

**ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

**THE COMPLETE  
WORKS OF SAINT  
FRANCIS  
OF ASSISI**



**St. Francis of Assisi**

# **The Complete Works of Saint Francis of Assisi**

**Enriched edition.**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by April Kennedy*

Published by

**MUSAICUM**

Books

- Advanced Digital Solutions & High-Quality eBook  
Formatting -

[musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info](mailto:musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info)

Edited and published by Musaicum Press, 2021  
EAN 4066338113160

# Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Author Biography](#)

[Historical Context](#)

[Synopsis \(Selection\)](#)

## **The Complete Works of Saint Francis of Assisi**

[Analysis](#)

[Reflection](#)

[Memorable Quotes](#)

# Introduction

## [Table of Contents](#)

The Complete Works of Saint Francis of Assisi gathers in one place the principal writings attributed to the Poverello of Assisi, presenting them in an accessible order for study, prayer, and reflection. The aim is not to retell his life, but to let his own voice shape the encounter. Here the reader will find texts that sustained the early Franciscan movement and continue to orient those who seek a Gospel-shaped existence. This collection offers a coherent view of Francis's thought as preserved in authoritative tradition, organizing disciplinary, pastoral, and devotional pieces so that their complementary purposes may be appreciated together and read as a single spiritual corpus.

The volume spans multiple literary forms. It includes admonitions that function as brief spiritual exhortations; normative rules that legislate common life; a testament cast as a personal spiritual legacy; and practical directives on reverence for the Eucharist and the keeping of hermitages. It presents letters addressed to diverse audiences: the faithful, friars, ministers, civic rulers, regional custodians, and a close companion. It concludes with prayers, hymns, and a liturgical office, texts designed for praise and contemplation. Some pieces are poetic; others are epistolary or regulative. Together they show Francis as teacher, legislator, brother, and worshiper.

The structure of the book reflects this range. Part I gathers admonitions, salutations, rules, fragments related to

the sisters associated with Clare of Assisi, the Testament, and guidance on eremitical life—materials that set the foundations of Franciscan identity and practice. Part II contains six letters, arranged by intended recipients, allowing the reader to hear how Francis adapted his counsel to differing responsibilities. Part III collects prayers and praises, culminating in the Canticle of the Sun and the Office of the Passion. An Appendix notes lost, doubtful, and spurious writings, clarifying the boundaries of the authentic canon and the reverent tradition that surrounds it.

Saint Francis of Assisi stands within the renewal of the Western Church in the early thirteenth century, known for a life ordered to the literal following of the Gospel. His writings are modest in scale but remarkable in focus. Composed in contexts of preaching, fraternity, and prayer, they aim at conversion of heart rather than literary display. Preserved in Latin and early vernacular witnesses, they reveal a pastor who speaks plainly, with urgent charity. They complement the many narratives about him by showing how he himself articulated obedience to Christ, love for the Church, and compassion toward all creatures as a pattern of life.

The Words of Admonition distill his pastoral method. They are short, scripturally saturated counsels that invite self-knowledge, mutual charity, and fidelity to the Gospel. The Salutation of the Virtues personifies the virtues as living companions, showing how ethical commitments are inseparable from fraternity. On reverence for the Lord's Body and the cleanliness of the altar discloses how devotion to the Eucharist anchors the outward life of preaching and service. These pieces exhibit Francis's insistence that

doctrine and worship are not abstractions but concrete practices, enacted with humility, gratitude, and joy among brothers and before the people of God.

The Rules of the Friars Minor articulate a communal shape of discipleship. They prescribe poverty, fraternity, obedience, and mission as concrete habits rather than ideals. Fragments from the rule of the sisters connected with Clare demonstrate parallel concerns for simplicity and enclosure adapted to their vocation. The Testament, written near the end of Francis's life, bears witness to graces received and priorities to be guarded, offering not new legislation but a spiritual remembrance that binds memory to fidelity. Of living religiously in a hermitage provides a brief plan for contemplative withdrawal that remains anchored in mutual service and accountability.

Francis's letters disclose his pastoral voice in motion. The letter to all the faithful calls to penance and a life worthy of baptism, while the letter to all the friars recalls their common calling and the responsibilities of fraternity. A letter to a certain minister shows delicate counsel to a leader facing difficulty. The exhortation to rulers of the people extends Gospel concerns to civic authority. Instructions to the custodes address liturgical care and oversight. The note to Brother Leo offers personal comfort and direction. Across these texts, tone and content adjust to the audience without losing evangelical clarity and tenderness.

In the prayers, Francis's language turns from instruction to adoration and supplication. The Praises and the Prayer to obtain divine love exemplify a theology expressed as worship, attentive to God's goodness and the

transformation of desire. The Salutation of the Blessed Virgin honors Mary within the economy of salvation, with a concise density typical of liturgical piety. The sheet given to Brother Leo, a devotional autograph, unites blessing and praise in a concrete act of friendship and faith. These pieces illuminate the inner source of Francis's public life: an abiding orientation toward God in love and thanksgiving.

The Canticle of the Sun, composed in the Umbrian vernacular, is among the earliest extant religious poems in Italian. It praises the Creator through the goodness of creation, naming elements of the cosmos as kin in one household of praise. Its simplicity is artful, joining theological affirmation with the familiar speech of daily life. It has long served as a text for communal singing and meditation, and it continues to shape Christian reflection on stewardship and gratitude. In this collection it stands as a hinge between exhortation and contemplation, summoning readers to see the world as a transparent sign of the Giver.

The Office of the Passion arranges biblical language into a devotional cycle centered on Christ's saving work. It shows Francis as a careful assembler of Scripture for prayer, attentive to the rhythms of liturgical time while allowing for private devotion. The text invites the reader to enter the mystery of the Passion not through speculation but through the measured recitation of psalmody and acclamation. Its Christocentrism complements the Canticle's cosmic praise, revealing how adoration of the Crucified sustains evangelical poverty, fraternity, and mission. The Office thus embodies the union of contemplation and action that marks Franciscan spirituality.

Across the corpus, several themes recur with persuasive consistency: a literal love of the Gospel; poverty understood as freedom for God and others; humility expressed as *minoritas*; obedience rendered to Christ and the Church; brotherhood and peace enacted without violence; and reverence for the Eucharist and for Scripture. Stylistically, the writings are concise, scriptural, and performative. They favor address over argument, imperative over exposition, and blessing over ornament. Francis speaks to communities and individuals as kin, invoking the language of brotherhood and sisterhood as a moral grammar that binds devotion to justice and joy to penitence.

This collection serves readers who seek reliable access to the written legacy of Saint Francis. By distinguishing core texts from those that are lost, doubtful, or spurious, the Appendix protects the integrity of the canon while acknowledging the devotional reception that surrounds it. Taken together, these writings allow scholars to trace themes, ministers to receive pastoral wisdom, and all readers to engage a form of discipleship at once demanding and serene. They are best read slowly, with attention to their practical intent. Their enduring significance arises from their capacity to call forth not only admiration, but imitation.

# Author Biography

[Table of Contents](#)

## Introduction

St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1181/82–1226) was an Italian friar whose life and writings catalyzed a major renewal of Christian spirituality. Founder of the Order of Friars Minor, he is renowned for radical poverty, fraternal charity, and a lyrical love for creation. This collection presents his core works: formative texts for communities (Rules, Admonitions, Testament), pastoral letters to friars, laypeople, and civic leaders, and a set of prayers that range from intimate devotion to cosmic praise. It reveals a practical mystic who wrote to shape lives more than to argue doctrines, and whose “Canticle of the Sun” became a landmark of early Italian literature.

Set amid the social and religious ferment of the early thirteenth century, Francis composed brief, direct pieces that spoke clearly to clergy, religious, and laity. The collection’s arrangement—Admonitions and Rules, Letters, and Prayers—highlights his method: moral exhortation grounded in the Gospels, governance oriented toward humble service, and worship expressed in simple, fervent language. Canonized in 1228, he remains a touchstone for Christian life centered on poverty, peace, and joy. Through these texts, the historical Francis emerges not only as a saint and founder but also as a disciplined writer with a distinctive voice.

## **Education and Literary Influences**

Francis received modest schooling typical of a prosperous merchant's son in Assisi, more suited to trade than to the liberal arts. He did not pursue higher studies, and his Latin was largely acquired through the liturgy and the Vulgate. Scripture saturates the Admonitions and the Rules, where Gospel passages function as norms rather than topics for debate. Liturgical rhythms shape The Office of the Passion, which reorders biblical phrases into a devotional cycle. His writings display a practical pedagogy: short chapters, imperatives, and scriptural refrains aimed at memory and action rather than scholastic analysis or rhetorical display.

Literarily, he drew on Umbrian speech and song, contributing to early vernacular expression in The Canticle of the Sun. Patristic moral vocabulary and monastic exhortation inform his personifications of virtue and his emphasis on obedience, poverty, and chastity. Ecclesial legislation of his day provided structural models for communal life, yet he reshaped them to enforce non-ownership and minority. Missionary passages in the Rule of the Friars Minor reflect crusade-era contexts while privileging peaceful witness. The blend of biblical literalism, liturgical sensibility, and vernacular lyric gives the collection its distinctive alternation between pastoral instruction and contemplative praise.

## **Literary Career**

Part I begins with the Words of Admonition, a compact set of spiritual counsels crafted to form the conscience and conduct of the brotherhood. These pieces address humility,

true obedience, and the dangers of pride or self-will among ministers and subjects alike. Their style is parenetic and scriptural, favoring concise maxims over argument. The companion Salutation of the Virtues personifies virtues as noble ladies allied with holy wisdom, dramatizing the inner order of a gospel life. Together they establish Francis's hallmark pedagogy: moral clarity, brevity, and an appeal to the heart informed by biblical cadence.

On Reverence for the Lord's Body and on the Cleanliness of the Altar underscores Francis's intense Eucharistic devotion. He urges that the Body of the Lord be preserved and carried with care, that sacred vessels and linens be clean, and that churches be kept in fitting order. The tract is practical, even procedural, and reveals a reformer's zeal grounded in love for Christ present in the sacrament. This concern resonates elsewhere in the collection, notably in the Letter to All the Friars and the Letter to All the Custodes, where he instructs guardians to honor the Eucharist and safeguard liturgical books.

The Rule of the Friars Minor, presented here in its mature form, provides the juridical backbone of Franciscan life: evangelical poverty without personal or communal ownership, obedience to ministers, manual work, restrained preaching by permission, fasting, and respectful mission among non-Christians. Its tone is sober and scriptural, avoiding casuistry while insisting on concrete practices that protect minority and fraternity. The short treatise *Of Living Religiously in a Hermitage* complements the Rule: small groups alternate between "mothers" caring for domestic

tasks and “sons” dedicated to prayer, a rhythmic pattern balancing contemplation and service within solitude.

Fragments from the Rule of the Sisters of St Clare record Francis’s influence on the female branch later known as the Poor Clares. The fragments stress absolute poverty, communal humility, and fidelity to the Church. They testify to his capacity to translate his ideals beyond the friars, adapting governance to enclosure and contemplative life without diluting the evangelical core. The Testament of the Holy Father St Francis, likely from his final period, gathers these threads: remembrance of his conversion, uncompromising insistence on not glossing the Rule, reverence for clergy, care for churches, and abiding solidarity with the poor and the sick.

Part II collects six Letters that show Francis as a pastor of broad horizons. The Letter to All the Faithful calls laypeople to penance, sacramental life, and works of mercy. The Letter to All the Friars reiterates obedience, reverence for Scripture and the Eucharist, and mutual care. To a Certain Minister offers tender counsel on patience and forgiveness in leadership. To the Rulers of the People urges civic authorities to honor God and promote moral order. To All the Custodes provides practical directives for local guardians. The personal note To Brother Leo offers spiritual freedom of conscience with fraternal assurance.

Part III gathers prayers spanning cosmic praise and intimate supplication. The Praises channel adoration in simple, repetitive acclamations. The Salutation of the Blessed Virgin honors Mary’s singular role and virtues. The Prayer to Obtain Divine Love burns with desire for union

with God. The Sheet which St. Francis gave Brother Leo—a cherished chart from La Verna—combines a blessing with brief praises, linking friendship and worship. The Canticle of the Sun, celebrating brother sun, sister moon, and sister death, exemplifies Francis’s vernacular lyric and theology of kinship with creation. The Office of the Passion reorganizes biblical texts into a heartfelt devotion to Christ’s suffering.

Editorial awareness surfaces in the collection’s Appendix, which acknowledges lost, doubtful, and spurious writings. Medieval transmission often attached Francis’s name to popular devotions or community regulations. By distinguishing authentic pieces from uncertain ones, the collection safeguards the integrity of the corpus while illuminating the breadth of the Franciscan spiritual milieu. It also helps readers locate the core of Francis’s own voice: practical exhortation anchored in the Gospels, juridical texts protecting minority and poverty, pastoral letters bridging Church and civic life, and prayers that move from liturgical forms to vernacular poetry.

## **Beliefs and Advocacy**

Francis’s convictions are legible across genres. Radical poverty and “minority” protect humility and fraternity in the Rules and the Testament. Eucharistic devotion animates the tract On Reverence for the Lord’s Body and reappears in letters instructing friars to honor the sacrament and the Scriptures. The Admonitions teach interior poverty, obedience, and patient charity; the Salutation of the Virtues dramatizes the moral architecture undergirding those teachings. The Canticle of the Sun and related prayers

expand charity to the whole created order, articulating a kinship with creatures that flows from praise of the Creator and culminates in peaceable, joyful living.

His advocacy was consistently ecclesial and public. He urged rulers to foster the worship of God and moral renewal, addressed laypeople as full participants in a life of penance and mercy, and shaped women's religious life through the fragments for the Sisters of St Clare. Missionary sections in the Rule of the Friars Minor stress respectful presence among non-Christians. He reaffirmed loyalty to Church authority while calling clergy to reverence and reform, especially in matters touching the Eucharist. His texts thus weave personal conversion, communal norms, and civic responsibility into a coherent program for gospel-centered renewal.

## **Final Years & Legacy**

In his last years Francis endured illness, composed the Canticle of the Sun, and deepened his contemplative orientation, with the La Verna retreat (1224) traditionally associated with the stigmata. He died near Assisi in 1226, leaving the Testament as his final admonition to guard poverty and simplicity. Canonized in 1228, he inspired rapid growth of the Franciscan family and a wide manuscript tradition. The prayers nurtured liturgical devotion; the Rules stabilized a global movement; the letters shaped governance and outreach. Awareness of apocrypha, noted in the Appendix, protects his legacy. His voice endures where praise, peace, and humble service meet practical reform.

# Historical Context

## [Table of Contents](#)

The writings gathered as The Complete Works of Saint Francis of Assisi arise from the High Middle Ages, roughly the first quarter of the thirteenth century, when western Europe experienced rapid urban growth, commercial expansion, and religious reform. Italian communes like Assisi fostered new civic identities and social tensions alongside prospering merchant classes. Within the Church, papal authority consolidated, canon law matured, and pastoral needs multiplied in towns. Against this backdrop emerged the mendicant orders, especially the Franciscans and Dominicans, created to preach, serve the poor, and model apostolic life without property. Francis's texts respond to these conditions with concrete guidance, prayers, and rules of life.

Francis of Assisi (c.1181/82–1226), son of a cloth merchant, underwent a conversion around 1206–1208, embracing radical poverty and itinerant preaching. Companions gathered, and in 1209 he received oral approval from Pope Innocent III for a simple form of life. The movement expanded across Italy and beyond within a decade. His extant writings—short exhortations, rules, letters, and prayers—come from leadership needs in a swiftly growing fraternity, not from academic aims. They show a founder shaping a new religious project that had to navigate ecclesiastical structures, urban audiences, and the

temptations and opportunities of wealth in a developing market society.

The ecclesiastical climate framing many texts includes the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which codified pastoral reforms, affirmed the doctrine of the Eucharist with precision, and mandated annual confession and communion. Papal support continued under Honorius III, who in 1223 issued the bull *Solet annuere* approving Francis's definitive Rule. The Church's centralized administration and emphasis on orthodoxy inform the collection's insistence on obedience, sacramental reverence, and accountability. These documents thus occupy the hinge between charismatic beginnings and institutionalization, showing how a popular evangelical movement engaged canon law, episcopal oversight, and papal expectations in the age of a confident papal monarchy.

The Admonitions are short, pointed teachings to the early fraternity. They address humility, charity, obedience, and the danger of appropriation—spiritual or material. Historically, such maxims fit the pastoral milieu of itinerant preachers meeting diverse urban and rural audiences. They also respond to contemporaneous lay religious currents, including penitential movements and critiques of clerical worldliness. Unlike scholastic treatises then flourishing at universities, these sayings are oral in style and pragmatic in aim, reflecting a founder forming conscience and practice within a brotherhood that grew from small fraternities to an international order within two decades.

The Salutation of the Virtues personifies virtues as noble ladies and casts vices as rivals, drawing on the allegorical habits of medieval preaching and the courtly idiom familiar in Italian communal culture. Against the background of commerce and civic ambition, Francis's praise of Lady Poverty and her companions functions as counter-formation. It reimagines honor and nobility for a society in which status increasingly came from wealth and office. The text reframes cultural scripts by celebrating voluntary dispossession and meekness, providing a spiritual grammar that could be proclaimed in streets and squares as well as cloisters.

On Reverence for the Lord's Body and on the Cleanliness of the Altar addresses clergy about Eucharistic care—clean corporals, worthy vessels, proper custody. Its urgency reflects post-Lateran IV insistence on correct sacramental theology and practice across Europe, including poorly resourced rural parishes. Francis's concern that the Eucharist be honored sits within wider efforts to standardize liturgy and discipline. The text also signals his reverence for priests precisely as ministers of the sacrament, even while calling them to reform. It gave friars a way to advocate ecclesial fidelity without stepping outside obedience to bishops and pastors.

The Rules of the Friars Minor exist in two redactions—the Earlier Rule (c.1221) and the approved Rule of 1223. They codify itinerancy, common life without property, manual work, preaching with permission, and brotherly obedience. They also include guidance for brothers who go among "Saracens and other nonbelievers," composed in the wake of crusading campaigns and Francis's 1219 journey to Egypt

during the Fifth Crusade. The Rules mirror the transition from an inspired way of life to a juridically recognized order, balancing Gospel literalism with papally required clarity about governance, admission, discipline, and relationships with ecclesiastical authorities.

Fragments from the Rule of the Sisters of St Clare reflect the parallel emergence of the women's branch associated with Clare of Assisi (1194–1253). Early forms of life emphasized enclosure and absolute poverty, a stance strengthened by the “Privilege of Poverty” granted by Innocent III (1216). While Clare's definitive Rule would be approved later (1253), the fragments attributed to Francis point to his counsel for the “Poor Ladies” at San Damiano. They belong to broader thirteenth-century debates over women's religious life, property, and enclosure, and show the shared aspiration for evangelical poverty across male and female communities.

The Testament of St Francis, written near the end of his life (1226), is not a legislative revision but a personal witness urging the brothers to observe the Rule “simply and without gloss.” It recalls his conversion, reverence for the Eucharist and clergy, and the manual work and begging that sustained early fraternities. Historically, the Testament registers tensions already visible in a rapidly institutionalizing order—questions of property use, study, and administration. By insisting on original practices, it became a touchstone in later disputes over poverty observance, revealing how foundational memories shape ongoing governance.

Of Living Religiously in a Hermitage offers practical guidance for brothers alternating between contemplative withdrawal and active service, modeled on the Gospel's Martha and Mary. In the early thirteenth century, hermitages dotted the Italian landscape, and friars periodically sought solitude amid heavy preaching demands. This text shows the mendicant adaptation of older eremitic traditions to itinerant life: short retreats, mutual service, and clear roles. It reflects a broader medieval conviction that stability and mobility, contemplation and mission, must be held in tension—a structuring concern in a movement tasked with both preaching in cities and nurturing interior prayer.

The six letters demonstrate how Francis addressed distinct audiences as the order expanded across Europe. He wrote broadly to “all the faithful,” to friars as a body, to a specific minister, to civic rulers, to custodians (regional guardians), and to Brother Leo. Historically, the titles map the emerging administrative framework—ministers and custodes—necessary for a transalpine mission. They also show pastoral creativity in an age when letters circulated through networks of preachers and households. The epistolary form allowed brief, portable interventions that traveled with friars, reinforcing common discipline and inviting lay participation in penance.

The Letter to All the Faithful calls people living in the world to penance—conversion expressed in acts of mercy, prayer, and sacramental life. Versions of this text are linked to the rise of lay penitential movements and the eventual formation of the Franciscan Third Order (Brothers and Sisters of Penance). After Lateran IV's parish reforms, urban

laity sought forms of devotion compatible with family and work. Francis's letter meets that demand, translating evangelical counsels into lay-friendly practices without monastic vows, and encouraging reconciliation, almsgiving, and reverence for the Eucharist within the rhythms of civic and domestic life.

Letters to all the friars, to a certain minister, and to the custodes reflect internal governance under strain of growth. They urge obedience, mutual patience, and mercy toward struggling brothers—important counsel as new recruits from diverse regions entered the order. By the early 1220s friars had reached Spain, France, Germany, and, by 1224, England. The letters aim to preserve unity amid geographical spread and varied pastoral work. They also clarify permissions and limits for preaching and travel, aligning local initiatives with the Rule and episcopal oversight, an administrative necessity in the Church's increasingly regulated pastoral field.

The Letter to the Rulers of the People addresses civic officials characteristic of Italian communes (consuls, podestà) and similar authorities elsewhere. It exhorts them to honor God publicly and promote practices of thanksgiving and peace. Medieval sources also connect Francis's peacemaking with Assisi's own civic conflicts; a stanza later associated with the Canticle of the Sun was reportedly used to reconcile the bishop and the podestà. In a period marked by factional strife and competition among families and guilds, the letter frames civic office as stewardship under God, aligning public authority with the common good and religious observance.

The prayers in this collection—The Praises, the Salutation of the Blessed Virgin, and the Prayer to Obtain Divine Love—situate Francis within the devotional currents of his time. They are saturated with biblical phrases and Trinitarian doxology, reflecting a liturgical culture shaped by the Psalms and the Divine Office. Marian devotion had been intensifying since the twelfth century; Francis’s salutation joins a widespread emphasis on Mary’s humility and role in salvation. These texts provided simple formulas of praise and petition that friars and laity could memorize, complementing preaching with affective, theologically sound prayer.

The Sheet which St Francis gave Brother Leo, the Canticle of the Sun, and the Office of the Passion illustrate the variety of genres and languages. The Chartula for Brother Leo, with a blessing and praises of God, comes from 1224 after Francis’s stigmata at La Verna and survives as an autograph. The Canticle, composed in the Umbrian vernacular around 1224–1225, is among the earliest extant Italian religious poems, celebrating creation as kin. The Office of the Passion arranges scriptural verses for the Hours, exemplifying thirteenth-century affective devotion to Christ’s suffering and the friars’ adaptation of the Church’s liturgy.

The appendix of lost, doubtful, and spurious writings acknowledges the complex manuscript transmission of Francis’s works. Early companions—especially Brother Leo—preserved texts, and collections arose in the thirteenth century. Over time, prayers and sayings circulated under Francis’s name, prompting later scholars to evaluate

authenticity through philology and historical context. Modern critical editions sift these layers, while translations from the nineteenth century onward—alongside renewed interest sparked by historians such as Paul Sabatier—have shaped contemporary readings. Today, interpreters also connect Francis's creation praise to ecological concerns and see his poverty program as a critique of consumerism, extending the works' historical resonance.

# Synopsis (Selection)

[Table of Contents](#)

## Introduction

An orienting preface that situates the texts and identifies recurring spiritual concerns—evangelical poverty, humility, fraternal charity, and reverence in worship. It prepares readers for a voice that alternates between concise exhortation, practical regulation, and lyrical prayer.

## **Admonitions and Salutation of the Virtues (Words of Admonition; Salutation of the Virtues)**

These paired pieces distill St. Francis's moral and spiritual counsel into short admonitions and a litany-like salute to the theological and moral virtues. They press for humility, obedience, and simplicity of life, warning against self-will while celebrating grace-filled character. The tone is urgent yet pastoral, aiming to shape hearts as much as conduct.

## **On Reverence for the Lord's Body and on the Cleanliness of the Altar**

A focused appeal for devout treatment of the Eucharist and due care for altars and sacred objects. It unites practical directives with solemn reverence, seeking to restore honor in the celebration and custody of holy things. The result is