

Chapter VII

HOW HE CAME TO ASSISI FROM SIENA AND CONCERNING THE CHURCH OF SAINT MARY OF THE PORTIUNCULA AND THE BLESSING OF THE BROTHERS

Six months before the day of his death, he was staying in Siena for treatment of his eye disease. But then all the rest of his body started to show signs of serious illness. His stomach had been destroyed, and his liver was failing. He was vomiting a lot of blood, so much that he seemed close to death. On hearing of this in a place far away, brother Elias rushed to his side. At his arrival the holy father had recovered so much that they left that area and went together to Le Celle near Cortona.^a After reaching the place he *stayed for a while*, but then the swelling began in his abdomen, his legs, and his feet. [Mt 25:5](#) His stomach became so weak that he could hardly eat any food at all. At that point, he asked brother Elias to have him carried to Assisi. The good son did what the kind father commanded and, when everything was ready, led him to the place he longed for. *The city rejoiced at the arrival* of the blessed father and all the people with one voice *praised God*, [Dn 3:51](#) since *the whole multitude of the people* hoped that *the holy one of God* would die close to them, and this was the reason for such great rejoicing.

¹⁰⁶ And so it was also the *will of God* [Jb 26:11](#)
that his holy soul, freed from the flesh,
would pass over to *the kingdom of heaven* [Mt 3:2](#)
from that place
where, while *still living in the flesh*, [Phil 1:24](#)
he had first been given the knowledge of higher things
and had the oil of salvation poured out upon him.

He knew that the *kingdom of heaven* [Mt 5:3](#)
was established in every *corner of the earth*
and he believed that divine grace was given
to *God's chosen ones* [Rom 8:33](#) in every place.
Yet he knew from his own experience
that the place of the church of Saint Mary of the
Portiuncula
was especially full of grace
and 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 driven out from one side,
go back in from the other,
for this *is truly a holy place* [Eph 1:18](#)
and *the dwelling place of God*. [1 Chr 29:1](#)
Here the Most High increased our numbers
when we were only a few; [Ez 42:13](#)
here He *enlightened the hearts* [1 Chr 16:19](#) 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, *God's dwelling*,
as worthy of all honor
and here praise God ^{Jer 29:13}
in cries of joy and praise ^{Ps 42:5 [Vulgate, Ps 41:5]}
with your whole heart. ^{Jer 29:13}

¹⁰⁷ As his illness grew worse, he lost all bodily strength, and deprived of all his powers, he could not even move. One of the brothers asked him what he would prefer to endure: this long-lasting illness or suffering a martyr's cruel death at the hands of an executioner. "My son," he replied, "whatever is *more pleasing to the Lord my God* to do with me and in me has always been and still is dearer, sweeter, and more agreeable to me. I desire to be found always and completely in harmony with and obedient to God's will alone in everything. But to suffer this illness, even for three days, would be harder for me than any martyrdom. I am not speaking about its reward but only of the *pain* and suffering *it causes.*" ^{Dn 3:50}

O martyr,
martyr laughing and rejoicing,
who endured so gladly
what was bitter and painful
for others to see!

Not one of his members remained without great pain and suffering; his bodily warmth gradually diminished, and each day he drew closer to his end. The doctors were amazed and the brothers were astonished that the spirit could live in flesh so dead, since with *his flesh all consumed* only skin *clung to his bones.* ^{Jb 19:20}

¹⁰⁸ When he saw his final day drawing near,
as shown to him two years earlier by divine revelation,
he *called to him* the brothers he *chose.* ^{Mk 3:13}
He blessed each one as it was *given* to him *from above,* ^{Jn 19:11}
just as Jacob of old, the patriarch, blessed his sons.
He was like another Moses
about *to ascend the mountain*
that the Lord had shown ^{Dt 32:49} him,
when imparting blessings on the children of Israel.

When brother Elias sat down on his left side with the other brothers around him, the blessed father crossed his arms and *placed his right hand on Elias' head.* ^{Gn 48:14} He had lost the sight and use of his bodily eyes, so he asked: "Over whom am I holding my right hand?" "Over brother Elias," they replied. "And this is what I wish to do," he said, "I bless you, my son, *in all and through all,* ^{Eph 4:6} and just as the most High has increased my brothers and sons in your hands, so too, upon you and in you, I bless them all. May the king of all *bless you in heaven and on earth.* I bless you as I can, and more than I can, and what I cannot do may the One who can do all things do in you. *May God remember* ^{Dn 14:37} your work and

labors, and may a place be reserved for you among *the rewards of the just*. [Heb 2:2](#) May you receive every blessing you desire and may your every worthy request be fulfilled.”

“Good-bye, all my sons. Live *in the fear of God* [Eccl 9:22](#) and remain in Him always, for a great *test* will come upon you and tribulation is drawing near! Happy are those *who will persevere* [Mt 10:22](#) in what they have begun: many will be separated from them by the scandals that are to come. But

now I am hurrying to the Lord *and I am confident that I am going to my God* whom I have served in my spirit.”

He was staying then in the palace of the bishop of Assisi, and he asked the brothers to carry him quickly to the place of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula. For he wanted to give back his soul to God in that place where, as noted above, he first came to know perfectly *the way of truth*.

Chapter VIII WHAT HE DID AND SAID AT HIS BLESSED DEATH

¹⁰⁹ Twenty years had now passed since his conversion, and his time was ending just as it had been shown to him by God’s will. For, once the blessed father and brother Elias were staying at Foligno, and one night while they were sleeping, a priest of venerable appearance and great age dressed in white clothing appeared to brother Elias. “Get up, brother,” he said, “and tell brother Francis that eighteen years have passed since he renounced the world and clung to Christ. He will remain in this life only two more years; then he will go *the way of all flesh when the Lord calls* him to Himself.” So it came to pass that, at the established time, the *word of the Lord* spoken long before now was fulfilled. [2 Chr 36:21](#)

After he had rested a few days in that place he so longed for, knowing *the time* of his death *was close at hand*, he called to him two brothers, his special sons, and told them to sing *The Praises of the Lord* [Heb 9:9](#) with a loud voice and joyful spirit, rejoicing at his approaching death, or rather at the life that was so near.^a He himself, as best he could, broke into that psalm of David: “*With a loud voice I cried to the Lord; with a loud voice I beseeched the Lord.*”

There was a brother there whom the holy man loved with great affection. Seeing what was happening and realizing the saint was nearing the end, he grew very concerned about all the brothers and said: “Oh, kind father, your sons will now be *without a father*, [Lam 5:3](#) and will be deprived of *the true light* [1 Jn 2:8](#) of their eyes! Remember the orphans you are leaving behind;^b forgive all their faults, and gladden them all, whether present or absent, with your holy blessing.” The holy man answered: “See, my son, I am being called by God. I forgive all my brothers, present and absent, all their faults and offenses, and I absolve them insofar as I am able. When you give them this message, bless them all for me.”

¹¹⁰ Then he ordered the book of the Gospels to be brought in. He asked that the Gospel according to John be read to him, starting with the passage that begins: *Six days before the Passover*, [Jn 12:1](#) Jesus, knowing that the hour had

come for him to pass from this world to the Father. [Jn 13:1 a](#) This was the very gospel his minister had planned to read, even before he was told to do so; that was the passage that met his eye as he first opened the book, although he had the complete Bible from which to read the gospel. Then he told them to cover him with sackcloth and to sprinkle him with ashes, as he was soon to become *dust and ashes*.

Many brothers *gathered* there, for whom *he was* [Dt 31:11](#) both father and *leader*. They stood there reverently, all awaiting his blessed *departure* [Acts 14:11](#) and happy *end*. [Sir 33:24](#) And then that most holy soul was released from the flesh, and as it was absorbed into the abyss of light, his body *fell asleep in the Lord*. [Acts 7:60](#)

One of his brothers and followers, a man of some fame, whose name I will conceal for now since he does not wish to glory in such fame while still *living in the flesh*, [Gal 2:20](#) saw the soul of the most holy father *rise straight to heaven over many waters*. It was *like a star* [Sir 50:6](#) but as big as the moon, with the *brilliance of the sun*, [1 Cor 15:41](#) and *carried up upon a small white cloud*. [Rv 14:14 b](#)

¹¹¹ Let me cry out therefore:
"O what a glorious saint he is!
His disciple saw his soul *ascending into heaven*:
beautiful as the moon,
bright as the sun,
glowing brilliantly as it ascended upon a white cloud!
O true *lamp* of the world,
shining more brilliantly than the sun in the *Church of Christ*!
Now, you have withdrawn the rays of your light,
as you withdraw into that luminous homeland.

You have exchanged our poor *company*
for that of *the angels* [Heb 12:22](#) and saints!
In your glorious goodness and great renown,
do not put aside care for your sons,
though you have put aside flesh like theirs.

You know, you truly know,
the danger in which you have left them;
for it was your blessed presence alone
that always mercifully relieved
their countless labors and frequent troubles!

O truly merciful and most holy father,
you were always kind and ready
to show mercy and forgive your sinful sons!

We bless you therefore, worthy father,
as you *have been blessed* by the Most High,
Who is God over all things blessed forever. Amen.

Chapter IX
THE LAMENT OF THE BROTHERS AND THEIR JOY WHEN THEY
PERCEIVED THAT FRANCIS BORE THE SIGNS OF THE CROSS IN HIS
BODY AND ABOUT THE WINGS OF THE SERAPH

At Francis's death,
a whole crowd of people praising God
came together and said: [Lk 2:13](#)
"You, our Lord and God, be praised and blessed,
for you have given us unworthy ones so precious a remnant!
Praise and glory to you, O ineffable Trinity!"

The whole city [Mt 8:34](#) of Assisi rushed down *as a group* and *the entire region* hurried to see *the wonderful works of God* which *the Lord of majesty* [Is 2:10](#) gloriously displayed in his holy servant. Each person burst into a song of joy at the urging of a *joyful heart*, [Lam 5:15](#) and all of them had their *desire fulfilled* [Phil 4:19](#) and blessed the almighty Savior. Still his sons were mourning, bereft of so great a father, and showed the deep feeling of their hearts in groaning and tears.

Then incredible joy lightened their grief!
A new miracle
turned their minds to amazement.
Their mourning turned [Est 13:17](#) into song,
their weeping to jubilation.
For they had never heard or read in Scripture
about what their eyes could see:
they could not have been persuaded to believe it
if it were not demonstrated by such clear evidence.
In fact,
there appeared in him
the form of the cross and passion
of the spotless lamb [1 Pt 1:19](#)
who washed away the sins of the world. [Rv 1:5](#)
It seemed
he had just been taken down from the cross,
his hands and feet pierced by nails
and his right *side*
wounded *by a lance.* [Jn 19:34](#)

They looked at his skin which was black before but now shining white in its beauty, promising the rewards of the blessed resurrection. They saw *his face* like *the face of an angel*, [Acts 6:15](#) as if he were not dead, but alive. All his limbs had become as soft and moveable as in childhood innocence. His muscles were not taut, as they usually are in the dead, his skin was not hard, his limbs were not rigid but could be easily moved back and forth.

¹¹³ *All the people* [Ex 33:10](#) saw him glowing with remarkable beauty and his flesh became even whiter than before. It was even more wonderful for them to see in the middle of his hands and feet not just the holes of the nails, but the nails

themselves formed by his own flesh, retaining the dark color of iron, and his right side red with blood. These signs of martyrdom did not provoke horror, but added great beauty and grace, like little black stones in a white pavement.

His brothers and sons hurried to him and, weeping together, kissed the hands, the feet, and the right side of their dear father who had left them. The wound in his side made them remember the One who poured out *blood and water* from His own side and *reconciled the world* to the Father.

People considered it a great gift to be allowed to kiss or even to see the sacred *marks of Jesus Christ* which Saint Francis bore in his own body. [Gal 6:17](#)

And seeing them,
who would not be moved to joy rather than tears?

And if moved to tears,
would that not be more

from gladness than sadness?

Whose heart would be so iron-hard
that it would not be moved to groan?

Whose *heart* would be so much *like stone* [Ez 11:19](#)

that it would not break with sorrow,
that it would not burn with divine love

or would not be strengthened with good will?

Who would be so dull-witted and senseless
as not to realize the obvious truth?

He is a saint!

If he was so honored with a unique gift on earth,
he must *be exalted* with unspeakable glory *in heaven*. [Is 33:5](#)

¹¹⁴ This is a unique gift,
a sign of special love:

to decorate the soldier with the same arms of glory
that in their great dignity belong to the King alone!^a

This is a miracle worthy of *everlasting remembrance* [Ps 112:7 \[Vulgate, Ps 111:7\]](#)

and a sacrament to be remembered
with unceasing and wondering reverence.

It presents to the eyes of faith
that mystery in which *the blood of the spotless lamb*, [1 Pt 1:19](#)
flowing abundantly through the five wounds,
washed away the sins [Rv 1:5](#) *of the world*.

O sublime splendor of the living cross,
giving life to the dead!

Its burden presses so lightly and hurts so sweetly
that through it dead flesh lives
and the weak spirit grows strong.

You have made radiantly beautiful
this man who *loved* [Lk 7:47](#) *You so much!*

Glory and blessing to God,
who alone is wise,

and gives new signs and works new wonders [Sir 36:6](#)
to console the weak with revelations
and to raise their hearts to the love of things unseen
through wonderful works [Ps 139:14 \[Vulgate, Ps 138:14\]](#) that are seen.^a
O wonderful and loving plan of God!
To allay suspicion about the newness of this miracle,
there first appeared mercifully in the One *from heaven*
what later appeared wondrously in the one who lived on earth.
The true *Father of mercies* [2 Cor 1:3](#)
wanted to show how worthy of reward is the one
who strives to love Him *with his whole heart*; [Mt 22:37](#)
worthy to be placed closer to Himself
in the highest order of supercelestial spirits

We too will certainly be able to reach these heights if, like the Seraphim,
we *spread two wings over our heads*: that is, following blessed Francis's example,
in every good work we have a pure intention and upright conduct, and, directing
these to God, we strive untiringly to please God alone in all things.^c These two
wings must be joined for us to cover our heads because *the Father of lights* will
not accept our activity as upright without a pure intention nor vice versa, since He
says: *If your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is
evil, your whole body will be full of darkness.* That eye is *not sound* if it does not
see what should be seen, because it does not know the truth, or if it looks at what
should not be seen, because it does not have a pure intention. An open mind will
judge neither as sound; the first is blind and the second evil. *The feathers of the
wings* are the love of the saving and merciful Father and the *fear of the Lord*, [Sir
1:11](#) the terrible judge. These lift the souls of the chosen above things of earth
while restraining evil thoughts and ordering chaste affections.

The *other two wings* [Is 6:2](#) are for flying: showing a double charity to our neighbor,
refreshing the soul with the *word of God* [Lk 4:4](#) and nourishing the body with
material aid. These *wings* are rarely *joined together*, [Ez 1:11](#) since one person could
hardly do both. The *feathers* of these wings are varied works of counsel and help
offered to our neighbor.

The last *two wings* are *to cover the body* [Ez 1:11](#) that is bare of merits. This happens
regularly as it is stripped naked whenever sin breaks in, but is then clothed again
in innocence through contrition and confession. The feathers of these wings are
the wide range of affections arising from hatred of sin and developing a longing for
justice.

¹¹⁵ Our blessed father Francis fulfilled all these things completely: he had both the
image and the form of the Seraph and, remaining on the cross, he merited to fly
away to the highest order of spirits. He was always upon his cross, never shirking
labor or pain, fulfilling to the utmost the Lord's will in and about himself.

The brothers who lived with him know
that daily, constantly, talk of Jesus was always on his lips,
sweet and pleasant [Ez 33:32](#) conversations about Him,
kind words full of love.

Out of the fullness of the heart his mouth spoke. [Mt 12:34](#)

So the spring of radiant love that filled his heart within
gushed forth.

He was always with Jesus:

Jesus in his heart,
Jesus in his mouth,
Jesus in his ears,
Jesus in his eyes,
Jesus in his hands,

he bore Jesus always in his whole body.

Often he sat down to dinner
but on hearing or saying or even thinking "Jesus"
he forgot bodily food,

as we read about another saint:

"Seeing, he did not see; hearing, he did not hear."^a

Often as he walked along a road,
thinking and singing of Jesus,
he would forget his destination
and start inviting all the elements to praise Jesus.

With amazing love he bore
in his heart and always held onto [Lk 2:19](#)
Christ Jesus and Him crucified. [1 Cor 2:2](#)

For this reason,

he, above others, was stamped with Christ's brilliant seal
as, in *rapture of spirit*, [2 Cor 5:13](#)

he contemplated in unspeakable and incomprehensible glory
the One sitting "at the right hand of the Father,"
the Most High *Son of the Most High*, [Lk 1:32](#)

Who, with the Father, "in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
lives and reigns," conquers and commands,
God eternally glorified *throughout all the ages*.

Amen.

Chapter X

THE MOURNING OF THE LADIES AT SAN DAMIANO AND HOW HE WAS BURIED WITH PRAISE AND GLORY

His brothers and sons had assembled with *the whole multitude of people* [Ez 27:33](#) from the neighboring cities, rejoicing to take part in such solemn rites. They spent that entire night of the holy father's death in the praises of God. The sweet sound of jubilation and the brightness of the lights made it seem that angels were keeping vigil.

When day was breaking, the multitude of the city of Assisi *gathered* with all the clergy. They lifted his sacred body from the place where he had died and carried it with great honor to the city, singing hymns and praises with trumpets blaring. *They all took branches* [Jos 6:20](#) of olive and *other trees* and solemnly followed the funeral procession, bringing even more candles as they sang songs of praise in loud voices.

With the sons carrying their father and the flock following the shepherd who was hastening to *the Shepherd of them all*, [Ez 37:24](#) he arrived at the place where he first planted the religion and the Order of the consecrated virgins and Poor Ladies. They laid him out in the church of San Damiano, home to those daughters he gained for the Lord. The small window was opened, the one used by these servants of Christ *at the appointed time* [2 Sm 24:15](#) to receive the sacrament of the Lord's body. The coffin was also opened: in it lay hidden the treasure of supercelestial powers; in it he who had carried many was now carried by a few.

The Lady Clare!

Clearly a woman of true brilliance and holiness, the first mother of all the others,
the first plant of that holy Order:
she comes with her daughters to see the father
who would never again
speak to them or return to them,
as he was quickly going away.
¹¹⁷ They looked upon him,
groaning and weeping with great *anguish of heart*. [Ps 38:9 \[Vulgate, Ps 37:9\]](#)

"Father, O father, what shall we do?" they *began to cry out*. [Jos 3:3](#) "Why are you abandoning us poor women? We are forsaken! To whom are you entrusting us?^a Why didn't you send us ahead of you in joy to the place you are going, instead of leaving us behind in sorrow? What would you have us do, enclosed in this cell, without your usual visits? *All consolation* [2 Cor 1:5](#) ebbs away along with you, just as no solace remains for us who are buried to the world! Who will comfort us in so great a poverty, poverty of merit as much as of goods?

"O father of the poor!" [Jb 29:16](#) O lover of poverty! Who will help us in temptation? You, who experienced so many temptations! You, who were such a careful judge of temptations! Who will comfort us in the midst of distress? *You, who were so often our help in times of distress!* [Ps 46:2 \[Vulgate, Ps 45:2\]](#) What bitter separation, what painful absence!

"O death, dreadful death! You are killing thousands of his sons and daughters by taking away their father! *Our poor efforts* bore fruit through him, and you rush to tear him far from us, beyond recall!"

The virgins' modesty overcame their tears.
To grieve too much over him [Zec 12:10](#) was unbecoming,
for at his passing
a host of angels rushed to greet him,
and *the citizens of heaven*
[Eph 2:19](#) and members of God's household rejoiced.^a
Thus,
torn between sorrow and joy,
they kissed his most splendid hands
that glittered with rare jewels and shining pearls.^b
Once he was taken away,
the door
that never again will suffer such pain,
was closed [Mt 25:10](#) on them

O how great was the grief of all at the misery of these women!
How full was their mourning and the devotion of their outcry!
Above all how great was the wailing of his grieving sons!^c

The sadness of each was shared by all,
since no one could keep from crying
when even *the angels of peace wept bitterly*. [Is 33:7](#)

¹¹⁸ Finally all reached the city
and *with great joy and gladness*
laid the most holy body in a sacred place
about to become even more sacred.^d
In the past he had brightened that place wonderfully
with instruction by his holy preaching.
There he now *enlightens the world* [Mt 27:59](#)
with a multitude of new miracles
glorifying the Most High *God Almighty*. [Rv 16:14](#)
Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Now look at what I have done, most holy and blessed father,
I have seen you through to the end with fitting and worthy praises,
inadequate though they be,
and I have written down your deeds
telling the story as well as I could.
Please allow me,
pitiful as I am,
to follow you worthily in the present,
that I may mercifully merit joining you in the future.

O loving one,
bear in mind your poor sons
for whom, without you,
their one and only consolation,
there is little comfort.
Even though you,
their primary and prized portion,
have joined the choirs of angels,
and are seated with the apostles on a *throne of glory*,
they still lie *in a muddy swamp*, [Ps 40:3 \[Vulgate, Ps 39:3\]](#)
enclosed in a dark cell, tearfully crying out to you:
"O father,
place before Jesus Christ, son of the Most High Father,
His sacred stigmata;
and show Him the signs of the cross on your hands, feet, and side,
that He may mercifully bare His own wounds to the Father,
and because of this
the Father *will ever show us* [Jb 33:26](#) in our anguish
His tenderness.
Amen.
So be it, so be it. [Ps 72:19 \[Vulgate, Ps 71:19\]](#) "