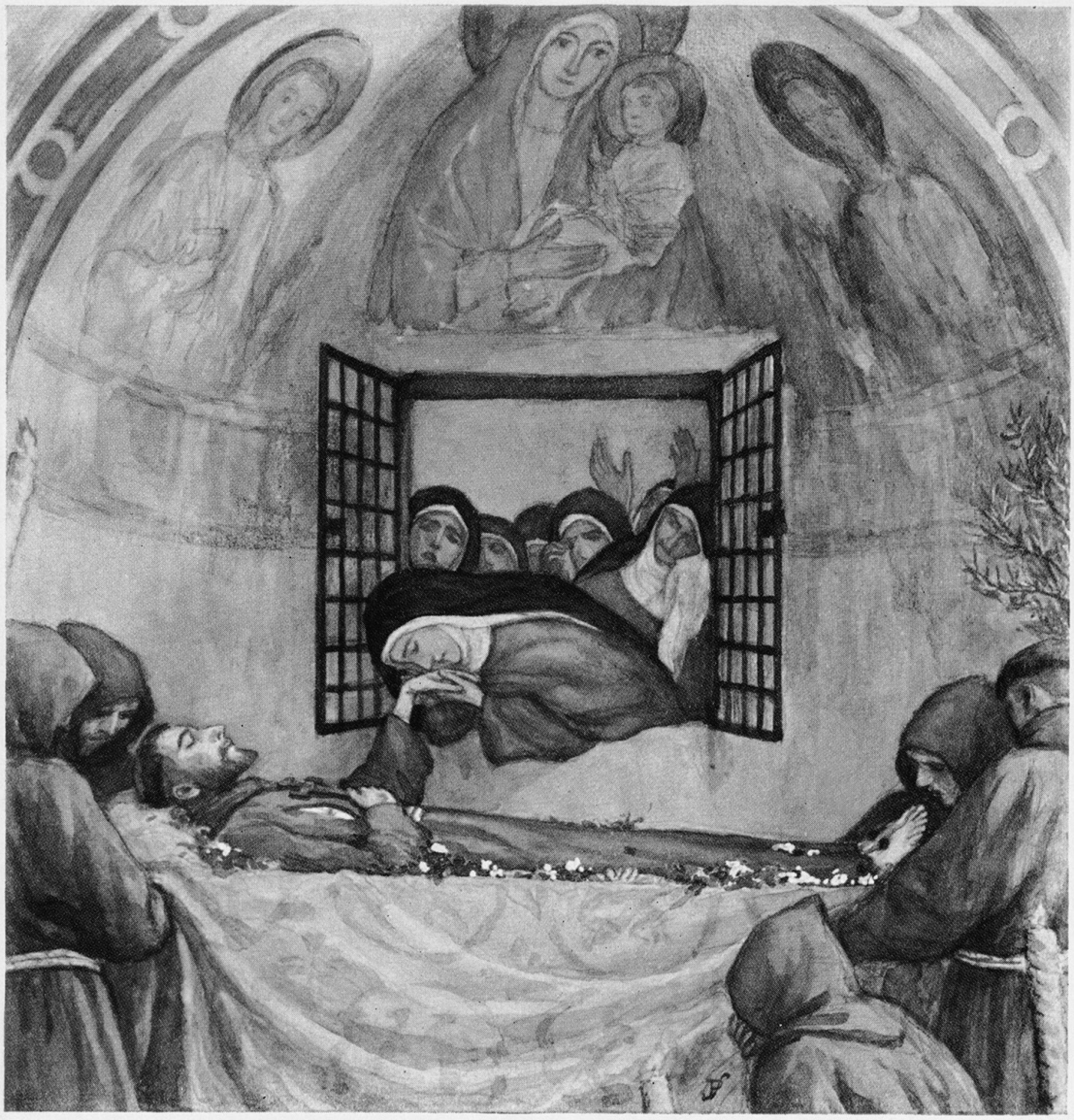
The Transitus
of Saint Francis of Assisi



Gregorian Chants and Latin Texts
from the Roman-Seraphic Ritual
with English Translation
and Supplemental Texts

Saint Mary of the Angels Press

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Presentation

Eight hundred years have passed since that heart-wrenching, yet glorious night when Saint Francis of Assisi made his flight from the hills of Umbria to the everlasting hills of the Kingdom of Heaven. Saint Francis, like his Lord and Master, was a 'sign of contradiction,' whose life of heroic poverty and apostolic zeal shook the consciences of the men of his time. Though never ordained to the priesthood, for he regarded himself unworthy of so sublime a calling, his earliest devotees referred to Saint Francis as an '*Alter Christus*,' another Christ, who revealed the Face of Christ once again to a prosperous and bustling new world that was in grave danger of forgetting its Redeemer. During the saint's own lifetime, the Order he founded spread to the far corners of the known world, with missions throughout Europe and in the Holy Land, a group of proto-martyrs who shed their blood in an attempt to convert the Saracens of Morocco, and with a constellation of beloved saints, including Saint Clare of Assisi and Saint Anthony of Padua. In the centuries that followed, the spiritual sons and daughters of Saint Francis carried on his mission, with its Christocentric and intensely Marian spirituality, leaving an indelible imprint on the piety, history, liturgy, and theology of the Church.

Among the rites that developed in the saint's honor down through the centuries, one of the most beautiful and evocative is the *Rite of the Transitus*, or "Passing." The traditional rite, which has fallen into disuse in many Franciscan communities, begins with a candle-lit procession to the altar or chapel of the saint, the veneration of his relic (or a sacred image if no relic is present), and then a series of Gregorian Chants and Latin prayers. These include the Psalm that Saint Francis asked the friars to recite on his deathbed (Psalm 141 in the Vulgate numbering), together with the Antiphon *O Sanctissima anima* and the hymn *Salve, Sancte Pater*.

Given Saint Francis's own calling to rebuild the mystical edifice of the Church, we are delighted to offer this new edition of the traditional *Rite of the Transitus*, taken from the *Roman-Seraphic Ritual*, as a small contribution to the work of rebuilding authentic devotion to this wondrous saint. The present edition includes all of the original chants and prayers, newly type-set, together with English translations to aid the reader who is not proficient in Latin.

The Appendices include a series of readings from the early biographies of the saint, together with another scriptural passage which Saint Francis had the friars read to him shortly before his death: the Gospel account of Our Lord washing the Apostles' feet during the Last Supper (Jn 13:1-17). These readings are useful for meditation,

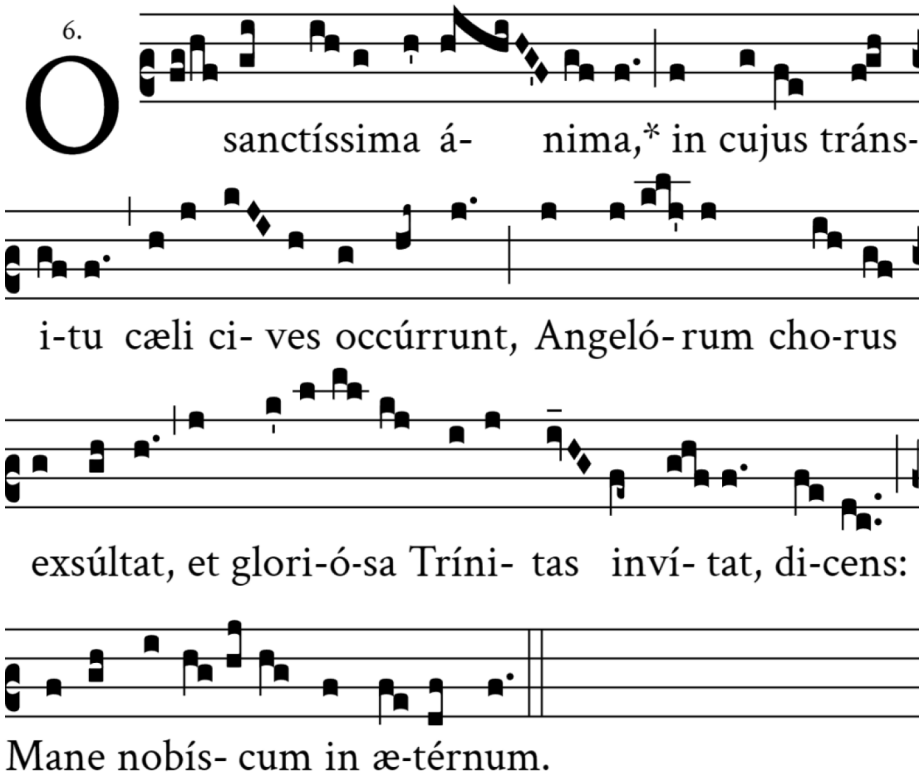
and selections could even be inserted at various points during the Rite.

May the eighth centenary of the passing of Saint Francis help us to rediscover the true face of this man who, in turn, will help us to rediscover the true Face of Christ.

MEMORIA TRANSITUS S. P. N. FRANCISCI

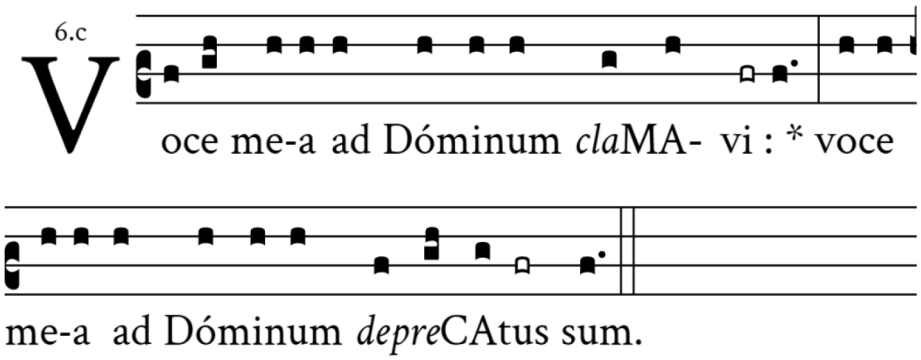
COMMEMORATION OF THE PASSING OF OUR BLESSED FATHER FRANCIS

1. On the Feast of Our Blessed Father Francis, around sunset, at the hour when Our Blessed Father Francis passed into heaven, or immediately after Vespers, the Friars gather, carrying lighted candles, to the chapel or altar of the Saint. Once there, incense is imposed and blessed in the customary manner. Then the Celebrant, dressed in a white cope, stands before the Relic of our Blessed Father; after making a profound head bow, he incenses it with two double swings of the thurible. When these things are finished and all are standing before his altar, the Cantors begin the Antiphon:



O most holy soul, at whose passing the citizens of heaven gather,
the choir of Angels exults, and the glorious Trinity beckons,
saying: "Remain with us forever."

Psalm 141



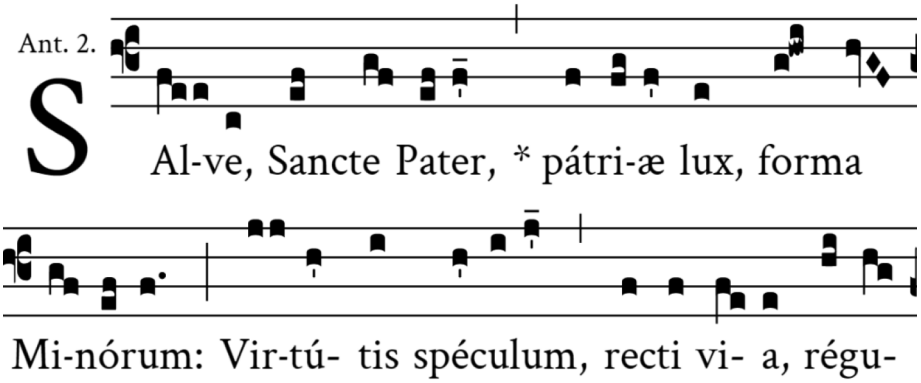
I cried to the Lord with my voice: with my voice I made supplication to the Lord.

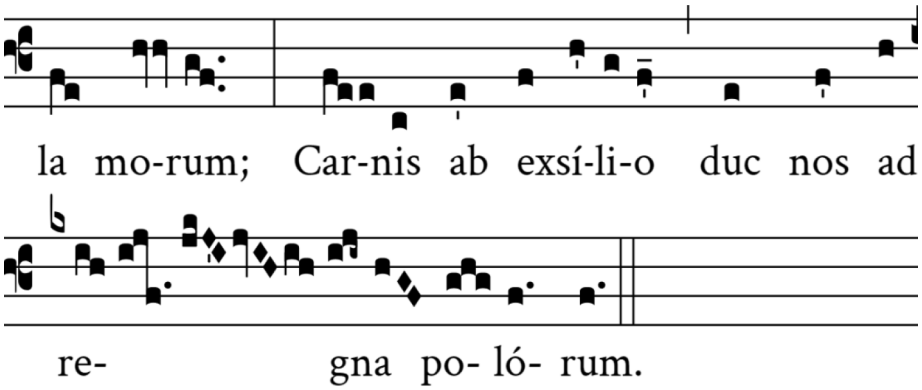
Choir: Effúndo in conspéctu ejus oratió*nem* MEam, * et tribulatiónem meam ante i*psum* pronúntio.	*In His sight I pour out my prayer, and before Him I declare my trouble:*
In deficiéndo ex me spíri*tum* MEum, * et tu cognovísti sé*mitas* MEas.	*When my spirit failed me, then Thou knewest my paths.*
In via hac, qua am*bu*LÁbam, * abscondérunt lá*queum* MIhi.	*In this way wherein I walked, they have hidden a snare for me.*
Considerábam ad déxteram, et *vi*DÉbam: * et non erat qui co*gnósce*RET me.	*I looked on my right hand, and beheld, and there was no one that would know me.*
Périit fuga A me, * et non est qui requírat á*nimam* MEam.	*Flight hath failed me: and there is no one that hath regard to my soul.*
Clamávi ad *te*, DÓmine, * dixi: Tu es spes mea, pórtio mea in ter*ra vi*VÉNtium.	*I cried to Thee, O Lord: I said: Thou art my hope, my portion in the land of the living.*

Inténde ad deprecatió*nem* MEam: * quia humiliá*tus sum* NImis.	*Attend to my supplication: for I am brought very low.*
Líbera me a persequéntiBUS me: * quia confortá*ti sunt* SUper me.	*Deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.*
Educ de custódia ánimam meam ’ ad confiténdum nómi*ni* TUo: * me exspéctant justi,’ donec retrí*buas* MIhi.	*Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name: the just wait for me, until Thou reward me.*
Glória Patri *et* FÍlio, * et Spirí*tui* SANcto.	*Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.*
Sicut erat in princípio et nunc *et* SEMper, * et in sæcula sæculó*rum*. Amen.	*As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

After the *Gloria Patri*, the Antiphon is repeated; then the candles are extinguished, and everyone kneels and recites 5 *Pater*, 5 *Ave*, and 5 *Gloria Patri*.

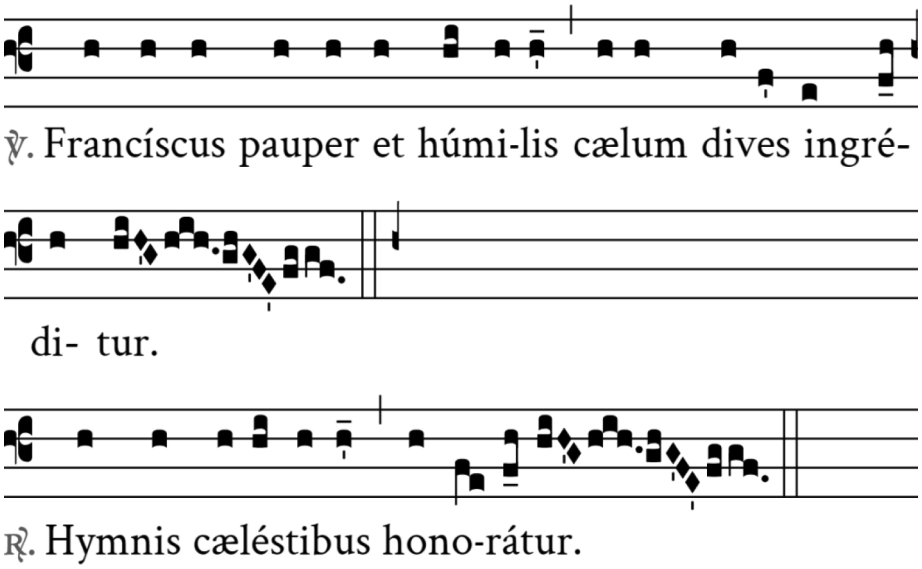
2. After this, everyone stands and sings:





Hail, Holy Father, light of the fatherland, model of the Friars Minor:
Mirror of virtue, path of righteousness, rule of conduct;
Lead us from the exile of the flesh to the Kingdom of Heaven.

All kneel and two Cantors sing:

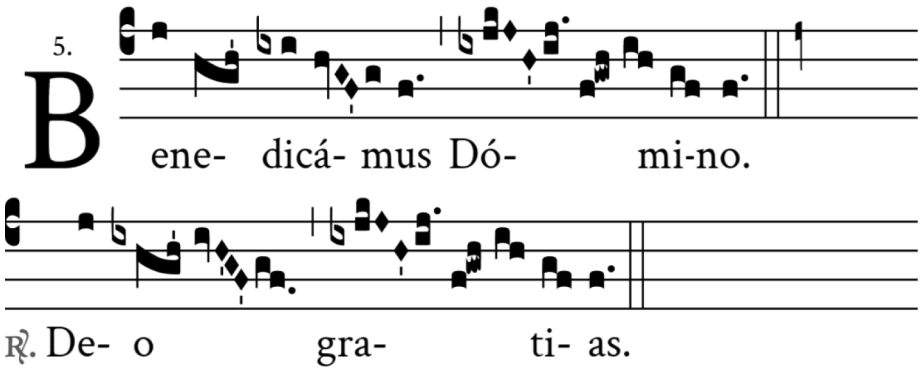


V. Francis, poor and humble, enters heaven rich.
R. He is honored with celestial hymns.

The Celebrant rises and adds:

Orémus.	*Let us pray.*
Deus qui (hodiérna die) animæ beáti Patris nostri Francísci ætérnae beatitúdinis præmia contulísti: concéde propítius; ut qui ejus migratiónis memóriam piis afféctibus celebrámus, * ad ejúsdem beatitúdinis præmia felíciter pervenire mereámur. Per Christum Dóminum nostrum. R. Amen.	*O God, who (on this day) bestowed the rewards of eternal beatitude on the soul of our blessed Father Francis, graciously grant that we, who piously celebrate the memory of his passing, may merit to happily attain the rewards of the same beatitude. Through Christ our Lord.* *R. Amen.*
V. Dóminus vobíscum. R. Et cum spíritu tuo.	*V. The Lord be with you.* *R. And with your spirit.*

The Cantors add:



Let us bless the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.

3. After this, the Celebrant imposes and blesses the incense, and makes a profound head bow. Standing before the sacred Relic, he again incenses it with a double swing of the thurible, and then blesses the people with it. He then presents it to the Religious and to the people to be kissed.

Appendix I:

Readings from the Early Biographies of Saint Francis of Assisi

From the *Life of Saint Francis* by Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (*Legenda Maior*, Ch. XIV)[1]

A long time beforehand he predicted the day of his death, and when the time of that transit drew near, he said to the brethren that he must shortly lay aside the tabernacle of his body, as it had been revealed to him by Christ. Two years, then, after the impression of the Sacred Stigmata, that is, in the twentieth year after his conversion, he was attacked by many infirmities; and as a rock struck and tried by many blows, or as a true stone, which was to be built into the edifice of the heavenly Jerusalem, or as some fair work which, by the force of the hammer of many tribulations, was to be brought to a perfect form, he ordered the brethren to carry him to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, that where he had received the spirit of grace he might give up the spirit of life. Having, therefore, been brought thither, and desiring to give a true proof to all men that he had no longer anything in common with the world in that grievous and painful sickness, he laid aside his habit, and laid himself prostrate on the bare earth, that in the last hour in which the enemy would attack him with all his fury he might wrestle naked with his naked adversary. Lying thus on the earth, with his face raised according to his custom to heaven, and intent upon its glory, with his left hand he covered the wound on his right side, and said to his brethren: "I have done my part; may Christ teach you to do yours!" And all his holy companions wept, for they were filled with great compassion. One among them, whom the man of God called his guardian, knowing his wish by divine inspiration, arose and brought a tunic and a cord, and offering them to the poor man of Christ, he said: "I bring thee these as to one who has made himself poor for the love of God; receive them by the command of holy obedience." Then did the holy man rejoice with great gladness of heart, when he saw that he had kept faith with his lady, poverty, even to the end; and raising his hands to heaven, he gave thanks to Christ, his Lord, that, being delivered from every burden, he was free to go to Him. And all these things he did out of his zeal for poverty, so that he would not have even a habit but what was lent him by another. For in all things, assuredly, he desired to be conformed to Christ crucified, Who hung naked upon the Cross, in poverty and pain. And therefore, as at the beginning of his conversion, he cast off his garment before the Bishop, so at the end of his life he desired to depart naked out of this world. And he commanded the brethren who were around him, in virtue of charity and obedience, that when they should perceive that he was dead, they would leave him thus upon the ground for so long a space of time as it would take a

1 English text based on the translation by Elizabeth Lockhart (London: R. & T. Washbourne, Ltd), 7th ed., 1915.

man to walk gently for a mile. Oh! most truly Christian man, conformed living to the life of Christ, and dying to the dying of Christ, studying in death to be perfectly conformed to the death of Christ, and found worthy to be adorned with His express similitude!

The hour of his departure being at hand, he commanded all the brethren who were in that place to be called to him, and comforted them with consoling words concerning his death, exhorting them with fatherly affection to the divine love. He spoke to them at length concerning patience, poverty, and faithful obedience to the Holy Roman Church, preferring the Holy Gospel to all other laws and institutions. And as all the brethren surrounded him, he extended his hands over them in the form of a cross, crossing his arms in the form of that sign which he had ever loved; and so he blessed all the brethren, whether present or absent, in the Name and in the power of the Crucified One. Then he added: "Farewell, my children, abide in the fear of the Lord, and ever persevere therein. And when any temptation or trouble approaches you say: 'Blessed are they who persevere in those things which they have begun.' And now I go to God, to Whose grace I commend you all."

When he had finished these loving admonitions, this man, most dear to God, commanded that the Book of the Gospels should be brought to him, and that the place of the Gospel of Saint John should be read to him which begins with these words: *Ante diem festum pasche*.[2] And then, as best he could, he broke forth into that verse of the psalm, *Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi, voce mea ad Dominum deprecatus sum*,[3] and so continued repeating the psalm until he came to the verse, *Me exspectant justi, donec retribuas mihi*.[4] All these mysteries being then accomplished in him, his most holy soul being set free and absorbed in the abyss of the divine glory, the blessed man slept in the Lord.

One of his brethren and disciples saw that blessed soul under the appearance of a glorious star, borne upwards by a white cloud, and so carried as upon many waters, straight to heaven; and that glorious cloud betokened the sublime purity of sanctity and the fullness of heavenly wisdom and abundant grace, by which the holy man had merited an entrance into that palace of light and peace, where for all eternity he reposes in Christ.

At that time Friar Augustine, a holy and just man, was minister of the Friars in Terra di Lavoro; he being at the point of death, and having for a long time lost the use of speech, exclaimed suddenly, in the hearing of all who stood around: "Wait for me, Father, wait for me; I am coming with thee." When the Friars, in great amazement, asked him to whom he thus spoke,

2 *Before the festival day of the Passover* (Jn 13:1).

3 *I cried to the Lord with my voice: with my voice I made supplication to the Lord* (Ps 141:1).

4 *The just wait for me, until thou reward me* (Ps 141:8).

he replied promptly, "See you not our Father Francis, who is going up to Heaven?" And having said this, his soul immediately departed from his body, and he followed his most holy Father.

At the same time the Bishop of Assisi was making a devout pilgrimage to the church of Saint Michael, on Mount Gargano. To him the Blessed Francis appeared on the very night of his departure, saying: "Behold, I leave the world and go to Heaven." When the Bishop arose in the morning he related to his companions what he had seen, and having made strict inquiry on his return to Assisi, he discovered certainly that, at the very hour revealed to him by the vision, the Blessed Father had departed from this world.

Certain birds which love the light, and have a great horror of darkness, at the hour of the holy man's transit from earth, which was the time at which twilight is wont to set in, came in great multitudes over the roof of the house, and flew round and round it joyfully for a long time together, giving clear and joyous testimony to the glory of the Saint who had been wont to invite them to sing the praises of God.

From the *Second Life of Saint Francis* by Friar Thomas of Celano (*Vita Secunda*, Chs. CLXIII, CLXV)[5]

So while the brethren were weeping bitterly and inconsolably lamenting, the holy father ordered bread to be brought to him: and he blessed it and broke it and handed to each one a morsel to eat. He was calling to mind that most sacred Supper which the Lord last celebrated with His disciples: and it was in reverent memory of Him that he did all this, to show forth the love he bore to the brethren. The few days that remained before he passed away he spent in praise; teaching his dearly loved brethren to praise Christ with him. Moreover, he invited all creatures to praise God; and in certain words which he had composed before exhorted them to the love of God. For he even exhorted Death herself, terrible and hateful to all, to give praise; and joyfully going to meet her, he invited her to lodge with him, saying: "Welcome, my sister Death.' And to the physician he said: "Brother physician, boldly foretell that death is at hand, for it will be the gate of life to me." To the brethren: "When ye shall see my end approaching, lay me naked on the ground, even as ye saw me three days ago, and let me lie there when dead for so long a time as one might take to walk a mile gently." So the hour came, and all the mysteries of Christ having been fulfilled in him, he took his happy flight to God. [...]

In that night and at that hour, the glorious father appeared to another of the brethren (a man of praiseworthy life who was then absorbed in prayer) clothed in a purple dalmatic, and followed by a countless multitude of men, from which multitude several detached themselves, and said to that brother, "Is not this Christ,

5 English text based on the translation by A.G. Ferrers Howell (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co.), 1905.

brother?" And he replied, "It is He." Others again asked him, "Is not this Saint Francis?" And the brother gave the like answer that it was he. Truly it seemed to the brother and to all the multitude that the person of Christ and of Saint Francis was one, a judgment which seems by no means temerarious to those of sound understanding, since he who cleaves to God becomes one spirit with Him, and God Himself shall be all in all. At length the blessed father with that wondrous crowd came to a delightsome place, watered with the most limpid streams, verdant with the fairest plants, radiant with the beauty of flowers and filled with every pleasant kind of trees. A palace was there, of wondrous size and singular beauty, which the new denizen of heaven entered eagerly; he found there very many brethren and began to feast with delight in their company at a table most splendidly set out, and covered with various dainties.

From the Circular Letter of Friar Elias to All the Provinces of the Order, on the Death of Saint Francis

To Friar Gregory, his dearest brother in Christ, minister of the Province of France, and to all the other brethren, his and ours, Friar Elias the sinner sends his greeting. Before I begin to speak, a groan arises from my heart, and with good reason. My roar is like rushing waters, because that which I feared has come to pass, for me and for you; and the thing I dreaded has fallen upon me and upon you. He who was our consolation has gone far away; he who carried us like lambs in his arms has left for a distant region. He who taught the way of life and of obedience to Jacob and who gave a covenant of peace to Israel, for he was beloved by God and by men, has been conducted into the bright dwellings of Heaven. [...] The presence of our brother and father Francis was indeed a true light, not only for us who were companions in the same profession of life, but also for those who were far off. He was indeed a light raised up by the true Light, the One that *sheds light on all who dwelt in darkness and who sat in the shadow of death to direct their steps along the way of peace* (cf Lk 1:79). This he has done, like a true midday light. The light from on high illuminated his heart and kindled his will with the fire of love. Thus inflamed, he preached the Kingdom of God and turned the hearts of fathers toward their children and the foolish toward the prudence of the just, and throughout the world he prepared a new people for the Lord. His name is celebrated unto the farthest ends of the world, and the whole universe is filled with wonder at his marvelous deeds. Do not, therefore, my sons and brothers, yield to an excessive sadness, for God, the Father of orphans, shall comfort you with His holy consolation. And if you weep, my brethren, then weep for yourselves and not for him. We, while in the fullness of our life, are in death, but he has passed from death to life. And be full of joy for, before departing from us, like another Jacob, he blessed all his children and pardoned everyone of any fault we may have committed or considered against him.

And now I announce to you a great joy,

an extraordinary miracle. Never has such a portent been heard of in the world, except in the Son of God, who is Christ the Lord. Some time before His death, our brother and father appeared crucified, bearing impressed on his body the five wounds, which truly are the stigmata of Christ. His hands and feet were pierced as with nails, which penetrated from one side to the other, with scars of the same black color as the nails. His side appeared pierced by a lance and often emitted drops of blood. While he lived, he was of humble aspect and there was no beauty in his face; not one of his members was not torn. His limbs were rigid on account of the contraction of his nerves, as happens in a dead man. But after his death, his face became exceedingly beautiful, resplendent with a wondrous candor and consoling to behold. His limbs, which had been rigid, became flexible and bent wherever one wished to move them, like those of a tender child.

Therefore, brethren, bless the God of Heaven and proclaim His greatness before all, for He has let His mercy descend upon us. Safeguard the memory of our father and brother, Francis, to the praise and glory of the One who made him great among men and glorified him amidst the angels. Pray for him, as he himself requested before dying, and invoke him, so that God may make us sharers with him in His holy grace. Amen.

Our father and brother, Francis, returned to the Lord at the first hour of the night preceding Sunday, the fourth of October. Therefore, O dearest brethren, whom this letter will reach, in imitation of the people of Israel in their weeping over Moses and Aaron, their illustrious leaders, let us give free rein to our tears, for we are deprived of the comfort of so great a father.

Appendix II:

The Gospel that Saint Francis Asked the Friars to Read to Him on His Deathbed (Jn 13:1-17)

Before the festival day of the Pasch, Jesus knowing that His hour was come, that He should pass out of this world to the Father: having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And when supper was done (the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray him), knowing that the Father had given Him all things into His hands, and that He came from God, and goeth to God; He riseth from supper, and layeth aside his garments, and having taken a towel, girded Himself. After that, He putteth water into a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. He cometh therefore to Simon Peter. And Peter saith to him: "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?"

Jesus answered, and said to him: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

Peter saith to Him: "Thou shalt never wash my feet."

Jesus answered him: "If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with Me."

Simon Peter saith to Him: "Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."

Jesus saith to him: "He that is washed, needeth not but to wash his feet, but is clean wholly. And you are clean, but not all." For He knew who he was that would betray Him; therefore He said: "You are not all clean." Then after He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, being set down again, He said to them: "Know you what I have done to you? You call Me Master, and Lord; and you say well, for so I am. If then I being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also. Amen, amen I say to you: The servant is not greater than his lord; neither is the apostle greater than he that sent him. If you know these things, you shall be blessed if you do them."

- Finis -

Among the rites that have developed in honor of Saint Francis of Assisi, one of the most beautiful and evocative is the *Rite of the Transitus*, or "Passing." This new edition includes the full rite as found in the *Roman-Seraphic Ritual*, with all the original Gregorian Chants and Latin prayers, newly type-set, together with English translations to aid the reader who is not proficient in Latin. The Appendices include a series of readings from the early biographies of the saint, together with the Gospel account which Saint Francis had the friars read to him shortly before his death. Audio recordings of the chants included in this booklet can be found on our website: www.smapress.org

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