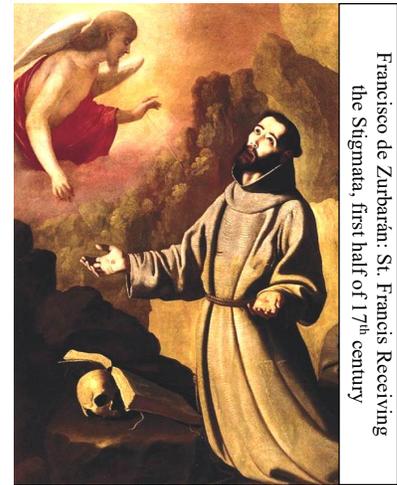


THE STIGMATA

Our Opening Prayer:

“The next day came, that is, the Feast of the Cross. And St. Francis, sometime before dawn, began to pray outside the entrance of his cell, turning his face toward the east. And he prayed in this way: ‘My Lord Jesus Christ, I pray You to grant me two graces before I die: the first is that during my life I may feel in my soul and in my body, as much as possible, that pain which You, dear Jesus, sustained in the hour of Your most bitter Passion. The second is that I may feel in my heart, as much as possible, that excessive love with which You, O Son of God, were inflamed in willingly enduring such suffering for us sinners.’”¹



In the ruggedness of the craggy terrain of rocky Mount La Verna, some 60 miles northwest of Assisi, some 40 miles east of Florence, along the Apennine spine of Italy lies the site given by Count Orlando to St. Francis and the friars as a place of meditation and contemplation. Francis and other friars often went there – not for luxury or comfort, but for the isolation and fraternity conducive to deep prayer. Over the years, many came to La Verna to pray in the spirit of St. Francis. For example, friar St. Anthony of Padua spent some time there, as did friar St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio.

Here took place the miraculous marking of St. Francis in his ultimate identification with Christ – his stigmata (stig'-ma-ta) with the sacred wounds of Christ in his crucifixion – the four marks in hands, feet, and the wound in the side.

Thomas of Celano reports: “While he [Francis] was staying in that hermitage called La Verna, after the place where it is located, two years prior to the time that he returned his soul to heaven, he saw in the vision of God a man, having six wings like a Seraph, standing over him, arms extended and feet joined, affixed to a cross. Two of his wings were raised up, two were stretched out over his head as if for flight, and two covered his whole body. When the blessed servant of the most High saw these things, he was filled with the greatest awe, but could not decide what this vision meant for him. Moreover, he greatly rejoiced and was much delighted by the kind and gracious look that he saw the Seraph gave him. The Seraph’s beauty was beyond comprehension, but the fact that the Seraph was fixed to the cross and the bitter suffering of that passion thoroughly frightened him. Consequently, he got up both sad and happy as joy and sorrow took their turns in his heart. Concerned over the matter, he kept thinking about what this vision could mean and his spirit was anxious to discern a sensible meaning from the vision.

“While he was unable to perceive anything clearly understandable from the vision, its newness very much pressed upon his heart. Signs of the nails began to appear on his hands and feet, just as he had seen them a little while earlier on the crucified man hovering over him.

“His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the middle by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on the inner part of his hands and on the upper part of his feet, and their points protruding on opposite sides. Those marks on the inside of his hands were round, but rather oblong on the outside; and small pieces of flesh were visible like the points of nails, bent over and flattened, extending beyond the flesh around them. On his feet, the marks of nails were stamped in the same way and raised above the surrounding flesh. His right side was marked with an oblong scar, as if pierced with a lance, and this often dripped blood, so that his tunic and undergarments were frequently stained with his holy blood. ...

“He hid those marks carefully from strangers, and concealed them cautiously from people close to him, so that even the brothers at his side and his most devoted followers for a long time did not know about them.

“Although the servant and friend of the Most High saw himself adorned with such magnificent pearls, like precious stones, and marvelously decorated beyond the glory and honor of all others, still his heart did not grow vain. He did not seek to use this to make himself appealing to anyone in a desire for vainglory. Rather in every way possible he tried to hide these marks, so that human favor would not rob him of the grace given him.

“He would never or rarely reveal his great secret to anyone. He feared that his special friends would reveal it to show their intimacy with him, as friends often do, and he would then lose some of the grace given to him. He always carried in his heart and often had on his lips the saying of the prophet: ‘I have hidden your words in my heart to avoid any sin against You.’ (Ps. 119:11)”²

These wounds were not just “tattoo” markings on St. Francis’ body. These were painful wounds, with nails imbedded. These were not five marks of wounds just painted on; they pierced his flesh. We have to realize that from this time, and for two years, the ongoing pain that resulted was in Francis’ every step, him walking anywhere, his moving about, and handling anything.

These wounds serve as a witness of:

- a) Christ’s confirmation and approval of St. Francis to his society (and to us).
- b) St. Francis’ total mirroring of and identification with Jesus.
- c) St. Francis’ total love of Jesus.

We recall with devotion each year this Stigmata of our Seraphic Father with a Franciscan Feast on September 17.



- Q1. Identifying with Christ – Is this the real goal of life? How much effort do I put into this?
- Q2. Can my acceptance of pain I cannot avoid have a purifying role in my life? If I unite my sufferings to Christ’s, can it ease my pain as well?
- Q3. What is MY sense of appreciation for all the things that the Word Made Flesh has suffered for me?
- Q4. What do I think of St. Francis’ expression “Love is not loved”? This reflection led Francis to tears, as we see expressed in the “Chapel of Tears” near the Portiuncula. [See Topic 2]
- Q5. Why do I think St. Francis would make such a prayer that we prayed as *Our Opening Prayer*?
- Q6. How does the Way of the Cross [the Stations] or the Pieta bring me to a closer appreciation of Christ’s sacrifices for me?

In addition, you might want to read these descriptions of the Stigmata: FA:ED, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 1232 – 1235, Speyer, Vol. I, pp. 410 – 411, vs. 61-63; FA:ED, *The Legend of the Three Companions*, 1241 – 1247, Vol. II, p. 108, v. 69; and FA:ED, *The Minor Legend of Saint Francis*, 1260-1263, Bonaventure, Vol. II, pp. 709 – 713, Chapter 6.

¹ *Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, R. Brown, 1958, p. 190

² FA:ED, *The Life of Saint Francis, Second Book*, 1228-1229, Vol. I, pp. 263-265, Chapter III: The Vision of a Man Having the Image of a Crucified Seraph, vs. 94-95