

## Transitus Service 2019

(TL Michael Auman)

*(Setting: A Capuchin habit is laid out on the floor in front of the altar, outlined by vigil lights. A tray with a loaf of bread is on the altar. The Paschal Candle is lit. The chapel is dimly lighted, and Gregorian chant is playing softly as individuals enter the chapel.)*

**Presider:** Tonight is a night when we— and all who cherish the memory of St. Francis— gather to remember and tell stories. As we reflect on the simple and faith-filled words of our brother Francis in the Cantic of the Creatures, we call to mind the joy and gratitude with which he lived his life, always conscious of that life of God that surrounds us in each of our brothers and sisters and in all of creation.

**Reader 1:** Francis himself had become a savior, a second Christ, with visible certification of his likeness to Jesus engraved in his hands and feet, in a manner never seen before. The Franciscan coat of arms has proudly mirrored this lofty claim for centuries; it shows two crossed forearms, the naked one belonging to Christ and the one clothed in the sleeve of a monk's tunic belonging to Francis. Both hands are marked with the wounds of the Crucified.

This representation is extremely daring from the standpoint of church dogma. Contrary to the usual stress on Christ's divine superiority, it suggests an equality between the two individuals.

The oldest account of how Francis' stigmata became publicly known comes from Thomas of Celano. It is found in his first biography of Francis from the year 1229, along with his description of the events following Francis' death in the year 1226.

According to Celano, Francis' body was first laid out in the Portiuncula chapel, and the population of Assisi and the surrounding area streamed out there in a crowd. What they got to see caused a sensation: "He seemed as though he had been recently taken down from the cross, his hands and feet were pierced as though by nails and his side wounded as though by a lance."

This kind of stigmata, once one gets a good view of it, proves to be a rich subject. We broach it because of Francis' striking predilection for the true stigmatics of his day. His overcoming of disgust at the lepers marked the decisive turning point in his life. From then on he moved by preference among social outcasts and the lowest classes. He chose the stigma of poverty.

Then all this was taken away from him when they transformed his fellowship of beggars to an officially recognized Order. Francis knew that doctoral robes and cardinals' capes would be awaiting the Friars Minor as soon as he was dead and buried. What could he do?

The five wounds that Francis bore were a body sermon which proclaimed two things: first, his abiding desire to stay on the side of the people who went about their whole lives with various stigmas: beggars, criminals, or lepers. Second, Francis' body revealed how much he himself had been injured and humiliated against his will, branded as a loser in his context with the powerful, and clearly conscious of his impotence.

The stigmata are entirely his creation. They belong to him as the finished work of art belongs to the artist who made it. Francis has now finally become like the figure of Christ at the Last Supper that filled him with such tenderness and blissful devotion. The Savior's gesture of self-donation in offering himself as food to the community of brothers signifies precisely that unlimited openness to others which we find so difficult and at

the same time so desirable. Bourgeois loneliness, with its acquisitive ego, found an ideal image “in those days,” and since then it carries it around everywhere, looking for redemption like the wondering Jew.

## Homily

**Reader 2:** Thomas of Celano, wrote: “After Francis had rested a few days in that place so dear to him, knowing that the time of his approaching death was at hand; he summoned two friars who were his especially beloved sons.

While the brothers were weeping very bitterly and grieving inconsolably, the holy man commanded that bread be brought to him. He blessed and broke it and gave a small piece of it to each one to eat. He was recalling that most holy supper which the Lord celebrated as his last supper with his disciples. He did all of this in reverent memory of that supper, showing thereby the deep love he had for his brothers.

## Breaking of bread

*Presider holds up the loaf of bread in silence; then places on the altar and begins to break it. Reader 1 then picks up the tray and holds it for the presider as he continues to break bread and distribute to the congregation as they approach him. (Soft piano music is played during this time)*

**Reader 2:** This is the story they tell: As the companions stood around his bed, Francis struggled to his feet and sat down on the floor. Then he took off his clothes, and remained sitting there, naked on the ground. He laid his left hand over the scar in his right side so that no one could see it. Then he said: “Forgive me, but it must be. I hope God inspires you now to do what is right.”

The companions began to cry. One of them, who was responsible for Francis at the time, realized that Francis wanted to strip off even the clothing that the Rule allowed him. So he took the tunic and the drawers and said: “Francis, I’m now lending you this tunic and the underwear. Don’t you dare give them away, because they don’t belong to you.”

Francis folded his hands and agreed. Then he said: “You know now how I wish to die. As soon as death occurs, you must undress me just as I did before, lay me on the ground, and let me lie there for as much time as it takes to walk a mile.” As soon as the time arrived, the companions did just as Francis had desired of them, just before his death.

Francis then commanded that a hair shirt be put upon him, and that he be sprinkled with ashes, for he was soon to become dust and ashes. Then, when many brothers had gathered about, whose brother and leader he was, and while they were standing reverently at his side awaiting his blessed death and happy end, his most holy soul was freed from his body and received into the abyss of light, and his body fell asleep in the Lord.

As Francis died, an exaltation of larks is said to have flown over his hut, singing.

## Psalm 142 is sung

**CANTOR:** With all my voice I cry to you, O God;

**ALL:** with all my voice I entreat you.

**CANTOR:** I pour out my troubles before you;

**ALL:** I tell you all my distress.

**CANTOR:** While my Spirit faints within me,

**ALL:** but you, O God, know my path.

**CANTOR:** On the way where I shall walk,

**ALL:** they have hidden a snare to entrap me.

**CANTOR:** Look on my right and see,  
**ALL:** there is not one who takes my side.

**CANTOR:** I have no means of escape,  
**ALL:** no one cares what happens to me.

**CANTOR:** I cry to you, O Lord,  
**ALL:** I have said: You are my refuge.

**CANTOR:** Listen, then, to my plea,  
**ALL:** for I am in the depth of distress.

**CANTOR:** Rescue me from those who pursue me,  
**ALL:** for they are stronger than I.

**CANTOR:** Bring me out of this prison,  
**ALL:** and I shall praise your name.

**CANTOR:** The saints will assemble around me,  
**ALL:** because of your goodness to me.

**CANTOR:** Give glory to God the Creator,  
**ALL:** who made both heaven and earth,

**CANTOR:** To Jesus, the Christ, the Lord,  
**ALL:** whose dying and rising have saved us,

**CANTOR:** To the Spirit who dwells in our midst,  
**ALL:** both now and forever. Amen.

**CANTOR:** With all my voice I cry to you, O God;  
**ALL:** with all my voice I entreat you.

### Prayers of the Faithful

**Presider:** The call to rebuild God's house and embrace the leper continues in service to God's people, in ministries both new and old. We pray now that the light of Christ will continue to inspire compassionate service to God's people.

**Reader 1:** For Pope Francis, all our bishops and priests, brother friars and nuns, sisters and seculars, may we always follow the calling of the Lord to rebuild His house, the Church...let us pray to the Lord...

For the Church, may she expose and untangle the errors of this age and always seek God's truth... let us pray to the Lord....

For those who come to us seeking relief from their sufferings, either bodily or spiritually, let us always ease their pain and feed their souls... let us pray to the Lord...

For those who exist on the margins of life, let us help them to gain dignity through prayer; food and shelter by help with resources; and love by personal contact and relationships... let us pray to the Lord...

For the young who seek a life filled with the love of God, let us share the gifts of our Franciscan charism and journey with them to knowing Christ... let us pray to the Lord....

For those whose physical pain leads them to despair and for those whose illnesses are channels of your love, may we always be there to bring them hope... let us pray to the Lord...

For those who have died, like Francis and Clare before us, may we all joyfully meet Sister Death, knowing that the Lord awaits us... let us pray to the Lord...

### Presider: Closing prayer

Praise and bless my Lord and given Him thanks and serve him with great humility.

May the Lord bless us an keep us.

Amen

May God's face shine upon us and be gracious to us.

Amen

May the Lord look upon us kindly and give us peace.

Amen

### **Hymn: All Creatures of Our God and King**

All creatures of our God and King

Lift up your voice and with us sing

O praise Him, Alleluia

Thou burning sun with golden beam

Thou silver moon with softer gleam

O praise Him, O praise Him

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia

Thou rushing wind that art so strong

Ye clouds that sail in Heaven along

O praise Him, Alleluia

Thou rising moon in praise rejoice

Ye lights of evening find a voice

O praise Him, O praise Him

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia

Let all things their Creator bless,

and worship him in humbleness,

O praise him, alleluia!

Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,

and praise the Spirit, three in one.

O praise him, O praise him,

alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

*Nota bene: Readings not referenced in context are taken from "The Last Christian: A Biography of Francis of Assisi," by Adolf Holl.*