

May 12
BLESSED FRANCIS OF SIENA
Memorial

Francis was born in Siena in 1266. Because of his love for the Blessed Virgin he entered the Order of Servants of Mary when he was twenty-two years old, and shortly after was ordained to the priesthood. He was noted for his charity, his preaching, and his good judgment in counselling those who came to him. He died in 1328 and his body is venerated in the Basilica of St. Mary of the Servants in Siena. Benedict XIV approved devotion to him in 1743.

From the common of the saints and blessed of our Order, or from the common of holy men.

Office of Readings

SECOND READING

Choose one of the following readings.

From the sermon *On Love Of the Poor* by Saint Gregory Nazianzen, bishop
(or. XIV, 2. 2-4. 40: PG 35, 859-866. 910)

Let us embrace the poor with love and benevolence

Mutual love is a beautiful thing of which we have the witness of Jesus, who was not only pleased to be called our brother, but for our salvation suffered even death. Good will toward men and women is a beautiful thing; and here again we have the witness of Jesus, who not only created human beings as one of his good works, but impressed his likeness on them as a means of leading them to do what is best, indeed supremely good; even, for our sake, becoming himself like us.

Humility is a beautiful thing; and there are many examples of it at hand; but surpassing all of them is that of our Saviour and Lord, who not only lowered himself to the condition of a slave, but even offered his face to be spat upon and allowed himself to be ranked with the impious; and this was he who made expiation for the filthiness of the world's sins, and who, moreover, as if a servant, washed his disciples' feet.

Being poor, coupled with a detached attitude toward money, is a beautiful thing; and Zacchaeus bears witness to this; so too does Christ. The former, when Christ entered his house ' offered him the gift of almost his entire wealth; the latter, when he counselled the rich young man to seek perfection by these means.

If I may add briefly to these thoughts, I would say that contemplation is a beautiful thing; so too is action; the former, mounting up from this world and striving to enter the holy of holies, restoring our mind to its original state; the latter, striving to follow and serve Christ, expressing the abundance of its love by means of good works.

If, according to the teaching and authority of Paul, indeed of Christ himself, charity must be reckoned the chief end of the law and the prophets, the first and greatest of the commandments, then, from this, I gather the following: an important part of it consists in surrounding the poor with love and benevolence; also in being concerned about and grieving over the misfortunes of our relatives. No external act of worship is as pleasing to God as works of mercy. I say this because there is nothing more appropriate to God, for mercy and truth lead the way before him, and he prefers mercy to stern judgment. It is in exchange for kindness that he weighs out kindness. He always gives just measure, but makes merciful love his measure and weight.

Furthermore, we are told to rejoice with those who rejoice and to be sad with those in sorrow. We must, then, be generous to all poor people, having compassion on them, no matter what the reason is for their miseries and troubles. We ourselves are human and it is to other persons that we must first discharge our debt of kindness. They may be in need for many different reasons: the loss of a spouse, a parent, or their country; the severity of their employers, the harshness of government officials, the heartless insistence of

the collector of taxes, the violence of thieves, the forfeiture of possessions, the insatiable rapacity of burglars; or their property may have been lost at sea. All alike are the victims of

misfortune, and they look to us for help, just as we look to God when we need help. So, dear Christians, brothers and sisters of Christ and joint heirs with him, listen to me. Let us take every opportunity to visit Christ, to nurse hi, to bandage his wounds, to feed and clothe him, every respect. The Lord of all does not want sacrifice he wants love; and love is worth more than countless fat lambs. Let us, then, show this love to him in the person of the poor, so that when we leave this world they may welcome us into our eternal abode, in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

RESPONSORY

See Matthew 9:13; 11:28

V. Learn what this means: I want mercy and not sacrifice.

R. I have come to call not the just, but sinners, alleluia.

V. Come to me, all who labour and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.

R. I have come to call not the just but sinners, alleluia.

Alternative.

From the Life of Blessed Francis of Siena by Fra Christopher of Parma (Nn. 6-9. 14. 30: Monumenta OSM, V, pp. 24-25. 28. 34)

He chose the glorious Virgin as his Mother and sole Lady

Francis chose the glorious Virgin as his special mother and Lady; he so revered her in his mind and heart that. he never called her anything but Lady. He would genuflect before her image five hundred times a day. He recited the Hail Mary and other praises of the glorious Virgin and prayed that the lily of his own virginity would never be uprooted. He fervently sought humility of heart, patience in adversity and strength to overcome the temptations of the devil. He made his flesh serve his 'spirit and, with plaintive cries, dashed the passions that allured him against the rock which is Christ and the glorious Virgin, his Lady. He washed away with tears and sighs those venial sins that sometimes crept into his mind. He wore a hair shirt and used the discipline.

When his mother died, he was free of worldly obligations and thought to carry out the plan in his heart. He would have retired to solitary life in service o t e Creator and the glorious Virgin, his Lady, but they had determined otherwise. He had frequently pondered in his heart the words: "Flee worldly company," and the Holy Spirit gave him to understand that it was imitation of the vices of others, not contact with them, that was sinful. On the contrary, contact with people could be more meritorious if by his words and the example of his life he could save them from the wiles of the devil. Those who walked as wild beasts in the dangerous paths of the world, lost in vice through the devil's deceit, he would lead to the path of holiness.

Francis, the servant of God, like the prophets, understood that the Lord was speaking within him. Following this inspiration, he decided to enter religious life immediately. There, under obedience, with nothing of his own, he could imitate the poor Christ and the glorious Virgin. In the flower of his virginity and purity, his service to the Virgin Mother and her Son would be more pleasing. At the age of twenty-two, Francis, already a servant of the Virgin, entered the Order of her Servants. The outcome was to show how happy was his choice. Among his brothers in community there are many who bear witness to his perfection which found favour with the Lord of all virtue. The servant of God rejoiced when he realized that Divine Grace shone forth in him. He became more fervent in serving God; he was the exclusive possession of the glorious Virgin; day and night he meditated on the law of the Lord and on how to improve in virtue. Never, except when seriously ill, would he lie down on a soft bed; even when half-dead he reclined on boards or on the ground, placing a small cushion under his head. When sleep overcame him, day or night, he would rise immediately and run to the oratory he had erected in his cell with an image of the glorious Virgin. Over and above the required "Hours," he continually and devoutly repeated the Hail Mary and other praises of the Blessed Virgin.

After celebrating Mass (on Ascension Day, 1328), he was completely exhausted and could

barely stand up. Nonetheless he had to go to preach in a town called Prisciano near Siena. He knelt before the prior and asked his blessing and the absolution of all his sins. He asked the prior to place the walking stick in his hand. The prior refused this act of profound reverence, for he knew not what had happened, and was unaware of the Lord's secret. Francis said, "Father, I do not know when I will ever again be able to ask your blessing." With his remaining strength he set out, sustained by the walking stick and a friar who accompanied him. When the servant of God had gone a stone's throw from the city gate, his strength abandoned him and he fell to his knees and said, " I love you, O Lord my strength, O God my firmament, my refuge and my liberator." Since the Had Mary was always on his lips he added: "Had Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. " Then with the help of his companion, he tried to continue, obedient even unto death.

RESPONSORY See John 19:26-27; Sirach 3:5

V. When Jesus saw his mother standing beside the cross with the disciple whom he loved, he said to her: "Woman, behold your son." Then he said to the disciple: "Behold you mother."

R. From that hour he received her into his home, alleluia.

V. Whoever cherishes his mother is like one who stores up treasure.

R. From that hour he received her into his home, alleluia.

Prayer, as in Morning Prayer.

Morning Prayer

CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH

Ant. Seek the Lord, all you gentle of the earth, you who have lived justly. Seek his justice and his gentleness, alleluia.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, instil in us the gifts of piety and gentleness like those of your servant, Francis. These qualities of heart made him remarkable in his devotion to the Mother of Jesus and gave him the ability to lead others to holiness, We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Evening Prayer

CANTICLE OF MARY

Ant. Francis, the servant of God, at the hour of his death, quietly whispered: "All things are finished. In peace may I sleep and rest, alleluia."

Note: Some biblical texts are taken from: The New American Bible <http://www.vatican.va/archives/>