

SAINT FRANCIS RECEIVES THE STIGMATA

INSCRIPTION:

WHILE THE PATRIARCH DWELLED ON MOUNT ALVERNIA, WHERE WITH CONSTANT FASTING AND PRAYERS HE CONTEMPLATED THE SUFFERINGS OF HIS BELOVED JESUS, ONE MORNING, ON THE DAY OF THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS, AS HE PRAYED AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN, A SERAPH APPEARED TO HIM IN THE FORM OF A WINGED CRUCIFIX. WITH DIVINE SYMMETRY, IT IMPRESSED UPON HIM THE SAME WOUNDS OF HIS PASSIONATE LORD. THUS, TRANSFORMED INTO CHRIST, FRANCIS SEEMED TO SAY WITH SAINT PAUL: "I LIVE, YET NOT I, BUT CHRIST LIVES IN ME."

Thomas of Celano, the first biographer of Saint Francis, describes this dramatic moment with great care. According to the careful analysis of Frugoni, Thomas references the suffering of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: feeling alone, abandoned, and betrayed, and then an angel brings him comfort. Similarly, Saint Francis on Mount Alvernia suffers from the solitude in which the friars had left him due to their lifestyle choices, which he found unacceptable. The angel and then the stigmata give meaning to his suffering. Upon seeing the angel, Francis "could not understand anything specific and remained worried about the singularity of the apparition when signs of nails began to appear in his hands and feet, like the man he had just seen crucified above him." Bonaventure and our Brother Giuseppe tell the story differently, thinking of Calvary and the physical suffering of the crucifixion. As the angel disappears, the stigmata appear on Francis's body. "The stigmata are no longer flesh of the flesh, produced by the Saint's body to solve the enigma of the apparition." It is the angel who marks the Saint's body, imprinting those wounds on his flesh. Giotto in Assisi paints rays of light connecting the wounds of Francis to those of Jesus, to make the divine symmetry more visible. Francis thus becomes a great saint, at that moment the greatest of the saints since no one had received the gift of the stigmata, but he also becomes an unachievable model for the friars. It was a significant point for those who continued to distance the friars from the spirituality of the origins. In fact, Brother Elias, representative of the moderate wing, wrote a letter to all the convents after Francis's death to communicate his discovery: "...cast away from you all sadness; and if you must weep, weep for yourselves and not for him: because we, more than being in life, are prey to death. While he has passed from death to life. And now I announce a great thing, a truly new miracle. Indeed, it has never been known through the ages that such a sign was manifested except in Christ, the Son of God. Not long before his death, Francis appeared crucified, bearing in his body the five wounds as the true stigmata of Christ. Therefore, brothers, bless the Lord and give thanks because he has shown us his mercy, and keep the memory of our brother and father Francis to the glory of Him who wished to magnify him before men and angels. And pray to Him that through his intercession the Lord may grant us his holy grace."

Bonaventure indeed emphasizes the enormous veneration that should be accorded to the founder of the Order, but he frees the Franciscans from having to take the Saint as a model, as he is unattainable: "The friars can instead follow saints like Anthony, more in line with the evolution of the Order." Perhaps this justifies the choices of Brother Giuseppe, who frescoes in the cloister, next to the four episodes of Saint Francis's life, a paradise of saints in the lunettes and medallions

