

C. Exhortations & Admonitions

A Necessary Introduction to “Finding Inspiration in the Writings of St. Francis”

A word of advice: The recommended procedure for using the following materials is ideally to have the printed lesson given to each individual a month or at least a week before the sharing time so the individual has time to read it and to reflect and pray about the sharing questions, and jot down any notes they wish to use as reminders during their time of sharing at the meeting.

In this way Francis’ writings become a blessing for the individual during the preparation time as well as at the sharing session of their ongoing formation.

Finding INSPIRATION in the WRITINGS of St. Francis – a Sharing Guide

(a study compilation by Fr. John Sullivan, ofm – 2004)

We have so much to learn about St. Francis and his spirit. For us Franciscans, this is a perennial challenge. Reading about Francis’ life is an important ongoing inspiration for each one of us; but there’s more. Our SFO General Constitutions tell us about the foundation of our faithful lives as Secular Franciscans in article 12 where it says: “Gaining inspiration from the example and the **writings** of Francis....” Article 40-2 also reminds us that Francis’ **writings** are supposed to be a part of the initial formation program.

Are there ways to tackle Francis’ **writings** in a productive way? Of course, just taking the texts of his writings given to us and reading them can be a starter. The following materials are offered as a way to guide us through the riches of his writings. In this process we will also find a few texts frequently attributed to Francis as historically not his.

His writings for the purposes of this study-reflection guide are divided into 4 categories, namely:

Part A) His letters for specific situations

Part B) Prayers and devotions

Part C) Texts of spiritual and ascetic exhortation

Part D) Texts defining ways of life (Rules)

The translated texts for studying His prayers (Part B) and for his Admonitions (Part C) are supplied here with each reflection set of questions. These are translations by Fr. John Sullivan, ofm - 2004

For other sources for studying the writings of St. Francis you can consult:

a) St. Francis, Omnibus of Sources, (1983) 1900pp. Franciscan Press, Quincy, IL 62301
217-228-5670..... approx. \$40

b) Study Text, Writings of St. Francis, 175 pp. Franciscan Press, Quincy, IL 62301
217-228-5670.... (first 175 pages of same Omnibus, above, with all of Francis’ writings). approx. \$????

c) St. Francis, the Saint, Vol.1 (635pp.) New City Press, Hyde Park, New York, 12538...approx.\$30

d) Francis and Clare, the Complete Writings, 256pp – (1982), Paulist Press – approx. \$20

For further understanding of the search itself for Francis' writings (all hand-written copies or hand-written originals) down through the centuries, you can read some interesting details in the **St. Francis of Assisi, Omnibus of Sources** (1983), pp. 5-22 and in **Francis of Assisi, the Saint – Early Documents** (Vol.1), pp.11-39.

For convenience of printing here, we will identify references to these two books by “Omn.” for the former, and “FA1” for the latter book. The **Francis and Clare, Complete Writings** is reference-coded by “FC”

Keep in mind the way St. Francis writes. An important general observation begins to surface that he does not make use of theological terminology. Instead, Francis presents his ideas and convictions with simple, straight-forward, descriptive vocabulary and imagery. He writes with conviction, with concern, with compassion, and often with great exuberance.

If we are to gain much from these exercises, we need to approach them in the same pattern we use in reading the Sacred Scriptures, namely: asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to become “the listener” as we read.

It is essential also to remember that we are not approaching these texts as academic exercises or as history research, but primarily our focus is on “finding inspiration” in the writings of St. Francis. (see SFO General Constitutions, #12)

Let's start.

C. Exhortations and Admonitions

2004

The following writings are singled out, even though more exhortatory materials are contained in Francis' letters.

1- The [28] Admonitions of St. Francis (Omn.p.77-87;FA1-pp.128-137; FC,p.25-36)

Introductory remarks:

This set of 28 Admonitions is a compendium/compilation which gathers together some of Francis' thoughtful and prayerful sharing with the friars. Various theories are proposed as to how they were finalized in this printed form. One common understanding is that near the end of Francis' life he with one or two other friars (they being the “scribes”) made up this collection of what we might call little “ferverinos”, containing some of Francis' serious teachings and advice.

While written for the friars who had taken public vows in the Church (poverty, chastity, obedience), each of these 28 admonitions reveal that Francis had a deep understanding of human nature and its workings within our lives of Faith. Hence they become valuable and insightful tools for checking our own secular spiritual lives and behavior.

Note the meaning of “admonition” – advice, encouragement, exhortation.

No particular arrangement seems to have been chosen for the various topics in this collection. However, it might be noted that the first (and the longest) is on the Eucharist – one of Francis' greatest loves and which he was always solicitous about for himself and the friars.

A caution: different sources for these admonitions have differing sequence arrangements for their numbering (as we see in the difference between Omn. and FA1). This can cause confusion until the reader gets used to this solvable problem.

Note that the “titles/captions” given to each of these admonitions are not in the original texts; later authors have composed these as an aid for us.

Note the pattern that Francis often uses: the admonition often begins with a Sacred Scripture quote. In each case, we might spend some reflective time on the connection between the Scripture quote and the rest of Francis’ message.

→ As we treat each admonition, please begin by slowly reading through it, letting its contents sink into our minds and our hearts.

Admon.1 – God Present in the Eucharist; profess this belief.

Admon.1 – On the Body of the Lord.

The Lord Jesus says to his disciples: I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.

If you would know me, you would also know my Father; and in fact you have known him and have seen him.

Philip says to him: Lord, show us the Father, and that will suffice for us.

Jesus says to him: For so much time I am with you and you have not known me? Philip, who sees me, sees also my Father.

The Father dwells in inaccessible light, and God is spirit, and no one has ever seen God.

So he can be seen only in the spirit, because he who gives life is spirit; the flesh does not produce that.

But the son, who is equal to the Father, is never seen by anyone else than the Father -- similarly for the Holy Spirit.

Hence everyone who has seen the Lord Jesus according to his humanity and has not seen and believed according to the spirit and divinity that he is the true Son of God, are condemned.

In the same way all who see the Sacrament, which is made holy through the words of the Lord upon the altar at the hand of the priest in the form of bread and wine, and do not see and believe according to the spirit and divinity, what is truly the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, are condemned.

With the strongest testimony, the Most High says: This is my body and my blood of the new testament [which is poured out for many]; and who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has life eternal.

It is the Spirit of the Lord, therefore who dwells in his faithful people, he it is who receives the most holy Body and Blood of the Lord.

All others who do not have that same spirit and presume to receive Him, eat and drink judgment to themselves.

Hence: Sons of men, why continue with hardness of heart?

Do you not recognize the truth and believe in the Son of God?

Look. Daily he humbles himself, just as when from the royal chambers he came into the womb of the Virgin; daily he comes to us in humble appearance; daily he comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of the priest.

And just as he showed himself to the holy apostles in true flesh, in like manner he shows himself to us in the Sacred Bread.

And just as with their carnal eyes they only saw his flesh, yet in contemplating him with their spiritual eyes they believed him to be God.

Similarly, we see the bread and the wine with our corporeal eyes, and firmly believe his most holy Body and Blood to be living and true.

And in this way the Lord is always with his faithful people, just as he says: I am with you until the completion of the world.

Q1. Since God is spirit, what is our necessary approach to Him?

Q2. How does Francis describe that we have two sets of eyes? What are they to be used for? Do I use both sets of eyes?

Q3. What are we to believe about the Eucharist? How necessary is this faith?

Q4. How did Francis apply this teaching to his own life?

Q5. How central to Francis' faith was this Eucharistic Sacrament?

Q6. Do you recall any other places in his writings that Francis expresses this concern?

Admon. 2 – Evil of one's own will – as "property" – independence

Admonition 2 – The evil of one's own will.

The Lord said to Adam: Eat from every tree, but do not eat from the tree of good and evil.

So he could eat from every tree of paradise, and as long as he had not sinned by going against obedience.

However he eats from the tree of knowledge of the good, who appropriates his own will to himself and prides himself with the good, which the Lord tells him and carries out in him. And so, through the suggestion of the devil and the transgression of the command he partook of the fruit of the knowledge of evil. Accordingly, it took place that he sustained the penalty.

Q1. Is poverty only about material things?

Q2. Was that a fair test for Adam (and with its serious consequences)?

Q3. Adam was clearly given free choice, in the surroundings of so many blessings in the garden – How did Adam handle it?

Q4. Have I ever looked upon my "free will" as "property", as Francis presents it here? Explain. Is Francis giving his friars a useful image for their lives?

Q5. Are there consequences for disobedience?

Admon. 3 – Perfect Obedience

Admonition 3 – The power of perfect obedience

The Lord says in the Gospels: He who does not renounce all things that he possesses, cannot be my disciple; and, Whoever wants to make his own soul secure is to lose it.

That person completely surrenders all he possesses and loses his body who has given his total self in obedience into the hands of his superior.

And whatever he does and says, provided that he himself knows that what he is doing is good and not against his will, is true obedience.

And if when the obedient person may see what is better and more useful for his soul than what the superior has prescribed for him, he may still voluntarily sacrifice them to God; and let him make the efforts to fulfill the assignments which are from the superior.

For this is the obedience under charity, because he is satisfying God and his neighbor.

If the superior should really call for something contrary to his conscience, he is allowed not to obey, but he should not leave.

And if thereby he should have to put up with persecution from some, the more he loves them for God's sake.

For whoever accepts persecution rather than be separated from his brothers, truly remains in perfect obedience, because he is offering his life for his brothers.

There are many religious, who under the guise of seeing greater things than what the superior prescribes, look back and return to the vomit of their own will; they are killers and through their bad example cause many souls to perish.

Q1. How does Francis see the Scriptural “total renunciation of all that he possesses” [poverty] as including the virtue of obedience?

Q2. What is a friar to do when he “may realize that there are many courses of action that would be better and more profitable to his soul than what his superior commands”?

Q3. The question of commands “against his conscience” surfaces here; how is the friar to react in such issues of conflict? - leave? - revolt? - get even? – give insults?

Q4. What strong word does Francis use to describe one who fails in this vow of obedience?

Q5. How does this teaching of Francis contrast to Paul Sabatier’s differing opinion about Francis’ teachings and the protestant reformers? (Read footnote, Omn.p.56)

Admon. 4 – Do not yearn to be a Superior

I have not come to be served, but to serve, says the Lord.

Those who are assigned over others, should glory in that appointment as if they were assigned to the office of washing the feet of the brothers.

And the more they are disturbed over the loss of being superior than the duty to wash feet, all the more do they gather for themselves “money bags” to endanger their souls.

Q1. The sense of service is essential to Francis’ view of “superior”; what image does Francis use here that a friar should have toward the role of “superior”?

Q2. Is being a superior to add anything to one’s self-importance?

Q3. Does this teaching have application for a SFO fraternity and its council members?

Q4. How does our SFO Rule deal with this topic (for example, see SFO Rule, art.21)?

Q5. Is Francis saying that no one should be willing to volunteer to be a “superior”?

Q6. In this context, what is the difference between “yearning” and “be willing”?

Admon.5 – Glory in the Cross of Christ – in your infirmities, both physical and psychological.

Admonition 5 – That noone should be proud, but should glory in the cross of the Lord.

Observe, O man, such a lofty position in which the Lord God has placed you, because he created you and formed you to the image of his Beloved Son in the flesh and into His likeness in your spirit. And all creatures under heaven are subservient to him, know and obey their Creator better than you.

And even the demons have not crucified him, but you with them have crucified him and even now you are crucifying him by delighting in vices and sins.

What can you find your glory in? For if you were as sharp and wise that you contained all knowledge and knew how to interpret all kinds of languages and with great acumen comprehended heavenly things, in all these things you cannot be praised; because one demon has known about heavenly things as well as knows earthly matters better than all people, unless there might exist someone who might have received a special understanding of the highest wisdom.

Similarly if you should be more handsome and wealthier than others and if you did remarkable things, that you could drive out demons, all these things are not of your doing and nothing reflects back to you, and in these you can not be held in honor; but in this we can be honored – in our infirmities, and daily to take up the holy cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

While not quoting directly a passage from Sacred Scripture here, Francis refers to Genesis 1:26.

Man is gifted greater than the rest of creation by alone being made in the image and likeness of God.

Q1. Can we boast of appearances, wealth, working wonders, driving out devils?

Q2. Is this message relevant for us today? ...for me today?

Q3. How fundamental is this basic honesty about ourselves that Francis promotes?

Admon.6 – Face trials as Christ did

Admonition 6 – Call to True Imitation, not Just Talk

Observe, all my brothers, the good shepherd, who in order to save his sheep has undergone the passion of the cross.

The sheep of the Lord have followed him in tribulation and in persecution, disgrace and hunger, in weakness and in temptation and in similar things.

So the great disgrace for us servants of God is that by retelling the activities of the holy ones we ourselves want to receive the glory and honor.

The first sentence sets the basis for the rest of the reflection.

Francis in the last sentence reminds us how easy it is to want praise for talking glowingly about the Saints instead of trying to duplicate their accomplishments.

Q1. Instead of wanting praise by talking glowingly about the Saints, what are we supposed to be doing?

Q2. How does Francis see it that we may only talk about our faith, but not live it.

Q3. What trials did Christ accept to save us?

Q4. Is there a necessary price to pay for discipleship?

Admon.7 – Knowledge is to edify and be edified, to glorify God

Admonition 7 -- That good performance might follow knowledge

The apostle says: the Letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

People have been killed by the letter when they want to know quotations only so that people will be impressed that they are more learned and they can make money to give to their relatives and friends. Religious have been killed by the letter when they have no desire to follow the spirit of Sacred Scripture, but only want to know what it says so that they can explain it to others. On the other hand, those have received life from the spirit of Sacred Scripture, who, by their words and example, refer all that they know or wish to know to the most high God, to whom belongs all good, and do not allow their knowledge to build up their own self-image.

Francis here shows his serious concern for the purposes for which we study, why we learn things. So often our learning serves to create the impression that we just be seen as “smarter” than others, or to put others down, or practice “false humility”.

Q1. Francis warns of some disruptive values for learning, which are?

Q2. Francis indicates a positive value for learning, which is?

Q3. What value does Francis put on the Sacred Scriptures?

Q4. How does this admonition compare to Francis’ letter to St. Anthony of Padua? (Omn.p.162;FA1,p.107;FC,p.79)

Admon. 8 – Avoid envy, which is blasphemy.

Admonition 8 – On avoiding the sin of envy

The apostle says: No one can say: The Lord Jesus, unless in the Holy Spirit; and there is no one who does good, no not even one.

Whoever therefore envies his brother for his good, which the Lord says and does in him, is dealing with the sin of blasphemy, because he envies the Most High himself, who says and does every good.

Q1. Why does Francis not only warn us against the vice of envy, but also identifies it as “blasphemy”?

Q2. How does this compare with Francis’ prayers, such as: “God alone is Good, all Good”? (– see Omn.p.139;FA1,p.162;FC,p.102).

Q3. How important is it in the Christian faith to rejoice in the goodness of others?

Do we do this enough? Do we take this for granted too often?

Admon. 9 – Love of enemy, includes deep concern for the culprit

Admonition 9 – On Love

The Lord says: Love your enemies [do good to those who hate you, and pray for your persecutors and calumniators]. For a person really has love for his enemy when he is not offended by the injury done to himself, but instead for love of God feels burning sorrow for the sin his enemy has brought on his own soul; in this way he proves his love in a practical way.

Q1. How does this admonition help us to raise ourselves above ourselves even as we still practice the love of enemies that Christ taught us?

Q2. How does this admonition capture the spirit of what Christ did on the Cross?

Q3. When someone wrongs us, where is the more serious evil found?

Admon. 10 – Quit blaming others, take responsibility –

Admonition 10 – On Chastising the Body

Many people blame the devil or their neighbor when they fall into sin or are offended. But that is not right. Everyone has in his power his own enemy which leads him into sin, and this enemy is his lower nature. Blessed is the servant who keeps this enemy a prisoner under his control and protects himself against it. As long as he follows this policy no other enemy, visible or invisible, can harm him.

- Q1. Do we recognize this as a very popular human behavior pattern – the “Adam-and-Eve syndrome” (Read Genesis 3:9-13)?
- Q2. Whom do we easily blame for our failures and sins?
- Q3. What is considered our “enemy”? What assurances does Francis give?
- Q4. How well did Francis capture one of our human weaknesses by this admonition?

Admon. 11 – Not to be disturbed by another’s evil – no anger or retaliation

Admonition 11 – That no one be corrupted by the evil of another

It is essential that nothing displeases the servant of God except sin. And whenever any person is uncharitably disturbed or agitated, he stores up a fault for himself.

That servant of God, who is not irritated nor disturbs himself about anything is correctly living without property [“sine proprio”]. And blessed is he, who does not retain for himself anything – rendering the things that are Caesar’s to Caesar, and those which are God’s to God.

For “sine proprio” see the friars Rule, chapter 1.....

- Q1. Should this calmness of heart, contrary to being disturbed and angered, that Francis calls for be the goal of our personal dealings with others? How well have we mastered this?
- Q2. Can this solve many problems of peace? How?
- Q3. Is this the way of peace? (How does this compare to the advice given in the “Peace Prayer”?)
- Q4. Can I think of anything that upsets or disturbs me? How do I react?

Admon. 12 – Spirit of God is essential, self alone is worthless.

Admonition 12 – *On recognizing the Spirit of the Lord*

The servant of God can be properly recognized, if he has the spirit of the Lord: when the Lord does anything good through him in the flesh (which is always at war with every good) he does not exalt himself. But rather if he considers himself in his own eyes more unworthy and judges himself the lesser among all other people.

- Q1. How does this description compare to “false humility”?
- Q2. How do our ego-trips stand in the way of our growth in the spiritual life?
- Q3. How do we develop the mind-set of recognizing the real source of the good we do?
- Q4. Can false humility be shown to really be a veneer with no depth?
- Q5. What does Francis see as the enemy of goodness?

Admon 13 – Patience & Humility in adversity is revealing

Admonition 13 – *On Patience*

Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called the children of God. The servant of God cannot determine whether he himself might have patience and humility, as long as all is going well. When however the time comes that those who should be helping him work against him, then and there he has just that much patience and humility and no more.

- Q1. Here Francis indicates a foolproof barometer for our patience...-and for our humility; what is the test?
- Q2. How insightful is this principle by Francis?
- Q3. Does this principle ring true in my own experience?

Q4. When do we have difficulties finding the truth about our humility and patience?

Admon. 14 – Be poor in spirit, not disturbed

Admonition 14 – On Poverty of Spirit

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the heavenly kingdom. There are many who in fulfilling their prayers and duties carry out many self-denials and afflictions on their bodies. But with a single word, that seems to be an insult about their bodies or by anything else, which they might be deprived of, they immediately are shocked and disturbed.

These are not poor in spirit; because he who is truly poor in spirit hates himself and loves those who strike him on the cheek.

Q1. When it comes to bearing the crosses in life, does Francis hit upon a real human weakness here?

Q2. How powerful and valid is this description by Francis of this human propensity?

Q3. Why is it we often only want to choose our own crosses, not accepting other crosses sent to us by others.

Q4. Do we find ourselves becoming resentful when others offer us a cross to bear?

Q5. What is Francis' observation and advice here?

Q6. Recognizing our human weaknesses, what are the dangers of "money"?

Admon. 15 – Preserve inner peace in trials (also confer Admon.#13 & #11 & #14)

Admonition 15 – On Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Those are truly peacemakers, who in the midst of all the things which they undergo in this life for love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, develop peace in mind and body.

Q1. How do we let sufferings and trials from others rob us of inner peace?

Q2. Here Francis quotes one of the beatitudes; which is?

Q3. Where does true joy come from? Where is it found?

Q4. What is the difference between "to forgive" and "to condone"?

Admon. 16 – Have a pure intention

Admonition 16 – On Purity of Heart

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Those are pure of heart who despise worldly things, and never cease with a pure heart and soul to seek heavenly matters and always adore and see the Lord God living and true.

Q1. What is Francis' definition of one who is "pure in heart"?

Q2. How does this differ from the limited idea that "purity of heart" is restricted to sins of sensuality?

Q3. Have you noticed that admonitions 9-13-14-15-16 quote the beatitudes?

Admon. 17 – The humble servant

Admonition 17 – On the humble servant of God

Blessed is the servant, who does not brag himself up more over the good which the Lord says and does through him, than what the Lord says and does through another person.

That person sins, who expects more from his neighbor, than what he is willing to give of himself to the Lord God.

- Q1. What is Francis' norm here to evaluate our humility?
Q2. How does this advice/admonition compare to Admon. 13?

Admon. 18 – Generous compassion & patience with others

Admonition 18 – On compassion for one's neighbor

Blest is the person, who accepts his neighbor in his brokenness, as he would wish to be accepted by him, if he were in a similar situation.

Blessed is the servant, who acknowledges all good things to the Lord God, because whoever retains anything for himself hides for himself the Lord God's money. And what he might think he has will be taken away from him.

- Q1. To get another perspective, Francis suggests exchanging places....?
Q2. Is this message clear?
Q3. Is this easy to carry out in daily living?

Admon. 19 – We are as humble as God sees us – “in the sight of God”.

Admonition 19 – On the humble servant of God

Blessed is the servant who does not consider himself better, when he is complimented and praised by people, than as when he is considered vile, simple and despised, because as much as a man is before God, that he is and no more. Woe to that religious who has been placed by others on a pedestal and who does not wish to come down voluntarily. But blessed is that servant, who is not promoted through his own choosing and always wants to be under the feet of the others.

- Q1. If you want to “rate” yourself, why not profitably use Francis' great examination of conscience statement: “What a man is before God, that he is and no more.”?
Q2. Is this a good norm for self-evaluation?
Q3. Does this statement reflect true wisdom?
Q4. Francis helps us put compliments and praise in proper perspective, which is?

Admon.20 – Finding true joy and happiness

Admonition 20 – The good and the vain religious

Blessed is that religious, who does not find joy and happiness except in the most sacred words and actions of the Lord, and through them he leads people to the love of God with joy and gladness. Woe to that religious who enjoys himself in his empty and useless words and through them leads people to laughter.

- Q1. What should be the source of happiness for the religious (and hence for a member of the Secular Franciscans)?
Q2. How does this compare to the prayer: “My God and My All”?
Q3. Can it be said that the key principle here is that “God is all Good”?
(– also check back to Admonitions #8 and #17.)

Admon. 21 – Check motive in revealing the Lord's gifts (cf. Admon.#28)

Admonition 21 - On the vain and talkative religious

Blessed is the servant who, when he speaks, does not display everything about himself for the sake of an apparent reward and is not hasty to speak -- but wisely presents what he needs to say and answer.

Woe to that religious who does not keep in his heart the good things which the Lord shows to him and does not exhibit them to others by his deeds, but rather for the sake of recognition would display them to people by his talk.

He thereby receives his reward and the listeners take away little fruit.

First of all, we are challenged here to control of the tongue, the need to be circumspect in what we say.

Q1. Preferably, rather than using words, what does Francis ask us to use to reveal the goodness of God?

Q2. How do people give evidence of spiritual arrogance?

Q3. Have we encountered people who seem to brag about all the wonderful religious activities they take part in? – for example, how many rosaries they pray every day?

Q4. Does this principle have application in my life?

Admon. 22 – Accepting correction patiently

Admonition 22 – On Accepting Correction

Blest is the servant who so patiently bears correction, accusation and reproach from another person just as from himself. Blest is the servant who when reproached accepts it with graciousness, and humbly confesses and freely makes up for the fault. Blest is the servant who is not quick to excuse himself and humbly puts up with the revilement and reproach for the sin, when he has not actually committed the fault.

Q1. We often find this is hard to take, humanly speaking (our lower nature). Yet what example did Christ give us in trials?

Q2. Have you ever accepted blame willingly, even though you knew you did not do what was accused? Is this a purifying experience?

Q3. How does this compare to the message of Admon. #14?

Admon. 23 – With humility before All –

Admonition 23 – On Humility

Blessed is the servant, who is found humble among his subjects, just as when among his superiors. Blessed the servant, who always remains under the rod of correction.

That servant is faithful and prudent, who for all his offenses does not delay to interiorly punish himself through contrition and exteriorly through confession and satisfaction in his actions.

Q1. Does Francis challenge us to keep developing a correct understanding of humility?

Q2. Is the correct pattern here that we honestly accept our own failings, and then embrace contrition and amendment?

Q3. Why does Francis mention both contrition and amendment?

Q4. Have you noticed how often Francis gives admonitions on humility? Why is that?

Admon. 24 – Caring for the Sick –

Admonition 24 – On true concern

Blessed is the servant who so loves his brother when he is sick and cannot return the favor, as when he is healthy and can return the favor.

Q1. How should another's sickness influence our behavior with him/her?

Q2. St. Francis reminds us about a dangerous false principle that we will only do good deeds to others when they can return the favor. Gift-giving should always be done with no expectations in return. How does Francis' principle fulfill the true love of God and neighbor that Jesus preached and practiced?

Q3. Does this remind us of the parable of the Good Samaritan? How so?

Admon. 25 – Sacrificing, true love – Show respect in word and thought

Admonition 25 –

Blessed is the servant who so loves and honors his brother when he is away from him, just as when he is with him, and does not say anything about him that in charity he would not say in his presence.

Q1. Why does Francis remind us that talking behind another's back is against charity?

Q2. Why is it so appealing to try to run down the reputation of others behind their backs?

Q3. What is the Catholic moral principle regarding talking about others and their good and bad points?

Q4. What is wrong with the principle: "If you don't have anything good to say about someone, don't say it"? For example, how does this apply to political figures, to people being voted on?

Admon. 26 – The respect and honor due clerics

Admonition 26 – That servants of God should honor clerics.

Blessed is the servant who has faith in clerics who live properly according to the form of the Roman Church. And woe to those who despise them; for even if they might be sinners, yet no one must judge them, because only the Lord himself reserves to himself judging them.

For how much greater is their ministry, when they handle the most sacred Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which they themselves receive and only they minister to others, so much more are they guilty of sin who sin against them, than against all other people of this world.

Q1. We find this a frequent expression and concern by Francis. Why does he single out this deep reverence and respect for persons who have received this particular one of the seven Sacraments?

Q2. Have some clergy themselves seemed to have lost this reverence for this Sacrament they bear? ...– in Francis' day? ...--today?

Q3. Do we pray for those persons in the clergy who serve us and the Body of Christ?

Q4. Can I recall whether Francis has expressed this concern elsewhere? Where?

Admon. 27 – Virtues against vices

(a reminder: "virtues" are "powers"- facing the challenge of good vs. evil).

Admonition 27 –

When there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance.

When there is patience and humility, there not neither anger nor frustration.

*When there is poverty with joy, there is neither coveting nor avarice.
Where there is quiet and meditation, there is neither worldly cares nor emptiness.
Where there is fear of the Lord guarding at the gate, there the enemy cannot have a place for entry.
Where there is mercy and concern, there is neither superfluity nor an undue hardship.*

- Q1. Which 11 virtues does Francis list here?
Q2. Taken together, they can produce much harmony in loving and living. Contrariwise, each of these vices disrupts community life. Have I ever observed that?
Q3. Are these vices obstacles also in family life ...and SFO fraternity life?
Q4. Might this admonition serve as an opening prayer for council meetings, or for commissions?
Q5. Compare this to Francis' prayer of "Greeting of the Virtues". (Omn.p.132; FA1,p.164; FC,p.151)

Admon. 28 – Secret treasures of the heart (also check Admon.#21 and its QQ.).

Admonition 28 – On the good that should be hidden lest it be lost.
Blessed is the servant, who builds up treasures in heaven, which the Lord shows to him and under the appearance of a reward does not wish to display them for people, because the Most High himself will manifest his works to whomever he wishes. Blessed is the servant who keeps the secrets of the Lord in his heart.

- Q1. How does Francis tell us that the inner working of the Spirit is "not for show"?
Q2. How and why does Francis advise us not to become spiritual exhibitionists?
Q3. Should we, or God, do the appropriate revealing?

2- Perfect Joy (Omn.p.1318-1320;FA1,p.166-167;FC,p.165-166) – This little but important dialogue is hard to classify, yet it serves as an admonition to understand the impact of this topic of joy in the life of Francis, any friar and any Christian. (also check Admonition #20) It also is a kind of parable with a punch.

ON TRUE AND PERFECT JOY

[Friar Leonardo] related that one day blessed Francis who was near St. Mary's [of the Angels-the Portiuncula] called friar Leo and said: "Brother Leo, write." He responded: "Look, I'm ready."

"Write" he started "this is true joy.

A messenger comes and says that all the teachers of Paris have joined the Order; write – that is not true joy.

Then all the prelates beyond the mountains, and the archbishops and the bishops, even the King of France and the King of England: write – that is not true joy.

In fact, all my brothers have gone to those without faith and have converted all of them to the faith; and that I have such a grace from God that I can cure the sick and can do many miraculous things; I tell you that in all these things there is not true joy.

But what is true joy?

I upon returning from Perugia and in the dark of night arrive here and it is the bitter cold time of winter, all muddied, and therefore cold, and there are icicles on the edges of my habit and these cut into my legs and blood oozes out of such wounds.

And completely covered in mud I come to the door shivering from the cold and the ice.

And after I have knocked for awhile and I have called out, a brother comes and asks: 'Who is it?'

And I respond: 'Brother Francis'.

And he says: 'Go away; this is not the proper time for moving about! - Go away; you will not get in here.'

And again he answers to my insistence: 'Go away, you are just a simpleton and uneducated and you are not coming with us; there are so many of us and we do not need you.'

And once again I stand at the door and I say: 'For the love of God take me in tonight.' And he responds: "I will not. Go away to the Croziers' place and beg there."

I tell you that if I have patience and am not disturbed, that would be real joy and true virtue and salvation for the soul.

Q1. Do I judge "joy" to be the result of everything going my way – all going well and smoothly? How does my idea compare with Francis'?

Q2. What makes this description by Francis "joy"? ...and "perfect" joy? What essential requisites do I need to develop to be able to share Francis' opinion in such a case?

Q3. Do we rejoice in the Lord enough in our personal prayers?

Q4. When we as Franciscans see and share the big picture through the eyes of Francis, how can anything or anyone destroy our joy in the Lord?

For the following quotation and associated reflections, you will need to get a copy of the appropriate text (not supplied here).

3- Testament – We need to note that this three-page text is not part of the friars' Rule of life since Francis was no longer General Minister of the Order when this was written (Omn.p.65-70; FA1,p.124-127; FC,p.153-156).

Testament of St. Francis

The Lord so gave me brother Francis to begin to do penance: for when I was in sin it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And on leaving them, that which seemed bitter to me was turned for me into sweetness of soul and body; and after a little while I left the world.

And the Lord gave me such faith in churches, that I would simply pray and say: "We adore you, O Lord Jesus Christ, and in all your churches which are in the whole world; and we bless you because through your holy cross you have redeemed the world."

Afterwards the Lord gave me and even now gives me such faith in priests, who live according to the form of the holy Roman church because of their Ordination, that if they were to persecute me, I still wish to have recourse to them. And if I should have such wisdom as Solomon had, and I might find some very poor priests of this world in parishes in which they stay, I do not wish to preach against their will.

And I wish to reverence them and all others, to love and to honor as if they were my masters. And I do not wish to consider sin in them, because I discern the Son of God in them, and they are my lords. And this is the reason I act this way -- because I see nothing bodily in this world of the

most high Son of God, except his most holy Body and most precious Blood, which they receive and they alone minister to others.

And these most holy Mysteries I wish to honor above everything else, to venerate them and to keep them in precious places. These most holy names and his written words, wherever I might find them in improper places, I wish to collect; and I beg, that they be gathered up and placed in a decent place.

And we must honor and venerate all theologians and those who minister God's most holy words, for they minister to us spirit and life (cf. John 6:64).

And after a while the Lord gave me brothers; no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel. And I had these few words written down simply, and the Lord Pope confirmed them for me. And those who came to take on this life, gave all the things which they might have to the poor; and they were content with one tunic, patched inside and out, with a cord and breeches. And we chose not to have anything else.

We clerics recited the Office like other clerics. The lay friars recited the Our Father, and we quite willingly remained in churches. And we were unlearned and subject to all.

And I did manual labor with my hands, and I wish to work; and I strongly wish that all the other friars should apply themselves to work which is reputable.

Let those not knowing how to work learn, not because of any desire of receiving the payment of their work, but because of good example and for rejecting idleness.

And when the reward of our work was not given to us, we had recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door. The Lord revealed to me this greeting, that we should say: "May the Lord give you peace."

The friars should certainly be on their guard not to receive churches and poor little places to live and everything else which is constructed for them, unless they should be as is fitting holy poverty, which we have promised in the Rule, staying there always as travelers and pilgrims.

I strongly command through obedience all my brothers that wherever they are, not to dare to ask for any letter from the Roman Curia, neither they nor through an interposed person, neither for a church nor for any other place nor under the guise of preaching nor for the persecution of their bodies; but wherever they might not be received, let them flee into another territory to do penance with the blessing of God.

And I strongly wish to obey the minister general of this fraternity and any guardian, whom he chooses to give me. And I so wish to be a captive in his hands, that I might not go or do anything beyond obedience and his will, because he is my master. And even should I be simple and infirm, nevertheless I always wish to have a cleric, who might pray the office with me, as is contained in the Rule.

And all the other friars should be so held to obey their guardians and to pray the office according to the Rule. And if any are found who are not praying the Office according to the Rule and should wish to change it in any way, or who would not be Catholic, all the friars, wherever they are, are bound by obedience that wherever they should find such a one of their own must bring him before the guardian. And the guardian is seriously bound by obedience to properly guard him, as a person in chains day and night, so that he cannot escape from his

hands, until he might personally present him into the hands of his minister. And in turn the minister is seriously bound by obedience to send him through such friars, that day and night will guard him, in order to send him to the Lord of Ostia, who is the lord, the protector and the corrector of the whole fraternity.

And the friars are not to say: "This is another Rule"; because this is a written record, an admonition, an exhortation and my testament, which I Brother Francis, the little poor one, give to you my brothers with my blessings so that the Rule, which we have promised the Lord, we might more faithfully observe in a Catholic way. And the general minister and all the other ministers and guardians are bound by obedience, not to add to or remove any of these words. And they should always have this text together with the Rule. And in all the chapters they hold, when they read the Rule, they should read these words also.

And all my friars, clerics and laics, I strongly beg through obedience, that they not put glosses on the Rule or on these words saying: "This is how they are to be understood". For just as the Lord gave them to me to tell them clearly and to write the Rule and these words, so simply and without any gloss you are to understand them and observe them through holy living to the end.

And whoever shall have observed these things, may he be rewarded in heaven by the blessing of the beloved Son together with the most Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and with all the powers of the heavens and all the saints, and I brother Francis, your little servant, in whatever way I can confirm to you interiorly and exteriorly this most holy blessing.

The Omnibus prints the Testament using 13 paragraphs. For our purposes we will offer reflections on it paragraph by paragraph. (You may wish to number them in your text.)

Observations: Francis again is addressing the friars. Really nothing "new" is revealed in this testament, but it does present key ingredients in Francis' life which he considered important [near the end of his life], and how he approached them. (These views are also available from other known sources.)

Paragraph 1 – How often does Francis claim God's inspiration for his way of life? What did Francis describe as the turning point in his conversion? What did Francis see his calling to be?

Par. 2 – Describe the double message of this prayer: "We adore You...". How does this short prayer parallel the two great miracles at every Mass?

Par. 3 – What reasons does Francis give for this deep reverence for Priests? Do we share this same view about the inherent necessity to have Priests to help us in our Catholic faith?

Par. 4 – Here Francis offers at least 4 channels of God's Word – can you list them? Do we make effective use of them?

Par. 5 – Whom does Francis claim showed him to embrace poverty and simplicity? In what way was this "counter-cultural"?

How is this mentioned in our SFO Rule?

What do I know of Francis' romance and nuptials with Lady Poverty?

Par.6 – What does this passage tell you about St. Francis' clerical state in the Catholic Church - "...Those of us who were clerics" ?

He speaks here of work, begging, praying the Office of the Church, and a greeting of Peace.

What is Francis' attitude toward work?

What does he expect of the friars regarding work?

Did Francis develop an order of "beggars" (as is often depicted)?

Francis acknowledges the need at times to consider begging, namely: when the friars are not paid for their services, and he calls it going to "the table of the Lord". What does that mean?

Par.7 - How do we describe the difference between "ownership of" and "use of" things? Is this just a "fiction" of terminology?

Par.8 – Although he chose the words "in virtue of obedience", Francis is really not the superior to properly expect such a response. Nevertheless what ideas is Francis trying to get across to the friars?

Par.9 – How does Francis view himself in regards to obedience? What images does he use? In professing the SFO Rule, in what ways am I called to obedience as an SFO member? List them....

Par.10 – Francis expects all the friars to be submissive in the same way as he. If they are not submissive in obedience, what penalties does he recommend? What are several violations against obedience that Francis describes here?

Par.11 – What would Francis mean by asking the friars to live the Rule "in a more Catholic way"?

Francis gives advice about having the friars' Rule handy – Is this advice also appropriate for SFO members and our Rule?

Par.12 – Francis advises the friars against becoming "lawyers" in dealing with their Rule of Life. What important specific advice does he give?

Is Francis's advice applicable to our living the SFO Rule also?

Does this mean becoming "care-free" and casual?

Par.13 – Here we find a closing Prayer – for those observing the friars' Rule.

When Francis wants to give a blessing, to whom does he appeal to join him?

Does this help us see that Francis always seems to have the larger picture of things?

Is this blessing also applicable to us in following the SFO Rule?

The prayer-texts supplied here are translated from Kajetan Esser's Critical Edition of the Writings of St. Francis of Assisi (1976) – by John Sullivan, ofm – 6/30/04