moreover some of the cardinals have personally come to this indulgence in the hope of gaining pardon, and thus with their personal presence have approved it as true and certain.

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<sup>62</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> August.

<sup>63</sup> The Latin term is *cedula*, which indicates a small parchment. It therefore seems that, in spite of the fact that Francis did not want to receive an official document regarding the indulgence from Pope Honorius III, he nevertheless received some written form of recognition of the granting of this indulgence.

As a faithful testimony for all these facts we have sent this letter and stamped it with our seal.

Given in Assisi, on the feast of Saint Lawrence, in the year of the Lord 1310.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Manuscript 344 of Assisi, in folio 54b has the following handwritten note by N. Papini: *Integrum exemplar hujus testificationis cum appenso sigillo et anno et mense et die et loco videlicet: Datum Assisii, die S. Laurentii anno MCCC decimo, asservatur membranaceum in archivio conventus nostri Perusii*. Thus this note referring to the manuscript conserved in Perugia, but which was lost, dates the Diploma of Theobald on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1310: “Given in Assisi, on the feast of Saint Lawrence, in the year of the Lord 1310.” The original text of this manuscript has now been discovered in the State Archives of Perugia and published in: *Il notariato a Perugia. Mostra documentaria e iconografia per il XVI Congresso Nazionale del Notariato* (Perugia, maggio-luglio 1967) Roma 1973, 285-288.

## THE DIPLOMA OF CONRAD, BISHOP OF ASSISI (1335)

It was during the same time that Francis Bartholi of Assisi was gathering witnesses regarding the Portiuncula Indulgence, that Conrad, bishop of Assisi and successor to Theobald, compiled another Diploma in defence of the same indulgence.

Before becoming bishop of Assisi (1329-1337) Conrad had been canon in the cathedral of Perugia. In 1335 he published the Diploma *Propter quorundam*, which is longer than the Diploma of Theobald. The principal aim of the new Diploma was that of reconciling the various traditions. In this narration we find the episode of the thorn bushes that are transformed into a rose garden. Conrad also inserts the testimony of Michele of Spello, a lay person who visited the companions of Saint Francis at the Portiuncula and gave witness to what they had told him regarding Francis' eremitic experience in the Portiuncula, the episode of the thorn bushes where Saint Francis throws himself naked on a cold January night, in order to extinguish a carnal temptation of the devil. Then he narrates the miracle of the roses and the angels who accompany Francis to the Portiuncula chapel. These episodes are very aptly illustrated in the cycle of frescos in the Chapel of the Roses by Tiberio d'Assisi (1516), and in the other cycle of frescos in the Chapel of the Roses in the Franciscan friary of San Fortunato in Montefalco, by Benozzo Gozzoli (1450).

### **Text of the Diploma of Conrad, Bishop of Assisi<sup>65</sup>**

Conrad, for the grace of God bishop of Assisi, to all faithful in Christ who will read this letter, wishes you all health in the Saviour.

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<sup>65</sup> English translation by NOEL MUSCAT OFM from the original Latin critical edition: FRATRIS FRANCISCI BARTHOLI DE ASSISIO, *Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, nunc primum integer editit PAUL SABATIER, Paris (Librairie Fischbacher) 1900, XC-XCVI. A vernacular edition of the *Diploma of Conrad*, dating from 1390 and the work of Pieraccino Pieri of Florence, is presented in MARIO SENSI, *Il Perdono di Assisi*, 183-194. For the footnotes explaining the details of the narration, refer to the section regarding the *Tractatus de Indulgentia* by Francis Bartholi of Assisi.

Because of those who, out of the zeal of jealousy or maybe because of ignorance, are detractors of the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels that is near Assisi, and because they contradict it hard-heartedly, we would like to send this letter in order to convince all the faithful in Christ regarding the way and form in which Blessed Francis, while he was still alive, requested this indulgence from the lord Pope Honorius. We shall also show how, after having requested it, the most venerable confessor of Christ Francis, in front of many bishops and a great crowd of people, publicly proclaimed this indulgence, and in this way we will convince all those who read this present letter of ours.

Blessed Francis, after he had repaired the church of Saint Mary of the Angels, because of his great devotion towards the queen of the angels, he began to live in this place with great devotion and devoting himself to prayer. One night he was praying very fervently to the Lord, and it was revealed to him that Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary his Mother were in that church together with a multitude of angels. So Francis immediately rose, and with great devotion, spiritual joy and reverence he entered the church. There he saw the Lord Jesus Christ with a multitude of angels, and he prostrated himself on the ground in front of the vision of Christ and of the glorious Virgin.

The Lord said to Saint Francis: “Francis ask me whatever you would like regarding the salvation of souls, since you have been offered as a light to the nations, and as a restorer of the Church in this world.” Francis was there lost in ecstasy. Then he turned to his senses and said: “Our most holy Father, I am a miserable sinner, but I beg you to condescend to grant this grace to all the human race, namely that you will grant pardon and indulgence to all and every single person who comes to visit this place, in such a way that all those who enter this church will be pardoned of all their universal and singular sins, after they have confessed to a priest and accepted to do penance for them. I also beg your most holy Mother, who is the advocate of the entire human race, to come to my aid, and to consent to intercede for me in front of your most holy and merciful majesty.” At that moment the queen of heaven bowed herself in a humble way to accept the prayers of Saint Francis, and immediately began to plead with her Son and to tell him: “Most high and all powerful God, I beg your divinity and I humbly intercede, so that it will be pleasing to your majesty to bow down to the prayers of Blessed Francis your servant.” The same divine majesty immediately answered and said: “Brother

Francis, what you are asking for is a great thing, but it is even greater in merit and therefore you will receive even greater gifts, and I will pay heed to your prayers and petitions. In the meantime you are to go to the Supreme Pontiff, who is now in Perugia, namely the lord Honorius III, and on my part request of him this aforementioned indulgence.”

The following morning Blessed Francis woke up and called to him Brother Masseo of Marignano, and went in his company to present himself in front of the lord Pope, and said: “Holy Father, out of reverence to the Virgin Mother of Christ I have recently repaired a church for you; I hereby plead with your holiness that you may grant an indulgence to that place without any money offering on the anniversary of the consecration of this church.”

The Pope answered: “This was not convenient since it is fitting that whosoever requests an indulgence merits it by lending his hand to contribute and help. However, indicate to me for how many years do you want me to grant this indulgence?” The Pope asked: “For one year? Or else, do you want the indulgence for three years?” Saint Francis said: “What does this mean?” The lord Pope again asked him: “Do you want us to grant a six-year indulgence?”

The Pope arrived at the point of wanting to grant a seven-year indulgence. Saint Francis was not satisfied, and answered: “My lord, what does this mean?” So the Pope asked him once again: “What do you want us to grant you?” Saint Francis then answered: “Holy Father, if it is pleasing to your holiness, do not grant me years but souls.”

The lord Pope said: “What do you mean by wanting souls?” Francis answered: “I want, if it is pleasing to your holiness, that for the benefits that God has bestowed to that place, all those who would come to this church after having confessed their sins and shown contrition for them, and after having been absolved by a priest, they would receive pardon from the pains and guilt that they committed both in heaven and on earth, from the day of their baptism until the day and the hour in which they enter this aforementioned church, and they should not be burdened with any other obligation.”

The lord Pope answered: “Francis, what you are asking for is too much; neither is it in the custom of the Roman Curia to grant such a type of indulgence.” Blessed Francis then answered: “Lord, what I am asking for does not come from my own initiative, but I am requesting it on behalf of the one who sent me, the Lord Jesus Christ.” The Pope answered: “And I will

grant you what you are requesting,” and he added: “It pleases me that you receive this favour; it pleases me that you receive this favour; it pleases me that you receive this favour. Let it be done in the name of the Lord.”

When the cardinals who were present came to know about this, they told the Pope that he should revoke such an indulgence, since it would prejudice the indulgence of the Holy Land. The Pope answered: “I cannot in any way revoke it, after having promised to grant it.” The cardinals answered: “Lord, be aware that if you grant him such an indulgence, you will destroy the indulgence beyond the sea, and the indulgence of Blessed Peter and Paul will be disregarded and will be held as having no value whatsoever.” The lord Pope answered them: “We have given and conceded this favour to him; we cannot, and neither is it expedient for us to destroy what we have decided to grant.” The cardinals said: “At least try to curtail it as much as you can.” The Pope answered: “We shall modify it in such a way that it would extend to one natural day.”

The Pope immediately called Saint Francis to his presence and told him: “Behold we shall grant your request. Anyone who comes and enters this aforementioned church after having confessed his sins in a correct manner and shown contrition will be absolved from the pains and the guilt. We want this concession to be valid forever every single year but only for one natural day, namely from the first vespers, including the night, until the vespers of the following day.”

Blessed Francis immediately bowed his head, and started to go out of the palace. When the lord Pope saw that he was going out, he called him and said: “O simple man, where are you going? What document are you carrying as proof of this indulgence?” Blessed Francis answered: “For me your words are enough. If this is the work of God, He will take care to manifest his action. I do not need any other documentary evidence, but for me it is enough that the Blessed Virgin is the parchment, Christ is the notary, and the angels are the witnesses.”

When Francis went out of the Pope’s presence after having received the indulgence, he returned from Perugia and took the road to Assisi. Half way through, in the place called Colle, where there was a leper hospice, he stopped for some time with his companion to rest and then fell asleep. He was awakened during his sleep and heard a voice telling him: “Francis, do know that in the same way that this indulgence has been granted to you on earth, so it has been confirmed in heaven.” After prayer Francis called his companion

over to him and told him: “Brother Masseo, I tell you on the part of God, that the indulgence that has been granted to me by the Supreme Pontiff has not been confirmed in heaven.” Regarding all these things, Blessed Francis still did not have a clear date determining the indulgence, neither from God nor from the Pope.

Once during the month of January, when Blessed Francis was staying in his cell that was situated in the garden behind the church of Saint Mary, while he was rapt in prayer around midnight behold Satan came and told him: “Francis, why do you want to die prematurely? Don’t you know that sleep is most healthy for the body? Why are you still awake in such fatigue? Didn’t I tell you in the church that is known as the Four Chapels in the district of Todi, that you are still young, and that you still have a long time ahead of you to atone for your sins in penance? Therefore why do you insist in keeping awake and vigilant in prayer?”

That same moment Francis went out of his cell, he took off his clothes, and he entered the thicket through a large and dense prickly bush, which was tearing in his flesh through its prickles and brambles, and he was saying: “It is better for me to know in an incalculable way the passion of the Lord, then to let myself submit to the soft caresses of the enemy.”

In the very same place where his body was bleeding because of the wounds, a great light shone around him, and many white and red roses of various species and of an incredible beauty appeared to surround him on all sides. Together with that light he saw a great multitude of angels in the church and outside the church. Those angels said to Blessed Francis: “Come quickly and approach the Saviour and his Mother in the church.” So he immediately put on a white habit, which he saw in that radiant light, and he rose from where he was and gathered twelve white roses and twelve red roses and approached the church. It seemed that the way to the church was strewn with mantles and silken cloth. He reverently entered the church and placed those roses on the altar.

At that moment he saw Our Lord Jesus Christ, together with his Mother and a multitude of angels. The Lord Jesus Christ then spoke to Blessed Francis and told him: “Francis, why don’t you give the dowry that you are obliged to offer to my Mother?” So Blessed Francis understood that Christ was speaking about the salvation of souls through the indulgence of that church, and he answered: “Our most holy Father, you who created in an orderly way the heavens and the earth, condescend in your great mercy to



indicate to me the day on which I can offer such a gift with the help of the most holy Virgin your Mother, who is the advocate of the entire human race.”

In this way the divine majesty ordered that whosoever would come from the vespers of the first day of August until the vespers of the following day, after having shown contrition and confessed all the sins he could possibly remember, would receive remission from all his sins from the day of his baptism till the day and hour in which he would enter the aforementioned church. Then the same Blessed Francis said: “Our most holy Father, how will it be possible to announce this pardon in such a way that all men might believe it?” And the same Christ Our Lord said: “Francis, this can be done with the help of my grace; in the meantime you are to go to Rome to my vicar, and he will take care to proclaim it as it would seem best for him to do.” Blessed Francis said: “How is it possible that your vicar would believe me? Can he believe me who am a sinner?”

The same almighty Lord then told Blessed Francis: “Take with you some witnesses among the companions who live here with you, and take also some red and white roses that you have gathered in the month of January in the thicket when you were afflicting your body in discipline, and take as many of these roses as you deem best to carry.” Brother Peter Cattanio, Brother Rufino Scifi, Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, Brother Masseo of Marignano, and the companions who were living in the cells outside the church in the garden where the cell of Saint Francis was found, heard all these words.

Blessed Francis took three red roses and three white roses from the roses that he had gathered in the thicket, in honour of the most holy and undivided Trinity. He did so in the presence of the same divine majesty and His Mother. Then the multitude of angels all broke into a magnificent and loud singing and began to chant: *Te Deum laudamus*.

The following morning Blessed Francis put on his habit and went to three of his companions and told them: “Prepare yourselves to come with me to Rome.” He imposed silence upon them regarding the words they had heard. These brothers were Brother Peter Cattanio, Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, and Brother Angelo of Rieti. They all began their journey in the direction of Rome.

When they entered the city of Rome, they directed their steps towards the church of the Lateran, and there they found Pope Honorius, successor of Innocent, the vicar of Jesus Christ. So Blessed Francis presented himself

with his few companions, and explained to the Pope all that had happened. As a witness to his words he presented the Pope with the aforementioned three friars, as well as with the six roses, three red roses and three white roses. The same Pope said: “What you are telling me is wonderful and is more fitting to divinity than to humanity. We know that your testimony is true.” The same Pope then continued: “We will speak with our brothers [the cardinals] and we shall listen to what they have to say in the consistory, and then we shall decide regarding what we shall do in this matter.” Then he commanded Blessed Francis to return to his presence the following morning. The following day Francis stood before the Pope and said: “Most worthy vicar of Christ, may you condescend to act regarding what I told you of the will of the King of heaven and His Mother for whom the church which is called of the Angels or of the Portiuncula is dedicated.” The Pope answered and said: “Brother Francis, declare in front of all my brothers and tell us what is the will of the King of heaven and of His Mother, even though you have already said all this to me and to your brothers.”

Blessed Francis answered him and said: “His will is that from the vespers of the first day of August until the vespers of the second day of the same month, whoever enters in the church of Saint Mary of the Angels, or of the Portiuncula, in the diocese of Assisi, will receive the pardon of all the sins that he remembers or does not remember, from the day of his baptism, on the condition that he would make contrition and confess them and receive the penance from a priest, with a contrite and humble heart, and then be absolved by the same priest after having received penance.” The Pope answered: “Brother Francis, what you are asking for is a great favour, but after the King of heaven the Lord Jesus Christ has given heed to your prayers, through the intercession of the Blessed Mary ever Virgin His Mother, we shall now write to the bishops of Assisi, Perugia, Todi, Foligno, Spoleto, Nocera and Gubbio, asking them to convene at the place of the Blessed Mary of the Angels or of the Portiuncula on the first day of the month of August, so that they will proclaim to all those who come over this same indulgence in the way that is pleasing to you.”

Thus Blessed Francis, together with his companions, received the letters from the Supreme Pontiff, and went to present the same letters to the aforementioned bishops so that they would come. The same Blessed Francis took care to invite all the aforementioned bishops to convene at the church of Saint Mary on the first day of the Calends of August.

A wooden pulpit was erected, in which all the aforementioned bishops ascended together with Blessed Francis. When a great multitude of people had gathered around the pulpit, around the middle of the hour of tierce, Blessed Francis asked the bishops: "Who among you would like to preach and proclaim the pardon?" They took counsel together and told him: "We want to follow your will, Brother Francis, according to what the papal letters order." Blessed Francis then said: "Although I am not worthy, nevertheless I want to say some things and to preach in front of these people in order to proclaim the indulgence upon the orders of the King of heaven, who has granted it through the intercession of His Mother. On your part, acting with your authority upon the mandate given to you by the Supreme Pontiff, who is His vicar, you will proclaim the indulgence together with me." So Blessed Francis stood up and began to preach in such a sweet and useful manner, that it seemed that he was an angel coming from heaven and not a man in flesh and blood.

When he finished his sermon, Francis proclaimed the indulgence, namely that whoever would come to that same church of Saint Mary of the Angels, and enter it from vespers of the same day of the Calends of August until vespers of the second day of the same month, both by day and by night, since that night formed part of the same day, after going to confession, he would receive pardon of all his sins from the day of his baptism until that particular day. This indulgence was given every year in perpetuity, to all those who would receive penance on the command of a priest, regarding all the sins they would remember having committed and also regarding the sins they could not remember.

When the bishops heard these words they were indignant and scandalised by what Blessed Francis had affirmed. So they told him: "Even if the lord Pope has commanded us to follow your will in this matter, it was not his opinion that we should follow you in what is not fitting; for this reason we shall declare that this indulgence is to be given for a period of ten years." So the bishop of Assisi rose to proclaim an indulgence of ten years, but he ended up saying exactly the same things that Blessed Francis had said, and could not explain things in a different manner. The same thing happened to each and every single bishop, one after another.

There were many witnesses present, both from Perugia as well as from other towns and castles of the district, namely Sir Suppolinus Ugolini, Sir Andrea de Montemellino of Assisi, Sir Neapoleo of Armenzano, Sir John

Gualtieri, the father of lord Jerome, lord John Peter Tubalducci, lord Biondo Lamassi, and Giles di Marco, lord Bernarduccio Pauli, Peter Zalfani, Bonacursus Ugonis, and many others from Assisi. There were also Peter de Bettona, lord Ugolino Crispolino of Bettona, lord Conrad Monaldus, lord Andrew of Bevagna, lord Neapoleo of Foligno, lord Matthew Benentese, and lord Beccarius of Spello, and also many others from the district whom it will be too long to mention, and who were present for the proclamation of the aforementioned pardon by Blessed Francis and the aforementioned seven bishops.

This account has also been forwarded by holy friars of a most proven life of sanctity, namely Brother Peter Cattanio of Assisi, who was once vicar of the saint; Brother Leo, companion and confessor of Saint Francis, who heard these facts from the mouth of the same Saint Francis; Brother Otho of Aquasparta, who was once minister and a most holy man; and Brother Marino of Assisi, nephew of the aforementioned Brother Masseo. Both these friars, namely Otho and Marino, were physically present with Blessed Francis when he went in the presence of Pope Honorius in Perugia.

We do not intend to write in an orderly fashion many of the other testimonies and reports regarding this sacred indulgence, the assertions and proofs that have been written in a public form, except for the information uttered by Peter Zalfani who was present in the consecration of the aforementioned church of Saint Mary of the Angels. He gave his testimony in front of Brother Angelo, minister of this province of Saint Francis, in front of Brother Bonifacio, Brother Guidone, Brother Bartholo of Perugia and other friars in the place of the Portiuncula. Peter Zalfani said that he had been present in the consecration of the aforementioned church, namely Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, and had heard Blessed Francis preach in front of those bishops. Saint Francis was holding a written document in his hand and was saying: “I want to send all of you to paradise and I announce to you an indulgence that I have received from the mouth of the Supreme Pontiff. All of you who have come here today and all those who will come every year on this day, with a well-disposed and contrite heart, will receive the indulgence of all their sins. I wanted this indulgence to be validly received during eight days, but I could not receive more than one day for it.”

We have transmitted all these facts regarding this indulgence so that nobody can excuse himself because of ignorance, and so that nobody will think twice before come to receive the grace of such a great mercy. In fact

the more one would come with all the affection of devotion to this same grace, the more one would receive effectively what he has asked and prayed for. We are saying these things in a special way because of those who are envious and disdainful, and who in all places want to destroy, suppress and condemn what is known by all in Italy, France, Spain, Germany, and the other provinces, both south and north of the mountains, and which the same God for reverence of His most holy Mother, through whose intercession this indulgence can be known and gained, is manifesting through marvellous and manifest miracles, which every year magnify, glorify and spread the fame of this indulgence.

In what way can anyone damage through pestiferous persuasions the facts that for such a long time the entire Roman Curia has willed to affirm and conserve with all force and vigour? In fact the lord Pope Boniface VIII has also sent his own solemn ambassadors to this indulgence in our times, and they, on their part, solemnly preached the indulgence. Moreover other cardinals personally came to the same indulgence, with the hope of gaining pardon, and they have approved this indulgence as true and certain with their personal presence.

For the benefit of all these witnesses who gave testimony and for the certain faith of all those who read this present [diploma] we have placed our personal seal upon this document.

Given at Assisi, in the year of the Lord 1335, on the third *Indictio*.

## THE WITNESS OF BROTHER FRANCIS OF FABRIANO (1268)

Brother Francis Venimbeni of Fabriano was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1251. He entered the Order of friars Minor in 1267. On 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1268 he was present at the Portiuncula, where he went on pilgrimage while he was still a novice. There he met Brother Leo who gave him the information he later on included in his small treatise on the Portiuncula Indulgence. He died some time before 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1322.

### **Testimony of Brother Francis of Fabriano<sup>66</sup>**

During the year of his novitiate [Francis of Fabriano] was sent to Assisi in order to gain the famous Indulgence of the Portiuncula. There he had a familiar meeting with Blessed Leo, who was the companion of Saint Francis, as well as his confessor and secretary. The meeting regarded the stigmata of the same saint, and the way in which he had obtained this indulgence. Regarding the truth and renown of this same holy indulgence, [Brother Francis] wrote this treatise as testimony, and this is how it starts:

“To future memory. I, brother Francis of Fabriano, a worthless and unworthy friar Minor, have read and seen the document marked with the authentic seal of the lord bishop of Assisi regarding the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula of this same town of Assisi, and now I will narrate it in this same writing.”

After having narrated the entire story [of the same indulgence], according to what the letter of the same bishop had stated with authority in that same time, as we have already seen, he added:

“This information has been witnessed by Brother Leo, one of the companions of Blessed Francis, a man of a proven life, whom I, Brother Francis, have seen in the same year in which I went to visit the friars when I decided to go to the indulgence. The same Brother Leo told me that he had

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<sup>66</sup> English translation by NOEL MUSCAT OFM from the original Latin critical edition: FRATRIS FRANCISCI BARTHOLI DE ASSISIO, *Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, nunc primum integer editit PAUL SABATIER, Paris (Librairie Fischbacher) 1900, LXVI-LXIX.

heard this information regarding the indulgence from the mouth of Blessed Francis, and how he had requested it, as we have already said.”

At the end of the treatise, called *Chronica Fabrianensis*, there is the following note:

“In the year of the Lord 1216, on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the Nones of August, the church of Saint Mary of the Angels was consecrated by seven bishops. The lord Pope Honorius III declared this indulgence from pain and guilt. And Saint Francis preached the indulgence to the people on this same day.”

## TESTIMONY OF BENEDICT OF AREZZO (31<sup>st</sup> October 1277)

The testimony given by Brother Benedict Sinigardi of Arezzo is included in a notarial act on the Portiuncula Indulgence. This witness was probably given during an investigation ordered by Brother Angelo of Perugia, minister provincial of Umbria (1274-1280), in answer to the decisions of the general chapter of Padua (31<sup>st</sup> October 1277). The notary Giovanni Canclasiastis interrogated Brother Benedict of Arezzo.

Benedetto Sinigardi was born circa 1190 in Arezzo,<sup>67</sup> son of Tommaso Sinigardo de' Sinigardi and Countess Elisabetta Tarlati di Pietramala. In 1211 he heard Saint Francis preaching in Arezzo, and felt the call to follow the Poverello. Leaving his noble family he received the habit from the hands of Francis himself. When he was only 27 years old, during the general chapter of 1217 he was appointed minister provincial of the Marches. Later on he travelled to Greece, Romania and Turkey. In 1221 he became minister provincial of the Holy Land, being successor of Brother Elias (1217-1220) and Brother Luca (1220-1221). During his tenure of office Benedict built the first Franciscan friary in Constantinople. According to tradition, Jean de Brienne, Emperor of Constantinople, following the example of Saint Louis IX, King of France, and Saint Elisabeth of Hungary, became a Franciscan penitent and received the habit of penance from Brother Benedict. In an uncertain date after he finished his provincial mandate in 1237, Benedict returned to Italy, maybe circa 1247 and settled in the Franciscan friary of Arezzo in the district of Poggio del Sole. Here he remained until his death in 1282. It is said that he died when he was 92 years old and in a great fame of holiness. He was proclaimed a Blessed by popular acclamation.

Benedict's devotion to the Passion of Christ and to the Virgin Mary is evident in some actions he accomplished while living in Arezzo. During the last years of his life he commissioned the Crucifix known as "of the Blessed Benedict" hanging on the main altar of the basilica of San Francesco in Arezzo, famous for the image of Saint Francis who kneels below the Crucifix and kisses the stigmata of the feet of Christ. Benedict is buried in the same basilica. The artist of the Crucifix is the so-called "Maestro di San

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<sup>67</sup> GIROLAMO GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Cristiano*, Tomo I (1215-1300), Collegio S. Bonaventura, Quaracchi 1906, 135-143.



Francesco”. In the choir and apse of the same basilica is found the cycle of frescos known as the “Leggenda della Croce”, by Piero della Francesca (c.1415 – 1492).

Benedict Sinigardi has remained famous also because to him is attributed the recitation of the antiphon *Angelus locutus est Mariae*, which is considered as the forerunner of the *Angelus Domini* prayer three times a day. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1993 Blessed Pope John Paul II visited the tomb of Blessed Benedict and mentioned the Franciscan tradition of reciting the *Angelus Domini* attributed to Blessed Benedict of Arezzo.

### Testimony of Brother Benedict Sinigardi of Arezzo<sup>68</sup>

A parchment or public document regarding the concession of the indulgence of Saint Mary of the Angels granted by the lord Pope Honorius when he was in Perugia.

In the name of the Lord, Amen. I, Brother Benedict of Arezzo, who was once a companion of Blessed Francis when he was still alive, by divine grace that was working in the same most holy father I was received by him into the Order. I was companion of his companions and I often lived with them when our holy father was still alive. After his departure from this life to the Father, I often spoke with the same companions regarding the secrets of the Order.<sup>69</sup> I hereby give witness that I often heard one of these

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<sup>68</sup> English translation by NOEL MUSCAT OFM from the original Latin critical edition: FRATRIS FRANCISCI BARTHOLI DE ASSISIO, *Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, nunc primum integer editit PAUL SABATIER, Paris (Librairie Fischbacher) 1900, XLIV-XLVI.

<sup>69</sup> *De secretis ordinis* is an ambiguous expression. We do not know exactly what kind of “secrets of the Order” the companions were jealously conserving. It could be that the Portiuncula Indulgence was one of them, since in various sources we are examining Francis himself forbade the brothers to divulge it and ask for privileges in favour of the same indulgence. Indeed, the Franciscan sources do sometimes speak about Francis who keeps secrets regarding the revelations and visions he receives. Maybe the best known and well-guarded secret concerned the words that Christ uttered during the vision of the Crucified Seraph on La Verna in September 1224, when Francis received the stigmata. According to the *Fifth Consideration on the Stigmata*, following the *Fioretti*, Christ revealed some secrets to Francis, which the saint jealously kept to himself, and which were only revealed after his death. *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions*, c. 9 (FAED III, 458) state: “Why these sacred stigmata had been impressed on Saint Francis has not become entirely clear. But as Francis himself said to his companions, this great mystery is being put off for the future.”

aforementioned companions of Blessed Francis, whose name was Brother Masseo of Marignano, who was a truthful man of a most trustworthy life that he was with Blessed Francis in Perugia in the presence of the lord Pope Honorius, when Francis requested the indulgence of all sins for all those who contrite and confessed would arrive at the place of Saint Mary of the Angels, which is also known by the other name of Portiuncula, on the first day of the Calends of August during vespers of the same day until vespers of the following day. Blessed Francis requested this indulgence in such a humble and insistent manner, that the Supreme Pontiff freely granted it to him, although the same Pontiff said that it was not the custom of the Apostolic See to concede this kind of indulgence.

I, Brother Raynerius de Mariano of Arezzo, venerable companion of Brother Benedict, hereby confirm all these words that have been stated above, and that I have often heard from the aforementioned Brother Masseo companion of Blessed Francis. I, Brother Raynerius, have been a most special friend of Brother Masseo.

This declaration has been read and published in the cell of Brother Benedict of Arezzo, in front of Brother Compagno of Borgo, Brother Raynaldus of Castiglione, Brother Caro of Arezzo, Brother Homodeus of Arezzo, Brother Aldebrandinus of Florence, Brother Jacobus of Florence, Brother Theobald of Arezzo, Brother Bonaventure of Arezzo, and Massario of Arezzo who have been asked to convene in this place for this reason. In the year of the Lord 1277, when no one is reigning, and when the Papal throne in the Church of Rome is vacant, on the fifth *Indictio* on the last day of October, which is a Sunday. I, John, notary son of the deceased Canclasiastis, was present at all these proceedings, and with the mandate received by the venerable Brothers Benedict and Raynerius have written and published this testimony.

## THE WITNESS OF PETER JOHN OLIVI (1279c)

Peter John Olivi was born in 1248 in Sérignan (Hérault), in the Languedoc region of southern France. He entered the Order of friars Minor at Béziers in 1260 and studied in Paris in 1267-1272. He lectured in his province. In 1279 Nicholas III published the *Exiit qui seminat*, a commentary on the Franciscan Rule, and Olivi was asked to present his opinion regarding poverty and the *usus pauper*. In his province Olivi took sides with the Spiritual family, against the relaxed discipline of the Community of the Order. In 1282 the Chapter of Strasbourg asked the masters at the Sorbonne university to examine Olivi's writings and accused him of heresy. The Chapter of Montpellier decided in Olivi's favour in 1287, and the new minister general, Matthew of Aquasparta (1287-1288) nominated Olivi as lector in the *studium generale* of the Minors in the friary of Santa Croce in Florence. This appointment had been supported by Pope Nicholas IV himself. In this way Olivi's high scholastic profile had been recognised by the authorities of the Church and the Order, but at the same time Olivi had been transferred far from Provence, where he had gathered support from many French friars. When Raymond Godefroy was elected General Minister (1289-1295) he nominated Olivi as lector in the *studium* of Montpellier. Godefroy was compelled to resign from the office of General Minister by Pope Boniface VIII in 1295, since he was suspected of nurturing sympathies with regards to the Spiritual friars. Olivi composed his last work, entitled *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, which was later on condemned as heretical, and died at Narbonne on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1298, and around his tomb in the church of the Friars Minor a proper cult was born. In 1299, however, his doctrines were condemned during the General Chapter of Provence. This condemnation enkindled the fury of the Spiritual friars of southern France, particularly in the friaries of Béziers and Carcassonne.

Around 1279 Peter John Olivi, maybe after a visit to Assisi, composed a treatise entitled *Quaestio de veritate indulgentiae Portiunculae*. In this work, which remained unfinished, Olivi asks whether it is convenient to believe the pardon of all sins granted by the Indulgence given at the church of Saint Mary of the Angels. The *quaestio* is a typical example of scholastic disputation, and is polemical in nature since it tries to go against

the arguments of the detractors of the Portiuncula Indulgence. Among other things Olivi states that the shrine of the Portiuncula was visited regularly not only by pilgrims from central Italy, but also by many others who came from afar, and that among the detractors of the same Indulgence one could also find friars Minor, since the relative official bulla of the Church that should have sanctioned such an indulgence did not exist.

### *Quaestio de veritate indulgentiae Portiunculae*<sup>70</sup>

One asks whether it is convenient to believe that the indulgence of all sins has been granted in the church of Saint Mary of the Angels, in which the Order of friars Minor was born.

#### I. Arguments against this assertion.

1. First of all because such an indulgence would impede the great benefit that can be gained from the pilgrimage to the Holy Land [...]

9. Therefore if the Pope cannot do such a thing it is clear that it is not convenient. I will prove in five ways that he cannot therefore do such a thing [...]

II. Response. I answer that this is a most convenient thing that could be done and that has been done. I believe that for us this is evident from eight arguments regarding this fact, namely the dignity of the one who procured [such an indulgence], the fittingness of the place, manner and time, the usefulness to the people, the sublime nature of the evangelical state, the evidence of the trustworthy witnesses, and the excessive magnificence to the highest state of the Supreme Pontiff who granted it.

1. Regarding the person who procured [such an indulgence], namely Saint Francis, I consider in him the unique conformity in the Church of Christ, the uniqueness of the grace of his life and wonders, the unique and universal reverence that the Church offers him, and the zeal and usefulness of his person. It was convenient first of all since he was uniquely conformed to Christ, particularly in the gift of tears and in the signs of our redemption, which were an effect of his same passion, and whose aim was properly the

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<sup>70</sup> English translation by NOEL MUSCAT from the Latin original in MARIO SENSI, *Il Perdono di Assisi*, Edizioni Porziuncola, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi 2002, 199-203. The Latin text offers excerpts from this treatise, edited by P. PÉANO, *La "Quaestio Fr. Petri Iohannis Olivi" sur l'indulgence de la Portiuncule*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 74 (1981) 33-76.

remission of sins and the requesting of multiple graces. He was conformed to Christ in various ways as well as regarding the place where he died and the place where Christ suffered [...]

2. Regarding the fittingness of the place I say that this place has been dedicated in honour of the Mother of God [...] I also consider that in this place the apostolic life was born and renewed, namely the state of the apostolic and evangelical life of Christ. I also consider the name by which this place is called, namely Saint Mary of the Angels and Saint Mary of the Portiuncula. This place was also magnified by revelations and divine interventions. It has also been placed close to the See of Saint Peter, just as Bethlehem and Nazareth are situated close to Jerusalem. Therefore it was fitting that in no other place more than this should the unique grace of the Virgin be accorded to sinners. Although this place is far from the Holy Land, it does not appear less solemn or less distinct from it.

3. Regarding the manner in which [the indulgence] has been procured, conceded and published, I will consider the form of the perfect humility and simplicity, the excessive piety and charity, the just sympathy or the discreet sobriety. The form was conformed to the propagation of the faith and it definitely limits any lament regarding thirst for money or simony. It was procured and conceded with so much simplicity and humility, that the simple truth far from any pomp of any fame or cunning intention or any clever extortion of any bulla [in favour of such a privilege] and without any colourful admiration and vain intention on the part of the one who requested it, are sufficient to show the abundant truth and simple intention of the one who acted not with lamentations or pomp, if ever with lamentations or pomp one would refer not least to a sealed letter or bulla, but rather to the strong and more generous manner in which this indulgence was requested. Thus one would be able to see that the heart of the pious Francis was not moved to such an action if not with excessive piety and charity of soul [...] The propagation of the faith was conformed to that which had been transmitted in the first place with all simplicity and which was promulgated in a hidden and implicit manner in due course of time, not through human means but rather through divine intervention, in such a way that the more one tries to contradict it, the more it grows and spreads. In this way one can see how the process of this same indulgence has progressed in conformity from the beginning up to this very day, and one can diligently note such a right progress of faith in all things. Since in our modern times indulgences are

even bought, and as a consequence they are ridiculed by many, therefore it was convenient that for the renewal of the most high poverty a universal indulgence be procured, and that the state and zeal of the one who requested it should nevertheless held to be valid rather than be loathsome.

4. Regarding the time it appears that it was highly necessary and that there was a great need [for the indulgence] because of the great number of sinners and persons who sinned, with whom the Church is inundated in these last times. As a convenient sign [the indulgence] was granted on the feast of the chains of Saint Peter, namely on the day in which the Church was divinely liberated from the chains that bind sinners, and it prefigured in a more appropriate manner the freedom of the power of the Church against any chains of the infernal prison. Therefore it is evident that the times were most fitting [for such an indulgence]. In fact, just as in the beginning of the sixth age and close to the end of the Old Testament the redemption of all sins appeared and was accomplished through Christ crucified, so it was convenient and fitting that in the beginning of the opening of the sixth seal, or during the sixth stage of the time of the Church and close to the end of the world, that in a certain unique way the redemption of the world be renewed once more by the one who bore the banner of the cross of Christ [...] It is therefore also evident that from the time of the promise of the prophets truth will come to be present. Indeed if the intellect delves profoundly in the mysterious truths of the Holy Scriptures, it will find a certain ineffable grace and condescension. It is necessary that the whole world be made aware of the end of the time of the Church that this indulgence appears to demonstrate, although it is a humble and small matter with respect to the promises of graces given to the whole world in abundance. Nevertheless it appears that [the indulgence] is most fitting. Regarding these other matters it is my desire to compose a long text and a great sermon.

5. The usefulness [of the indulgence] for the people is convincing when one becomes aware of the efficacious condition of its attraction, and of the unchanging drive of its new ways. Since in these times Christ, through his vicar, has gained such a power from God for that place, a new way to attract even obstinate sinners to penance has been invented. In this way they are not only attracted but in a certain way they are nearly compelled by an immense commitment to come with contrition for their sins and to emend their ways. This is why we see such a numerous concourse of diverse people coming from different nations. With the unique help of the spirit of Christ and with

his spiritual effects of grace which are seen in the evidence of the state of grace and of the images connected to it, in these last days God has wanted to reveal through Francis and Clare in this place the abyss of his grace and heartfelt mercy to all the world. It is to be hoped that one day all nations could come with a certain faith to this indulgence with a great conversion of heart and with a new desire and thought to return to God through penance. These facts have been shown in a satisfactory manner and I believe that greater signs will appear in spite of the malice of the world and the envy of the enemies.

6. Regarding the evangelical state it is evident [...] in an adequate manner that through the solemn renovation of this state much grace can flow for the benefit of the entire world [...]

7. This is evident also from the part of the trustworthy witnesses. In fact the indulgence has been certified by our by our [Seraphic] Father and his companions through living and most divine and famous words, through celestial visions which do not disregard oracles and through multiple wonders move the hearts to hurry to make penance. This fact has been contradicted from the very beginning not only by enemies [of the same indulgence], but also by the same friars who to this very day publicly assert that there is no official document sanctioning this privilege that they are aware of. These words have been handed down to us by the aforementioned fathers who are persons worthy of belief and who have seen the visions and heard the oracles, and whose narrations have been written down to a satisfactory degree, so that I hereby omit them. I have heard all these things from the ones who have seen and listened to trustworthy witnesses and who have accepted these narrations as fittingly valid. I have often heard one of these trustworthy witnesses tell me that he had heard from Brother Giles who had been one of the first companions of the holy father [Francis], who used to say that [Francis] would ask: “Did you hear what I am hearing?” The companions used to answer that they did not hear anything distinctly, but they confessed that at that place [the Portiuncula] it was as if they were hearing voices and noises coming from diverse nations and from the meeting of diverse tongues. The same Brother Giles used to say that if the world would come to know what grace one could receive from that place, not only if one was close to it but even if one would find himself at the ends of the earth, not only the faithful people would come over to visit it but even the unbelievers [...]

8. The eighth argument is based on the evidence of the one who granted

[the indulgence], namely the Supreme Pontiff [...]

9. Therefore I have implicitly cherished these eight reasons and I have expounded them in a popular rather than in an erudite way through argumentations. Thus it appears in an implicit manner that these facts show that it was fitting to grant this indulgence and that to believe in it is highly agreeable with the piety of the faithful and the rectitude of human reasoning [...]

### III. Response to these reasons.

1. Since therefore from the presentation of the false arguments that are contrary to what has been accomplished, it is unlikely that the fittingness and probability of such things be clarified, regarding the first argument we state that it is not true that [the indulgence] impedes the passage [the indulgence linked with the pilgrimage to the Holy Land], but instead it greatly benefits it [...] It is therefore evident that it is only the envy of malicious persons which forces such an impediment, and not the zeal for the passage that makes the detractors [of the indulgence] not to become aware that their actions are rendering odious this initiative of the Church [...] Therefore it is evident that the same universal passage is not always useful or necessary but only in those cases, in which maybe it could happen that the Supreme Pontiff himself wills it. If you consider that it is evident in front of everybody that there is an impediment to make the passage, therefore one has to provide a remedy for this through other multiple ways.<sup>71</sup>

2. To the second argument I answer that it is not universally true that such an incentive would give an easy way [of gaining pardon] to delinquents [...] In fact in order to gain such an indulgence it is not only necessary to show contrition and go to confession but also one has to have a sincere and devout intention [...] Nowadays there are many venial indulgences for which a small alms offering would render an infinite remission. That is why the priests, in the case of grave sins, impose an onerous penance that is

<sup>71</sup> Such a way of reasoning was highly valid in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the passage or journey to the Holy Land was a difficult if not impossible enterprise. The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem had fallen to Saladin during the battle of Hattin on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1187, and on 2<sup>nd</sup> October of the same year the Crusaders had left Jerusalem and been confined to the coastal strongholds, especially Acre. Except for a brief respite during the truce between Frederick II and the Sultan of Egypt in 1229-1239, which then lasted until the invasion of the Khwarezmian Turks in 1244, it was next to impossible to visit the Holy Sepulchre, and the Popes themselves prohibited Christians from going to Jerusalem and paying large sums of money to the Muslim leaders to go in the Holy Sepulchre. That is why the indulgence linked to the Holy Land fell into disuse, and other easier indulgences thrived, among which the Portiuncula Indulgence.



equivalent to the penance of going to the aforementioned place during the month of August, and they rarely find persons who are disposed to undertake the penances they impose upon them [...]

3. To the third argument regarding the time [...] I state that in the same indulgence one finds the concurrence of many divine benefits that are normally linked with it, namely: the unique devotion to the saints and to the holy places and to the state of the presence of Christ that has begun [in those same places], as well as the singular faith of the ecclesiastical power. As a consequence one can speak of a divine power, and it is even Christ himself who gives this remission in a permanent way and many other benefits are attached to it.

4. Regarding the fourth argument I state (*from this point onwards the text is interrupted and the quaestio remains incomplete*).

# THE WITNESS OF BLESSED ANGELA OF FOLIGNO (2<sup>nd</sup> August 1300)

Blessed Angela of Foligno, went on pilgrimage to the Portiuncula for the Indulgence in 1300, which was the jubilee year proclaimed by Boniface VIII. She first visited the tomb of Saint Francis on 1<sup>st</sup> August, and the following day she went down to the Portiuncula. She could not go in because of the great crowds, but she had a vision in which she found herself in a great basilica and could go in for the Indulgence, although she knew that the Portiuncula chapel was very small.

## **From the *Liber* of Blessed Angela of Foligno<sup>72</sup>**

The next morning, when I was about to enter the church of the glorious Virgin of the Portiuncula in order to receive the Indulgence, I was holding the hand of a certain woman who wished to help me. The moment I placed my foot over the threshold of the church, I was suddenly enraptured with such an impact that my body just stood there and did not move, and I let go of the woman who was going ahead of me to help me.

I saw the church expanding, by the power of God, into one of an astonishing magnitude and beauty. There was nothing material in this church; everything about it was totally indescribable. My soul was amazed at how it expanded as soon as I set foot in it, because I knew that the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula was extremely small.

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<sup>72</sup> English translation from ANGELA OF FOLIGNO, *Complete Works*. Translated with an introduction by PAUL LACHANCE, Paulist Press, New Jersey 1993, 284. The original Latin text in LUDGER THIER and ABELE CALUFETTI, *Il Libro della Beata Angela da Foligno*, Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas Grottaferrata (Rome) 1985.

## THE WITNESS OF UBERTINO DA CASALE (1305)

Ubertino da Casale is one of the most famous exponents of the Spiritual family of the Order of friars Minor. Born in Casale near Vercelli in 1259 he entered the Order when he was fourteen. He studied theology in Paris and became *lector theologiae* at the prestigious house of studies of Santa Croce in Florence (1287-1305). In 1305 he was exiled to Mount La Verna because of his critical views on the papacy, and there he composed his mystical and polemical masterpiece, the *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu*, The Tree of Life of the Crucified Christ, written between 9<sup>th</sup> February and 28<sup>th</sup> September 1305. In 1307 Ubertino was given freedom to be at service to Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, whom Pope Celestine V (1294) had chosen as Cardinal Protector of the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine, the breakaway group of Franciscan *Fratricelli* led by Angelo Clareno. When Pope John XXII entered into a bitter controversy on the poverty of Christ and the Apostles with the Franciscan Order, Ubertino was initially regarded with respect by the Pope, but after some time fell into disgrace. John XXII had him banished to the Benedictine Abbey of Gembloux, and in 1328 excommunicated him together with the Minister General Michele da Cesena and the Procurator Bonagrazia di Bergamo. The last years of the life of Ubertino are shrouded in mystery. It is probable that he died in 1330.

In his *Arbor Vitae* Ubertino speaks about the Portiuncula Indulgence in Book IV, chapter 11, as well as in the Prologue of Book One.<sup>73</sup>

### **The Portiuncula Indulgence in Book IV, chapter 11 of the *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu***

In the crown of twelve stars of the Virgin one can consider the crown of twelve apostles, as if through her merits these were elected and after the tragedy of Christ's death they were reformed in faith and through her teachings they were led, and through her prayers and sighs they were filled

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<sup>73</sup> English translation by NOEL MUSCAT OFM from the original Latin critical edition: FRATRIS FRANCISCI BARTHOLI DE ASSISIO, *Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, nunc primum integer editit PAUL SABATIER, Paris (Librairie Fischbacher) 1900, LXIII-LXVI.

with the Holy Spirit. Thus the victory that they brought about on the whole world can be attributed in a singular way to the same Virgin. In the same Virgin one sees in a unique way that city of the Apocalypse that is the home of all the chosen ones. In that same city the twelve Apostles are placed as the twelve precious foundation stones. In the same way the Apostles are symbolized by the twelve pearls that adorn the twelve gates of the city, since they were the twelve evangelical men through whom the twelve tribes of Israel have been converted and thus the whole world, as we shall say later on.

Thus the most illustrious Virgin is crowned with twelve stars since all the perfection of the Apostles is to be attributed to the most holy Virgin from whom it has been so efficaciously generated. In this same sign we find the beginning of the sixth and seventh stages in which all things will finally reach completion in Francis and his sons, as we shall say later on. Francis was accepted as the foundation of the Church by the same holy Virgin and Mother, since in the place of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula the evangelical state of both sexes commenced in a most perfect way with Francis and Clare.

In the same church, on the second day of August the most holy Virgin obtained from her Son in heaven, and Francis obtained from the Pope on earth, the indulgence of the plenary remission of all sins. Therefore consider how joyfully Jesus glorified his Mother and how powerfully and triumphantly he has crowned her.

### **The Portiuncula Indulgence in the Prologue of Book I of the *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu***

Then I visited the shrines of Rome and went to visit that angelic face of Jesus, namely the most holy John of Parma whom I found joyful on the mountain and who comforted, absolved and instructed me.<sup>74</sup> Thus on the second day of August, which was the day of the indulgence, I entered the church of the Blessed Mary of the Portiuncula in Assisi and I spent the night

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<sup>74</sup> John of Parma, minister general of the Order in 1247-1257, had to relinquish his office because he was accused of nurturing sympathies with the Joachimist doctrines of the Spirituals. After undergoing a process at Città della Pieve under the leadership of the new minister general St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, John was exiled at the hermitage of Greccio, where Ubertino da Casale visited him in his cell in 1284. Subsequently John was freed from imprisonment in 1290 with the intention of going as a missionary to Greece, but he died at Camerino that same year.

at that place. The same glorious Virgin Mary who had first bore Christ in Bethlehem had also bore for Francis and Clare their Orders and their life. At that place I received such an unwavering faith in the name of the life of the spirit of Christ and the intelligence of the holy Rule that it was all in vain that I believed that I could ever be stained with the common relaxations [of the same Rule].

## THE NARRATION OF MICHELE BERNARDI (1310-1335)

This rescript includes the narration regarding the concession of the Portiuncula Indulgence, made by Michele Barducci of Spello. This narration was published, but in an incomplete form, in the *Speculum vitae*, in 1509, and was then edited and published in a critical form by Paul Sabatier in 1900 from the Vatican Latin manuscript 4354, folios 154a-156b,<sup>75</sup> and in 1917 by Little from a manuscript of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, written maybe in Venice, and found in the Bibliothèque Philipps, folios 135a-136b.<sup>76</sup> The same text was inserted as part of the *Legenda* by Brother Giacomo da Porta, edited as an *Appendix II* of the *Chronica XXIV generalium*.<sup>77</sup>

This is a popular version of the Portiuncula Indulgence. It does not refer to the Diploma of Theobald (1310), but it influenced the Diploma of Conrad, bishop of Assisi (1335) as well as the *Tractatus de Indulgentia* by Francis Bartholi of Assisi. It corresponds to chapter 8-10 of the same *Tractatus*.

### **The *Narratio* of Michele Bernardi**

In the name of the Lord and of the undivided Trinity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and of the Blessed Mary ever Virgin and all the saints, to the reverence of the five wounds that Our Lord Jesus Christ carried upon the wood of the cross for the salvation of the human race. Blessed Francis was signed by these same wounds similar to the stigmata [of Christ] in his body,

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<sup>75</sup> English translation by NOEL MUSCAT OFM from the original Latin critical edition: FRATRIS FRANCISCI BARTHOLI DE ASSISIO, *Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, nunc primum integer editit PAUL SABATIER, Paris (Librairie Fischbacher) 1900, LXXXII-LXXXVI. A vernacular edition of the *Narratio Michaelis Bernardi*, is presented in MARIO SENSI, *Il Perdono di Assisi*, 177-183. For the footnotes explaining the details of the narration, refer to the section regarding the *Tractatus de Indulgentia* by Francis Bartholi of Assisi.

<sup>76</sup> A.G. LITTLE, *Un nouveau texte du témoignage de Michel Bernardi*, in *L'Orient Serafico* 27-28 (1916-1917) 107-114.

<sup>77</sup> *Analecta Franciscana* III, 632-634. English translation (partial) in FAED III, 810-812. A complete translation by N. Muscat, *Chronicle of the 24 Ministers General of the Order of friars Minor*, *Appendix II*, 862-866, in <http://www.i-tau.com/franstudies/>

when he was in contemplation and feeling afflicted. I, Michele Bernardi who once hailed from Spello and who is now a citizen and an inhabitant of Assisi, since I am especially devoted towards Blessed Francis and his Order, one day I went to the place of the Blessed Mary of the Angels or of the Portiuncula, and there I found Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, Brother Leo, Brother Peter Cattanio, Brother Angelo of Rieti, Brother Philip Longo from San Severino, Brother Masseo of Marignano and Brother William. These brothers were intent in speaking to one another.

When I approached them and saw that they were speaking privately among themselves, I felt embarrassed and I wanted to go out of that place, but they called me and I approached them. They were speaking about Blessed Francis.

One of them, namely Brother Peter Cattanio, began to speak to me and told me: “Michele, come to listen to a wonderful fact that has occurred during these last days. Our holy mother, namely blessed Francis, is now living on Le Carceri above Assisi. Brother Bernard today has arrived here since he was with him as his companion. When [Francis] was once in his cell, which was situated in the garden behind the church of Saint Mary during the month of January, he was praying round about midnight, when Satan came over to him close to his cell and said: ‘Francis, why do you want to die prematurely? Don’t you know that sleep is very necessary for the health of the body? Why are you tiring yourself so much? You are still young, and for you it is very healthy to sleep and rest. Did I not tell you in the church known as the Four Chapels in the district of Todi that you are still young and that you still have a lot of time to make penance for your sins? Why are you punishing yourself so harshly in vigils and prayers?’

That very moment Francis went out of his cell and took off his clothes and entered into the thicket through a large round bush, which was full of thorns and thistles, the property of Philip of James, close to the church of the Portiuncula. Our holy mother, namely blessed Francis, entered in the midst of the thorn bush and he pushed his body within it and he became full of wounds and blood. He was saying: ‘It is better for me to experience and come to know and feel the sufferings of the passion of Our Lord than to give in to the comfortable suggestions of the enemy.’

While his body was bleeding with the wounds he had suffered from the thorns, a great light appeared around him; and many red and white fragrant roses of great beauty were growing in that bitter cold of January. He also

beheld a multitude of angels in that same light. They appeared both in the thicket as well as in the church that stood nearby. The angels told Blessed Francis: 'Come quickly to meet the Saviour and his Mother in the church.'

So he immediately found himself wearing a new habit, which he did not know since he had never seen it before, and in front of him the road to the church appeared to be straight and it was adorned with silken vestments strewn upon it. Blessed Francis gathered twelve white roses and twelve red roses and came to the church. He went directly into the aforementioned church of Saint Mary and placed the roses upon the altar. Then he saw the Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Blessed Virgin Mother with a multitude of angels.

Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke to Blessed Francis who lay prostrate on the ground in front of His presence and that of His Mother the Virgin Mary, and told him: 'Francis, ask me whatever you like regarding the salvation of men and the restoration of the Church on earth.'

Francis seemed to be rapt in ecstasy beholding Christ's divinity. When he came back to his senses he spoke and said: 'Most holy Father, as a miserable sinner I plead you to condescend to grant this grace to all mankind, namely that you will grant pardon and indulgence of all their sins in a general and particular way to all those and to each and every single person who come to this place and enter this church, after they have confessed to a priest and accepted the penance. And I beg the Blessed Mary, who is the advocate of the human race, to condescend to intercede for me and help me in this matter in front of your most sacred and merciful majesty.'

That same most humble and clement queen of heaven condescended to the prayers of Blessed Francis, and immediately began to plead with her Son and to tell him: 'Most high and all powerful God, I beg your divinity and I humbly intercede for your servant Brother Francis, so that in your majesty you give heed to his prayers.'

The same divine majesty spoke and said: 'Brother Francis, what you are asking for is a great thing, but you are worthy of even greater favours, and so you will acquire greater gifts. I hereby accept your petitions and prayers. Determine now the day and time in which such a favour is to be granted.' Blessed Francis immediately spoke and said: 'Our most holy Father, you have created heaven and earth in an orderly manner, may you condescend in your great mercy to give instructions regarding this pardon today, with the assistance of your most holy Virgin Mother who is the advocate of all



mankind.’ Thus Christ, in his divine majesty, ordered that whoever would come from vespers of the first day of August until vespers of the following day, and would be contrite and confess all sins he could possibly remember to have committed, would be forgiven from all his sins from the day of baptism until the day and hour in which he entered the aforementioned church.

Blessed Francis then said: ‘Our most holy Father, how will it be possible to announce such an indulgence in a way that all men would believe its truthfulness?’ The same Lord said: ‘Francis, this also will be granted you with God’s benevolence and by the help of my grace. You therefore have to go to Rome to my vicar, whom I have constituted with the power of binding or losing, and he will indicate to you the best and most expedient way to make this indulgence happen.’ Blessed Francis then said: ‘How will your vicar believe me? Maybe he will not believe me who am a sinner?’

The almighty Lord told blessed Francis: ‘Take with you some witnesses from among your companions who are listening to these words, and take also the red and white roses which you gathered in the thicket in the month of January, when you were afflicting your body with discipline, and offer him this number of roses according to what seems best for you.’

Brother Peter Cattanio, Brother Rufino Scifi, Brother Bernard of Quintavalle and Brother Masseo of Marignano together with other companions heard these words. They were all staying in their cells, and these cells were situated close to the church in the garden where the cell of Blessed Francis was found. Blessed Francis went and from the roses that grew in the thicket gathered three red roses and three white roses in honour of the most holy and undivided Trinity and to the praise of God and of the most Blessed Virgin Mary and he presented them to the divine majesty and to His Mother. While he was doing so he heard the singing of the angels who broke out in loud voices and sang the *Te Deum laudamus*.

The following morning Blessed Francis put on his tunic and went to three of his companions and told them: ‘Prepare yourselves to come with me to Rome.’ He imposed silence upon them regarding all they had heard; they were Brother Peter Cattanio, Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, and Brother Angelo of Rieti. So they left off on their way to Rome, leaving behind them their other companions.

When they entered the city of Rome they directed themselves towards the church of the Lateran, and there they found the lord Pope Honorius, who was the successor of the lord Innocent, vicar of Jesus Christ. Blessed Francis

together with his few companions explained to him all we have already stated above. The three Brothers gave witness to the truth of the matter, as well as the six roses, namely three red roses and three white roses, which we have mentioned earlier. The same lord Pope said: ‘This is a marvellous event and is more fitting to divinity than to humanity, and now we know that it is true according to their testimony.’ The Pope continued: ‘We shall now speak with our Brothers [the cardinals], and in a secret consistory we shall listen to their answers and we shall decide what is the best thing to do.’

That same moment the Pope sent some servants to take Blessed Francis with his companions to a suitable and honest place, and to give to him the Brothers the things they needed. He also commanded Blessed Francis to present himself before him on the following day early in the morning. When, according to what the lord Pope had commanded him, Francis presented himself before him at dawn the following day, he told the Pope: ‘May the vicar of Christ condescend to take a decision as to what we are to do regarding this matter, according to the will of the King of heaven and of His Mother regarding the church known by the name of the Angels or of the Portiuncula.’ The Pope said to Saint Francis: ‘Here in front of all my Brothers declare what is the will of the King of heaven and of his Mother, so that it will be the same thing you requested earlier.’ Blessed Francis answered him saying: ‘His will is that from vespers of the first day of August until vespers of the second day of the same month, whoever comes to and enters the church of Saint Mary of the Angels or of the Portiuncula in the diocese of Assisi, will have all his sins forgiven from the day of baptism, namely all the sins he remembers and those he does not remember, with the condition that he will repent by going to confession and accepting the penance imposed upon him by the priest, with a contrite and humble heart, and will be absolved by the same priest after having accepted this penance.’

The Pope answered: ‘Brother Francis, you are requesting a great favour, but after the King of heaven Our Lord Jesus Christ, upon the intercession of his Mother the Blessed Mary ever Virgin has listened to your prayers, we shall write to the bishops of Assisi, Perugia, Todi, Spoleto, Foligno, Nocera and Gubbio, in order that they may convene at the place of Saint Mary of the Angels or of the Portiuncula on the first day of the month of August, and publicly announce to all those present for the occasion this same indulgence according to the way that is pleasing to you.’ Thus Blessed Francis together with his companions accepted the letters of the Supreme Pontiff addressed to

the aforementioned bishops and went to present them to these same bishops. The same Blessed Francis arranged that on the first day of the Calends of August all these bishops should convene at the aforementioned church of Saint Mary.

A wooden pulpit was prepared for the occasion, upon which the aforementioned bishops, together with Blessed Francis, took their place. When a great crowd of people had gathered around the pulpit, during mid-morning after tierce, Blessed Francis asked the bishops: 'Who among you would like to announce and preach the pardon?' The bishops took counsel together and said: 'We want to follow your will, Brother Francis, according to what the papal letters indicate.' Blessed Francis said: 'Although I am not worthy, nevertheless I would like to announce and preach in front of all the people gathered here, and I will proclaim the indulgence of Mother of God. With the command of the Supreme Pontiff, who is his vicar, you are called to have authority to announce it with me.'

So Blessed Francis stood up and preached in such a sweet and useful manner that it seemed that he was an angel coming from heaven and not a man of flesh and blood. He explained the indulgence in a perfect way, saying that whoever would come to this church of Saint Mary of the Angels and enter it from vespers of that same day of the Calends of August to vespers of the second day of the same month, whether he would come in at night or during the day, since that night was considered as part of the same day, all his sins would be remitted after he would have gone to confession, namely all sins committed from the day of baptism until that very day. This indulgence was granted in that place every year in perpetuity.

When the bishops heard Francis utter these words they were indignant and were scandalised by what he had preached. So they told him: 'Although the lord Pope has commanded us to follow and support your will, it certainly did not come to his mind that we should follow and support you in things that are not fitting. Therefore we shall announce that this is an indulgence of ten years.' Thus the bishop of Assisi rose to tell the people that the indulgence was valid for ten years, but he ended up saying exactly what Blessed Francis had declared, and could not speak differently. There were present many witnesses from Perugia as well as from other cities and castles of the surrounding district.

It should also be asserted that all the other bishops, individually one after another, rose to declare that the words that Francis had uttered should be

withdrawn. But they all ended up affirming exactly what Blessed Francis himself had said and they could not say anything less than that. Among the witnesses present there we mention Sir Suppulinus Ugolini who was a priest, Sir Andrew of Montemelino; from Assisi: Sir Neapoleo of Armenzano, Sir John Gualtieri father of Sir Jerome also a priest, Pende (!), Tubaldini. There were many others from the surrounding district whom it would too long to mention.

# THE CHRONICLE OF THE XXIV MINISTERS GENERAL OF THE ORDER (1369-1374)

In the name of the Holy Trinity, of the blessed Virgin Mary, and of blessed Francis, I, Michael Bernarducci, formerly of Spoleto and now a citizen and inhabitant of the city of Assisi, presently devoted to the Order of blessed Francis, went one day to the place of the Portiuncula.<sup>78</sup> There I found brother Bernard of Quintavalle, brother Leo, brother Peter Catanio, brother Masseo of Marignano, brother Angelo of Rieti, brother Philip Longo from the coast of San Savino, and brother William, talking among themselves. When I approached them I saw that they were speaking secretly, so out of embarrassment I wanted to withdraw, but when they called to me I approached them. Now, this conversation was taking place in the garden where the cell of Saint Francis is. One of them, brother Peter Catanio, turned to me and began to speak thus: “Listen, Michael, to what happened these last few days. Brother Bernard, the companion of Saint Francis, told me this, showing me the place in the cell where it happened, which was this year in the month of January just past, when the great rains and snow poured down. – One night around midnight Satan came to blessed Francis as he was at prayer next to his cell and said to him: ‘Francis, what are you doing? Do you want to die before your time? Why are you doing such things? Don’t you know that sleep is the principal nourishment of the body? You are so young, so for you sleep and rest are especially necessary. One time I say to you that you are young, and so another time you can do penance for your sins. Why then do you punish yourself so in vigils and prayers?’ Then blessed Francis took off his tunic and undershorts and left the hut and passed through the large and dense hedge and entered the wildest and thorn-infested woods that belong to Philip Nurbi, adjoining the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula. When blessed Francis was in the middle of the woods, his flesh all stained and bloodied from the thorns, he said: ‘It is better for me to acknowledge the passion of my Lord Jesus Christ than to give in to

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<sup>78</sup> English translation by NOEL MUSCAT from the Latin original: *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, in *Analecta Franciscana*, Vol. III, Quaracchi 1897, 632-634.

the seduction of the deceiver.’ Then suddenly there was a great light in the midst of the forest and in that time of frost rose blossoms appeared right there where blessed Francis was. And a countless host of angels suddenly appeared both in the woods and in the said church next to the woods, and behold they cried with one voice: ‘Blessed Francis, hurry to the Saviour and his Mother who await you in the church.’ There then appeared to him a straight path as if of decorated silk going up to the church, and blessed Francis took from the rose patch twelve red roses and twelve white roses and entered the church. He proceeded to the altar and placed on it the roses he had brought with him in joined hands. There he saw Jesus Christ standing with his Mother at his right with a great multitude of angels. Then Francis found himself dressed in a very beautiful garment before the Saviour and his Mother, and his Saviour said to him: ‘Francis, ask whatever you will for the enlightenment of the nations and the consolation of souls, to the honour and reverence of God, for you have been designated a light to the nations and a repair of the earthly church, that is the Church militant.’ Francis, however, lay as if enraptured in the presence of the Saviour and his Mother. Then recovering his senses, he spoke up: Our holy Father, I, a sinner, beg you to do me this favour, that you grant an indulgence of all their sins, on one day only, to all who come to this place and enter this church with contrition and confession of their sins, and who have graciously accepted the penance and satisfaction imposed. And I beseech the Virgin Mary your Mother, the advocate of sinners, that she intercede in this regard, for I am unworthy.’ Then the Virgin Mary, queen of heaven, in response to his prayers, begged her Son Jesus Christ saying: ‘Most High God, I beg you to grant what your servant requests.’ And the Saviour replied: ‘This is indeed a great thing you have requested, Francis, but you are worthy of even greater, and you shall have a great reward. So I grant your request and prayer. Just name the day when it should happen.’ Blessed Francis responded: ‘Most Holy Father, you who arrange heaven and earth, please, you arrange the day with your Mother.’ So the Saviour decreed that from the first Vespers of the first day of August to Vespers of the second day of the same month, whoever comes on that day, having repented and confessed the sins of which they were aware, all the sins they have committed from their baptism up to that day they entered this church would be forgiven. Then blessed Francis added: ‘Most Holy Father, how will this be known and believed by people?’ The Lord Jesus Christ replied: ‘Francis, this will be done through my grace; you,

however, should go to my Vicar whom I have placed over nations and over kingdoms, and he should make it known as he sees fit.’ Then Francis said: ‘And how will your Vicar believe me? Perhaps he will not believe a sinner.’ The Saviour replied: ‘Francis, take with you three of your companions who have heard this, and some of the white and red roses you gathered up in the woods in the month of January. Take with you whatever number seems to you most fitting.’ Now all these things were heard by brother Peter Catanio, brother Rufino Scifi, brother Bernard of Quintavalle, brother Masseo of Marignano, and their companions who were in their dwellings, that is, in their cells outside the church in the garden where the cell of blessed Francis is. Then blessed Francis took three white and three red roses in the presence of the Saviour and Mary His Mother. Finally the grandest song of the angels was sung: *Te Deum laudamus*, etc.

The following morning blessed Francis put on his tunic once again and went to his three companions. He called them and said: ‘Prepare yourselves to come with me to Rome.’ He imposed silence upon them regarding what they had heard, namely to brother Peter Catanio, brother Bernard of Quintavalle, and brother Angelo of Rieti. They alone went to Rome with him and entered in front of the Supreme Pontiff the lord Honorius, who was the successor of Innocent, Vicar of Christ, and to whom blessed Francis recounted all the events mentioned above, and showed him as witnesses the six aforementioned roses. The same Honorius saw the roses that were still fresh and had bright colours and were emitting a sweet fragrance and he said: ‘This is a wonderful fact and it is more a divine than a human work; therefore, we know that their testimony is true.’ Then he said: ‘We shall speak with our Brothers in the consistory about this secret and we shall take a decision regarding these facts.’ Then he commanded his household to take care of Francis and of his companions. He also commanded blessed Francis to return to his presence early the following morning. When Francis stood before the Pope on the following morning, he said to the Pope: ‘O worthy Vicar of Christ, please accomplish my desire regarding these things, which is in agreement with the heavenly will of the King and His Mother, to whose title this church is dedicated.’ The Pope answered: ‘Brother Francis, assert and explain what is the will of the heavenly King and His Mother, so that you and your brothers will not say things differently.’ Blessed Francis answered and said: ‘The will of God and His divine promise states that, whoever from the Vespers of the *Calends* of August until the Vespers of the second day

enters the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, will have all his sins forgiven from the day of his baptism, namely all the sins he can remember and for which he shows contrition and that he confesses to a priest having a mandate to hear his confession, and finally accepts in a gracious way to make penance and satisfaction.’ The Pope answered and said: ‘Brother Francis, what you are asking is a great thing, but after the heavenly King upon the insistent request of His Mother will give heed to your prayers, we shall write to the bishops of Assisi, Spoleto, Perugia, Todi, Foligno, Nocera and Gubbio, that they may come to the Portiuncula in order to announce this aforementioned indulgence, when it is pleasing to you.’ Thus blessed Francis and his companions received the letters and returned in order to present them to the aforementioned Bishops. Blessed Francis acquired the consent of all these Bishops that they would gather on the *Calends* of August in that aforementioned church, and thus it was done.

Francis ordered that a wooden pulpit be constructed, upon which the aforementioned Bishops went up together with blessed Francis.<sup>79</sup> When a great crowd of people had gathered in that place, around nine in the morning of that same day, the Bishops freely gave permission to blessed Francis to preach first; in fact the papal letter had said that those same Bishops had to follow the will of blessed Francis. So blessed Francis stood up and began to preach in such a sweet and strong manner, that the people present thought that they were seeing an Angel and not a man. When he finished preaching, he announced the aforementioned indulgence, and told them that it was a perpetual indulgence, that is, an indulgence given every year on that particular day. When the Bishops heard him saying this they were angry and said: ‘If the lord Pope has commanded us to follow the will of Francis, this was certainly not his opinion, namely, that we should follow such a will in things that are not convenient and not appropriate. Therefore we renounce to approve the indulgence in this way.’ The bishop of Assisi stood up and wanted to say that the indulgence should be given for 10 years, but he said exactly the same words that blessed Francis had said and could not say anything different. The same occurred in the case of the other Bishops;

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<sup>79</sup> This event is still represented in a famous fresco by Tiberio di Assisi, *Saint Francis proclaims the Portiuncula Indulgence* (1516) in the Cappella delle Rose near the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels. The fresco gives a clear idea of the exterior decoration of the Portiuncula Chapel in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as well as of the choir of the friars and other adjacent buildings. The friars began to build the actual Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels, designed by Galeazzo Alessi, on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1569.



indeed each one of them wanted to correct the declaration of the preceding Bishop, but they could not say anything different from what Francis had already said. There were many witnesses to this fact, people coming from Assisi, from Bologna, from Foligno, and from Spoleto. The aforementioned seven Bishops were present when blessed Francis preached and announced the indulgence. Thanks be to God.”

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*Cover Illustration:*

Benozzo Gozzoli (c.1420-1497)

Saint Francis accompanied by two Angels goes to the Portiuncula Chapel  
Chapel of the Roses, Montefalco (1450)