

## Chapter Thirteen

### THE SACRED STIGMATA

<sup>1</sup>It was a custom for the angelic man Francis  
never to rest from the good,  
rather, like the heavenly spirits *on Jacob's ladder*,<sup>a</sup>  
he either *ascended* into God  
or *descended* to his neighbor.  
For he had so prudently learned  
**to divide the time given to him** for merit,  
that **he spent some of it working for his neighbor's benefit**  
and dedicated **the rest**  
to the tranquil excesses of contemplation.

Therefore,  
when he emptied himself  
according to the demand of times and places  
to gain the salvation of another,  
leaving the restlessness **of the crowds**,  
he would **seek the secrets of solitude and a place of quiet**,  
where freeing himself more freely for the Lord,  
**he would shake off the dust that might have clung to him**  
**from the time spent with the crowds.**

Therefore,  
two years **before he returned his spirit to heaven**,  
after a variety of many labors,  
he was led by divine providence  
to a *high place apart* called Mount La Verna.

When according to his usual custom  
he had begun to fast there for forty days  
in honor of Saint Michael the Archangel,  
he experienced more abundantly than usual  
an overflow of the sweetness of heavenly contemplation,  
was on fire with an ever intense flame of heavenly desires,<sup>a</sup>  
and began to be aware more fully of the gifts of heavenly entries.

He was carried into the heights,  
not as a curious *searcher of the supreme majesty*  
crushed by its glory,  
but as a *faithful and prudent servant*,<sup>Mt 24:45</sup>  
exploring God's good pleasure,  
to which, with the greatest ardor, he desires  
to conform himself in every way.

## Stigmata: Fran. The Founder, Vol.2, Legends & Sermons- pg. 630

<sup>2</sup>Through a divine sign from heaven he had learned that in opening the book of the Gospel, Christ would reveal to him what God considered most acceptable in him and from him. After completing his **prayer** with much devotion, he took **the book of the sacred Gospels from the altar** and had his companion, a holy man dedicated to God, open it three times in the name of the Holy Trinity. All three times, when **the book was opened, the Lord's passion** always met his eyes. **The man filled with God understood that**, just as he had imitated Christ in the actions of his life, so he should be conformed to him in the affliction and sorrow of his passion, before *he would pass out of this world.* Jn 13:1

And although his body was already weakened  
by the great austerity of his past life  
and his continual carrying of the Lord's cross,  
he was in no way terrified,  
but was inspired even more vigorously  
to endure martyrdom.  
The unconquerable enkindling of love in him  
for the good Jesus  
had grown into *lamps and flames of fire*,  
that *many waters could not quench so powerful a love.*

With the seraphic ardor of desires,  
therefore,  
he was being borne aloft into God;  
and by compassionate sweetness  
he was being transformed into Him  
Who chose to be crucified out of  
*the excess of His love.*

On a certain morning about the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, while Francis was praying on the mountainside, **he saw a Seraph having six wings**, fiery as well as brilliant, descend from the grandeur of heaven. And when in swift flight, it had arrived at a spot in the air near the man of God, there appeared between the wings the likeness of a man **crucified**, with **his hands and feet extended** in the form of a cross and **fastened to a cross. Two of the wings were raised above his head, two were extended for flight, and two covered his whole body. Seeing this, he was overwhelmed and his heart was flooded with a mixture of joy and sorrow. He rejoiced at the gracious way** Christ looked upon him under the appearance **of the Seraph, but** the fact that **He was fastened to a cross** *pierced his soul with a sword* Lk 2:35 of compassionate sorrow.

**He marveled exceedingly**  
**at the sight** of so unfathomable a vision,  
knowing that the weakness of Christ's **passion**  
was in no way compatible  
with the immortality of the seraphic spirit.  
Eventually he understood from this,  
through the Lord revealing it,

that Divine Providence had shown him a vision of this sort so that  
the friend of Christ might learn in advance  
that he was to be totally transformed  
into the likeness of Christ crucified,  
not by the martyrdom of his flesh,  
but by the enkindling of his soul.  
As the vision was disappearing,  
it left in his heart a marvelous fire  
and imprinted in his flesh a likeness of signs  
no less marvelous.

**For immediately the marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet just as he had seen a little before in the figure of the man crucified. His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the center by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on the inner side of the hands and the upper side of the feet and their points on the opposite sides. The heads of the nails in his hands and his feet were round and black; their points were oblong and bent as if driven back with a hammer, and they emerged from the flesh and stuck out beyond it. Also his right side, as if pierced with a lance, was marked with a red wound from which his sacred blood often flowed, moistening his tunic and underwear.**

<sup>4</sup>As **Christ's servant** realized that he could not conceal from his **intimate companions the stigmata** that had been so visibly imprinted on his flesh, he feared to make public the Lord's *sacrament*<sup>a</sup> and was thrown into an agony of doubt whether to tell what he had seen or to be silent about it. He called some of the brothers and, speaking in general terms, presented his doubt to them and sought their advice. One of the brothers, Illuminato, by name and by grace,<sup>b</sup> understanding that Francis had seen something marvelous that made him seem completely dazed, said to the holy man: "Brother, you should realize that at times divine sacraments are revealed to you not for yourself alone but also for others. You have every reason to fear that if you hide what you have received for the profit of many, you will be blamed for *burying that talent*." <sup>Mt 25:25</sup> Although the holy man used to say on other occasions: "*My secret is for myself*," he was moved by Illuminato's words. Then, with much fear, he recounted the vision in detail, adding that the one who had appeared to him had told him some things which he would never disclose to any person as long as he lived. We should believe, then, that those utterances of that sacred Seraph marvelously appearing to him on the cross were so *secret that people are not permitted to speak of them*. <sup>2 Cor 12:4</sup>

After true love of Christ  
**transformed the lover into His image,** <sup>2 Cor 3:18</sup>  
when the forty days were over that he spent in solitude  
as he had desired,  
and the feast of St. Michael the Archangel  
had also arrived,  
the angelic man Francis  
*came down from the mountain,*  
bearing with him

the likeness of the Crucified,  
depicted not on *tablets of stone* or on panels of wood  
carved by hand,  
but engraved on parts of his flesh  
*by the finger of the living God.*  
And because *it is good to keep hidden*  
*the sacrament of the King,*  
the man aware of the royal secret  
would then hide from men those sacred signs.  
Since it is for God to reveal what He does for his own great glory,  
the Lord himself,  
who had secretly imprinted those marks,  
openly revealed some miracles through them  
so that the hidden and marvelous power of the stigmata  
would display a brilliance of signs.

**<sup>6</sup>In the province of Rieti a very serious plague broke out and so cruelly took the lives of cattle** and sheep that no remedy could be found. **A certain God fearing man was told in a vision at night to hurry to the hermitage of the brothers and get the water in which** God's servant Francis, **who was staying there at that time, had washed his hands and feet, and to sprinkle it** on all the animals. **He got up in the morning, came to the place,** secretly got the water from the companions of the holy man, and **sprinkled** it on the sheep and cattle. Marvelous to say, the moment that water touched the animals, which were weak and lying on the ground, they immediately recovered their former vigor, stood up and, as if they had had nothing wrong with them, hurried off to pasture. Thus through the miraculous power of that water, which had touched his sacred wounds, the plague ceased and deadly disease fled from the flocks.

<sup>7</sup>About the time the holy man stayed on Mount La Verna,  
clouds would form over the mountain,  
and violent hailstorms would devastate the crops

But after that blessed apparition  
the hail stopped,  
to the amazement of the inhabitants,  
so that the unusually serene face of the sky proclaimed  
the excellence of that heavenly vision  
and the power of the stigmata imprinted there.