

NINE AROUND ONE

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*A Novena of Companions
for the Eighth Centenary of the Transitus of Saint Francis*



THE LEADER'S BOOK

25 September to 3 October

For a church, a chapel, or a kitchen table

*Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Office, Conventual Franciscans
FranciscanVoice.org*

Before you begin

Nine nights, the twenty-fifth of September to the third of October, the night Francis died. Each night one of the nine people buried around him in the Basilica at Assisi speaks. Everything you need is printed in this book, and you will not have to look anything up.

What a novena is. Nine days of prayer; the word is only the Latin for nine. The custom runs two ways, and this one runs both. A novena of mourning is the older, the nine days we have always kept beside our dead and still keep for a pope. A novena of preparation is the one most of us know, nine days of asking that lead up to a feast. Because the ninth night here is the night Francis died, and the feast arrives the next morning, we keep the wake and get ready for the feast in the same nine evenings. No Franciscan has ever found that a contradiction. Francis prayed no novenas, since the form came later, but he withdrew for a stretch of days and came back changed often enough that the brothers counted his Lents. Nine nights is a small Lent, and he would have recognized it at once.

How these nine nights pray. Clare told Agnes of Prague to gaze, to consider, to contemplate, and to imitate. Every night moves through all four. We gaze by listening to a companion speak. We consider by holding one word from the teaching of the Church. We contemplate by sitting with the Scripture and the silence after it. We imitate by carrying one small thing out of the room and doing it before we meet again. The fourth is not an extra. It is the proof of the other three.

How the book is printed. You can tell various parts apart at a glance.

Leader: Spoken aloud by whoever is leading. Read it as it stands, or adapt it to your circumstances.

All: Printed in bold. Everyone answers together.

Small, sloping and set in from the margin. An instruction to you, and never read out loud.

Longer passages set in from both margins are read aloud in full: the voices of the nine, the verses of the Canticle, and the Scripture.

The candles. One large candle in the middle for Francis, and nine small ones around it. Light one more each night and leave the others burning. On the first night the table looks bare. On the ninth there are ten, and that is the point.

Music. Let a local setting of the Canticle of the Creatures play as people gather and again as they leave, instrumental only, to set the mood. It is not sung, and the verses inside the prayer are always recited, because they arrive one at a time and the room is still learning them. The ninth night is the exception: there the poem is finished and may be sung in full within the prayer, in a local setting if you have one. The printed text stays either way.

Who leads. Anybody. A friar, a sister, a Secular Franciscan, a parent, a grandparent, whoever called people together.

How long. About half an hour, except the ninth. If it is running to forty-five minutes, the leader is talking too much.

The part that is yours. On every night the one leading speaks for two or three minutes out of their own life. This is what makes this the prayer of the people in a particular place. You do not have to be a good speaker. Two minutes is enough, and if you would rather not talk about yourself there is a short reflection printed on every night that you may read instead.

NIGHT ONE Brother Sylvester

25 September. The stones of San Damiano.

Before people arrive

- Somebody to read the voice of Sylvester. Give them this page beforehand.
- Somebody who is not the leader to read the Scripture.
- The big candle in the middle, and nine small ones set around it, of which one will be lit tonight.

1. The greeting

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

2. The lamp

Leader: It is a common practice to light candles for our loved ones. Every night of this novena for the Transitus of our Holy Father Francis, we will light a candle for him.

In announcing the passing of Francis, Brother Elias asked the friars to pray both for and to Francis. Lighting the large candle each night is a symbol of our praying for him.

His light spread to his early companions, and from them onto countless generations of his followers. Each night we will also light small candles to represent one of his early followers, as a way of praying to Francis, that we too might join our own voices to theirs. What the early followers of Francis speak are based on early Franciscan sources and some imagination gleaned from what we know of them and their particular relationships with Francis.

Each night we will also add a verse from his canticle, and in conclusion each of us is asked to do one small thing before we meet again. This novena is a lived prayer, by which we gaze, consider, contemplate, and imitate.

Light the first of the nine from the candle in the middle.

Tonight we hear from Brother Sylvester.

3. The voice

Read aloud by one person, sitting down.

I sold him the stones.

He was patching up San Damiano and he needed stone, and I had stone, so I named a price and he paid it. Then I went home, did the arithmetic again, decided I had been cheated, and walked back to tell him so. I was a canon of San Rufino, the cathedral. I was not a poor man. He did not argue with me. He put his hand into Bernard's money, which was being given away in the square that day, and poured two fistfuls into my hands, and asked whether that was enough now.

It was more than enough. I took it home and I could not look at it.

Then I dreamed. A cross of gold came out of that man's mouth and the arms of it went out to the ends of the earth. I was the first priest to follow him, and I was already old, and for years afterward people came to me for a word from God. The only word I ever really had was the one I had to say first. I was greedy, and he saw it, and he never once held it against me.

4. The virtue

Leader: Sylvester's virtue is honesty about himself. Francis did not name that one. It is our name for it, on the strength of the single story we have just shared.

5. A few words from the one leading

Two or three minutes. A friar, sister, or Secular Franciscan in a church; a parent, a grandparent, or whoever called the family together, at home. Everything below is here to help you. Take what is useful and leave the rest.

The thought from the teaching of the Church: What everything is for...

The Church teaches that God gave the earth to everybody, and that owning something does not cancel that. She defends your right to own what is yours. She also says it comes with a debt. Pope John Paul II called it a social mortgage: what you own still owes something to the people who have nothing. Leo XIII said it more bluntly in 1891, that once a person has what they need for themselves and their household, the rest is not theirs to sit on.

Sylvester wanted a fair price for stones that were going into a church, and he was entitled to it, and he still went home and could not look at the money. Being entitled to something and being right about it can turn out to be two different things.

What to speak about

Speak for two or three minutes about a time you were owed something, and were correct about it, and it still did not sit well with you afterward.

Or speak plainly about where your household's money actually comes from, and who else is involved in it.

If you would rather not speak about yourself, use or adapt this short reflection:

I want to say one thing and then we will continue to pray.

Sylvester was not a bad man and he was not wrong about the money. He had done a job and he wanted to be paid for it. What shook him was not being caught out, because nobody caught him out. It was hearing himself say it out loud.

That is what we are doing for the next nine nights. We are going to say a few things out loud and listen to how they sound. We start with ourselves, because it would not be honest to start anywhere else.

One question

Leader: Let us now consider in our hearts and minds, when was the last time we were, individually or together as a community, completely right about something, and no better off for it?

6. The Canticle of Francis

Read the verse below aloud.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and every blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Read the verse, and then stop. Francis meant us to fall quiet at the end of this line. Wait thirty seconds, then read the words below out loud, because nobody will understand the shape of the next eight nights unless you tell them what will be happening.

Leader: That is where we stop. In the oldest copy of the Canticle the scribe left empty space around this line for music that was never written in, and the silence is as much a part of the song as the notes are. For the next six nights we are going to let the sun and the moon and the wind and the water and the fire and the earth do the praising, because the line says we, like Sylvester, are not fit to do it ourselves. On the eighth night, when Francis writes about pardon, we are let back in. Then we will sing, together with creation.

7. The reading

Read by somebody who is not the leader. Say the line below first, then the passage.

Leader: Contemplate two men praying in the temple. Listen for which of them goes home right with God, and for the reason.

Luke 18:9–14

He also spoke this parable to certain people who were convinced of their own righteousness, and who despised all others: "Two men went up into the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed by himself like this: 'God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of men: extortionists, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get.'

"But the tax collector, standing far away, wouldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his chest, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

8. Silence

One minute. An actual minute. Groups give thirty seconds and call it a minute, so time it for the first three nights until people get used to it.

9. The prayer

Leader: For everything we are owed, and keep counting.

All: Teach us to say what we are.

Leader: For the arithmetic we do at night.

All: Teach us to say what we are.

Leader: For what we would rather not hear ourselves say out loud.

All: Teach us to say what we are. Amen.

Then one Our Father, and only one. With Franciscan simplicity we leave off everything else that has gathered around novenas over the centuries.

Leader: With the poor, and in their name, let us pray as the Lord taught us.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

10. The one thing

Read it out, then have everybody say it back together.

Leader: Before tomorrow night, say one true thing about yourself out loud to another person.

All: Before tomorrow night, I will say one true thing about myself, out loud to another person.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

NIGHT TWO Brother Bernard of Quintavalle

26 September. His own house in Assisi, which is still standing.

Before people arrive

- Somebody to read the voice of Bernard of Quintavalle. Give them this page beforehand.
- Somebody who is not the leader to read the Scripture.
- The big candle in the middle, and the nine small ones set around it, of which two will be lit tonight.

1. The greeting

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

2. The lamp

Light the candle in the middle, then the candles lit on the nights before, then tonight's.

Leader: Two small candles tonight. The large one is lit for Francis, and the small ones for the companions who carried his light out to us. Tonight we hear from the first of Francis' followers, Brother Bernard of Quintavalle.

3. The voice

Read aloud by one person, sitting down.

I had a great deal to protect. Property, standing, a legal training, and the sort of household that sleeps well at night.

I gave him a bed because I was curious, and then I lay upstairs in the dark pretending to be asleep so that I could watch him. He prayed the whole night. He said one thing over and over. My God and my all. He did not know I was awake. That is the only reason I believed him.

In the morning we went to San Nicolò and asked the priest to open the holy book three times, and three times it said the same thing in a different way. Sell it. Take nothing for the road. Take up the cross. So I sold it, all of it, and we gave it out in the square, and there was a priest in that square who came up complaining that he had been shortchanged, and years later that same man dreamed of a cross of gold.

At the end Francis put his hand on my head and called me his firstborn and told the others to honor me. I would rather he had said nothing. All I did was stay awake.

4. The virtue

Leader: Bernard's virtue is faith, and the love of poverty. Francis named that one himself.

5. A few words from the one leading

Two or three minutes. A friar, sister, or Secular Franciscan in a church; a parent, a grandparent, or whoever called the family together, at home. Everything below is here to help you. Take what is useful and leave the rest.

The thought from the teaching of the Church: Looking at it from the other side...

The Church asks us to look at every decision from the side of the people who have the least, and to judge it by what it does to them. This is not a preference for one kind of person over another. It is a test we are all given. In October 2025 Pope Leo XIV wrote a whole letter about it, called *Dilexi te*, I have loved you, on love for the poor.

Notice where Bernard's money went. Not to an institution and not by messenger. Out in a public square in Assisi, in the afternoon, where the poor who needed it could easily partake in receiving it.

What to speak about

Speak about money, as honestly as you can manage in front of these particular people.

Or speak about the first time you gave something away and afterward missed it.

If you would rather not speak about yourself, use or adapt this short reflection:

I want to say one thing and then we will continue to pray.

Bernard was rich. He was trained in law, he owned property, he was respected in his town, and he gave the whole lot away in one afternoon in a public square. I am not going to stand here and tell you to do that, because I have not done it.

What I can tell you is that the Church asks all of us to look at our decisions from the side of the people who have least, and to ask what our choices are doing to them. The Church asks, Jesus asks us to consider.

One question

Leader: Let us now consider in our hearts and minds, who is poor among us. Not a group, but one person we could name, in the streets around this house.

6. The Cantic of Francis

Read all of it aloud, from the beginning. Tonight's new verse is the last one, printed in bold.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and every blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Pause.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, and especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, and bears a likeness of You, Most High.

He wrote this verse about the sun while he was almost blind and could not bear the light.

7. The reading

Read by somebody who is not the leader. Say the line below first, then the passage.

Leader: Contemplate a man with a great deal to lose, asking a sincere question. Listen for the fact that Jesus looks at him and loves him before he answers, and listen for what the man does next.

Mark 10:17–22

As he was going out into the way, one ran to him, knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”

Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except one—God. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not give false testimony,’ ‘Do not defraud,’ ‘Honor your father and mother.’”

He said to him, “Teacher, I have observed all these things from my youth.”

Jesus looking at him loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me, taking up the cross.”

But his face fell at that saying, and he went away sorrowful, for he was one who had great possessions.

8. Silence

One minute. An actual minute. Groups give thirty seconds and call it a minute, so time it for the first three nights until people get used to it.

9. The prayer

Leader: For what we hold that would take weapons to keep.

All: Loosen our grip.

Leader: For the sort of house that sleeps well at night.

All: Loosen our grip.

Leader: For everything we call security when we are speaking carefully.

All: Loosen our grip. Amen.

Then one Our Father, and only one. With Franciscan simplicity we leave off everything else that has gathered around novenas over the centuries.

Leader: With the poor, and in their name, let us pray as the Lord taught us.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

10. The one thing

Read it out, then have everybody say it back together.

Leader: Before tomorrow night, give away one thing you would need to defend. Put it into somebody's hands yourself.

All: Before tomorrow night, I will give away one thing I would need to defend, and I will put it into somebody's hands myself.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

NIGHT THREE Lady Jacoba of Settesoli

27 September. The door of the Porziuncola.

Before people arrive

- Somebody to read the voice of Jacoba of Settesoli. Give them this page beforehand.
- Somebody who is not the leader to read the Scripture.
- The big candle in the middle, and the nine small ones set around it, of which three will be lit tonight.

1. The greeting

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

2. The lamp

Light the candle in the middle, then the candles lit on the nights before, then tonight's.

Leader: Three small candles tonight. Tonight we hear from the only woman among the nine. She is buried on the stairs going down to Francis' tomb, and she is the only woman in that crypt. Tonight we hear from the Lady Jacoba of Settesoli, whom Francis called Brother Jacoba.

3. The voice

Read aloud by one person, sitting down.

He dictated a letter to me, and it never left Assisi, because I was already on the road.

He wanted three things brought. Cloth to wrap his body in, wax for the candles, and the almond sweets I used to make him when he was ill in my house in Rome. I brought all three, and a pillow, and a veil for his face, and my two sons, and rather more Roman escort than the occasion required, because I was of the family that owned the Colosseum and I never did learn how to arrive quietly.

Women were not allowed in. The brothers were surrounding Francis and working out what to do about me. He settled it from the ground on which he lay. Let Brother Jacoba come in, he said.

Understand what he had done to me years before that. I asked him what I ought to give up, and he told me to give up nothing. Go home. Keep the estate, keep the money, raise the boys, and live the Gospel in the middle of all of it. It is much harder than the other way. I did it for fifty years, and I was able to help build his church in Assisi, and I am buried on his stairs.

4. The virtue

Leader: Jacoba's virtue is fortitude. Francis called her Brother on account of it. The understanding is his; the description is ours.

5. A few words from the one leading

Two or three minutes. A friar, sister, or Secular Franciscan in a church; a parent, a grandparent, or whoever called the family together, at home. Everything below is here to help you. Take what is useful and leave the rest.

The thought from the teaching of the Church: The house is where it happens...

The Church teaches that the family is the first place a person learns that they matter, and that the ordinary Christian's work in the world, a job, a house, children, money, the decisions of a week, is a real calling and not a lesser one. The Second Vatican Council said that the world itself is the layperson's own proper field, and not the sacristy.

Francis did not make Jacoba a nun. He told her to stay exactly where she was. She was not a second-class Franciscan for it, and when he was dying it was her he sent for.

What to speak about

Speak about your own household. What is it actually like. If you are a parent, say one thing that is genuinely hard about it, in front of your children, which will do them more good than anything else you say all week.

If you are a friar or a sister, speak about the family you came from, or about the community you live in now, and be specific rather than warm.

If you would rather not speak about yourself, use or adapt this short reflection:

I want to say one thing and then we will continue to pray.

Francis told this woman to stay where she was. Keep the house, keep the money, raise your sons, and live the Gospel inside all of it. That is harder than leaving, and he knew it.

Some of us are sitting here tonight in the middle of a life we did not choose in every detail. The Church says that life is where holiness is meant to happen, and not in spite of it. Jacoba got fifty years of it. She is buried a few feet from him, on the stairs, and she is the only woman there.

One question

Leader: Let us now consider in our hearts and minds, who is not at this table who should be, and what it would cost us, individually or together as a community, to have them here next year.

6. The Canticle of Francis

Read all of it aloud, from the beginning. Tonight's new verse is the last one, printed in bold.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and every blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Pause.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, and especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, and bears a likeness of You, Most High.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars. In heaven You formed them, clear and precious and beautiful.

She came at night, carrying candles. That is why this verse is hers.

7. The reading

Read by somebody who is not the leader. Say the line below first, then the passage.

Leader: Contemplate a woman doing something extravagant, and being criticized for it in front of everybody. Listen for what Jesus says will happen to her story.

Mark 14:3–9

While he was at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster jar of ointment of pure nard, very costly. She broke the jar and poured it over his head. But there were some who were indignant among themselves, saying, “Why has this ointment been wasted? For this might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” So they grumbled against her.

But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want to, you can do them good; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for the burying. Most certainly I tell you, wherever this Good News may be preached throughout the whole world, that which this woman has done will also be spoken of for a memorial of her.”

8. Silence

One minute. An actual minute. Groups give thirty seconds and call it a minute, so time it for the first three nights until people get used to it.

9. The prayer

Leader: For the ones we keep outside, and the reasons we give for it.

All: Open the door and set a place.

Leader: For the rules that were sensible once and are now only old.

All: Open the door and set a place.

Leader: For everyone who arrives before the letter is sent, carrying exactly what we needed.

All: Open the door and set a place. Amen.

Then one Our Father, and only one. With Franciscan simplicity we leave off everything else that has gathered around novenas over the centuries.

Leader: With the poor, and in their name, let us pray as the Lord taught us.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

10. The one thing

Read it out, then have everybody say it back together.

Leader: Before tomorrow night, cook something and take it to somebody, and set one more place at your table than you need.

All: Before tomorrow night, I will cook something and take it to somebody, and I will set one more place at my table than I need.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

NIGHT FOUR Brother Masseo

28 September. A fork in the road.

Before people arrive

- Somebody to read the voice of Masseo. Give them this page beforehand.
- Somebody who is not the leader to read the Scripture.
- The big candle in the middle, and the nine small ones set around it, of which four will be lit tonight.

1. The greeting

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

2. The lamp

Light the candle in the middle, then the candles lit on the nights before, then tonight's.

Leader: Four small candles tonight. Tonight we hear from the tallest and best spoken of them, and the one Francis worked hardest to take down a peg. Tonight we hear from Brother Masseo.

3. The voice

Read aloud by one person, sitting down.

I was the tall one and the good-looking one and I could talk, and I knew all three.

I asked him once, on the road, why after you. Why does the whole world come running after you? You are not handsome. You are not learned. You are not well born. He was delighted with the question. He said God had looked everywhere for the most useless man alive and could not find one more useless than himself, so that nobody would ever mistake the harvest for his own work.

He made me porter and cook and almoner all at once, to grind the vanity out of me, and I let him do it, and then he gave me my place back.

Once we came to a fork in the road and did not know which way God wanted us to go. He told me to spin. I turned round and round like a child until I fell over, dizzy and undignified in front of everybody, and the way I was pointing when I stopped was the way we went. That is how we chose. I have been dead a long time and I still think it was the sanest thing we ever did.

4. The virtue

Leader: Masseo's virtue is a gracious manner, natural good sense, and devout speech. Francis named that one himself.

5. A few words from the one leading

Two or three minutes. A friar, sister, or Secular Franciscan in a church; a parent, a grandparent, or whoever called the family together, at home. Everything below is here to help you. Take what is useful and leave the rest.

The thought from the teaching of the Church: The work, and who gets a say...

Two teachings sit together tonight. The first is that work has dignity because the worker has dignity, and there is no job that is beneath a person. The second is that people have a right to a share in the decisions that affect them. The Church calls that participation, and lately we have been calling it walking together, which Franciscans have been doing in chapter for eight hundred years without needing a new word for it.

Masseo was given the door, the kitchen, and the alms bag at the same time and told to get on with it, and he did the work. So, when the brothers did not know which road to take, Francis did not decide by himself. He asked a man to spin round until he fell over.

What to speak about

Speak about your own work, and about the part of it that nobody sees.

Or speak about a decision that was made about you, without you.

If you would rather not speak about yourself, use or adapt this short reflection:

I want to say one thing and then we will continue to pray.

Masseo was the impressive one, and he was put on the door and in the kitchen, and given the alms bag, all at once, to take him down a peg.

The Church teaches that work is not the thing you do until your real life starts. It is where most of a life is spent, and the dignity in it belongs to the person doing it and not to the job title. She also teaches that people have a right to be part of the decisions made about them. Both of those were being taught to Masseo at the same time, and he found it extremely annoying, which is in the sources.

One question

Leader: Let us now consider in our hearts and minds, who among us does work that nobody ever thanks them for, and whether we have ever said so to them out loud.

6. The Canticle of Francis

Read all of it aloud, from the beginning. Tonight's new verse is the last one, printed in bold.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and every blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Pause.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, and especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, and bears a likeness of You, Most High.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars. In heaven You formed them, clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Wind is breath, and breath is speech, and it is also what turns you round and points you somewhere. All three of those are Masseo.

7. The reading

Read by somebody who is not the leader. Say the line below first, then the passage.

Leader: Contemplate Jesus speaking with Nicodemus, who has come to see him at night. It is one sentence. Read it twice, slowly, and then say nothing at all.

John 3:8

“The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don’t know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

8. Silence

One minute. An actual minute. Groups give thirty seconds and call it a minute, so time it for the first three nights until people get used to it.

9. The prayer

Leader: For the roads we cannot choose between.

All: Turn us until we are pointing the right way.

Leader: For our own good sense, which has taken us the wrong way before now.

All: Turn us until we are pointing the right way.

Leader: For everyone whose work holds this place up and is never named.

All: Turn us until we are pointing the right way. Amen.

Then one Our Father, and only one. With Franciscan simplicity we leave off everything else that has gathered around novenas over the centuries.

Leader: With the poor, and in their name, let us pray as the Lord taught us.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

10. The one thing

Read it out, then have everybody say it back together.

Leader: Before tomorrow night, sit down among people you would not normally sit with. Ask them two questions and then stop talking. What is it like to be you? What is it like to be here?

All: Before tomorrow night, I will sit down among people I would not normally sit with, and I will ask two questions and then stop talking.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

NIGHT FIVE Brother William of England

29 September, the feast of Saint Michael. The sea, and the right transept.

Before people arrive

- Somebody to read the voice of William of England. Give them this page beforehand.
- Somebody who is not the leader to read the Scripture.
- The big candle in the middle, and the nine small ones set around it, of which five will be lit tonight.

1. The greeting

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

2. The lamp

Light the candle in the middle, then the candles lit on the nights before, then tonight's.

Leader: Five small candles tonight, and today is the last day of the Lent of Saint Michael, the forty days Francis kept every year from the Assumption until today. Two years before he died he was in the middle of those same forty days, up on La Verna, when the wounds opened in his hands, feet, and side. Tonight we hear from Brother William of England.

3. The voice

Read aloud by one person, sitting down.

I came the other way.

Everybody remembers when Francis received the stigmata in 1224. In that same month our brothers landed at Dover and walked up to Canterbury and on to London and Oxford. I had already gone in the opposite direction. I left England, I came to Assisi, I found him, and I stayed. The great medieval chronicler, Matthew Paris, was a friend of mine and put my name in his chronicle, which is more than most of us got.

I died in 1232, six years after Francis, and they buried me close to the altar under which Francis was laid to rest, in the right transept. Then things began to happen at my grave. People were cured. Crowds came. It went on long enough to become a problem.

Brother Elias came and stood over the slab and asked me to stop. Out of reverence for Francis, he said. The saint is a few feet away and the pilgrims are all gathering in this transept, round an Englishman.

So I stopped.

That is the whole of my story and I would not change it. There is a kind of holiness that consists of being asked to be less impressive, and saying yes.

4. The virtue

Leader: William's virtue is knowing when to stop. It is the virtue we name for him, on the strength of the single story we have just shared.

5. A few words from the one leading

Two or three minutes. A friar, sister, or Secular Franciscan in a church; a parent, a grandparent, or whoever called the family together, at home. Everything below is here to help you. Take what is useful and leave the rest.

The thought from the teaching of the Church: Not doing what somebody else could do...

The Church has a word for tonight and it is worth teaching everyone: subsidiarity. It means that a bigger body should not take over what a smaller one can do for itself. Help is supposed to build people up, not stand in for them. Pius XI called it a grave wrong to take away from smaller communities the things they can do on their own.

There is a friar in Brazil who once sat in a meeting and said nothing while a group of poor people made a decision he knew would not work. Why did he remain silent? Because it was the first decision they had ever made themselves, and he did not wish to rob them of that dignity. Of course they had to keep meeting, and in time steer another course, but the friar was there to accompany them, not to decide for them.

What to speak about

Speak about something you have stopped doing, or something you know you should stop doing.

Or speak about somewhere you do for people what they could do for themselves, and about why it is hard to let go of.

If you would rather not speak about yourself, use or adapt this short reflection:

I want to say one thing and then we will continue to pray.

William of England came all the way to Assisi, joined the brothers, died young, and then miracles started happening at his grave. Brother Elias came and asked him to stop, out of respect for Francis. And he stopped. I find that story difficult, and I think we are meant to.

There is a kind of helping that is really about us. The Church says it is a serious wrong to take away from people the things they could do for themselves. So tonight is not about the good we are failing to do. It is about the good we ought to stop doing.

One question

Leader: Let us now consider in our hearts and minds, what we do for people, individually or together as a community, that they could do for themselves if we let them.

6. The Canticle of Francis

Read all of it aloud, from the beginning. Tonight's new verse is the last one, printed in bold.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and every blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Pause.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, and especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, and bears a likeness of You, Most High.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars. In heaven You formed them, clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

If your parish is dealing with water itself, with wells, drought, contamination or the price of it, use that tonight instead of subsidiarity. Laudato Si' says that safe drinking water is a basic and universal human right, and that where people are denied it the other rights walk out of the door behind it. If you do that, say so, so that nobody is confused about which teaching you are giving.

7. The reading

Read by somebody who is not the leader. Say the line below first, then the passage.

Leader: Contemplate John the Baptist, told that everybody is going to Jesus now instead of to him. Listen for his answer.

John 3:27–30

John answered, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. You yourselves testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore my joy is made full. He must increase, but I must decrease."

8. Silence

One minute. An actual minute. Groups give thirty seconds and call it a minute, so time it for the first three nights until people get used to it.

9. The prayer

Leader: For the good we do that is really about us.

All: Teach us when to stop.

Leader: For the jobs we will not hand on.

All: Teach us when to stop.

Leader: For everyone who has been helped into helplessness.

All: Teach us when to stop. Amen.

Then one Our Father, and only one. With Franciscan simplicity we leave off everything else that has gathered around novenas over the centuries.

Leader: With the poor, and in their name, let us pray as the Lord taught us.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

10. The one thing

Read it out, then have everybody say it back together.

Leader: Before tomorrow night, withdraw from one argument you are winning, and let somebody less able than you do a thing you do well, without correcting them afterward.

All: Before tomorrow night, I will withdraw from one argument I am winning, and I will let somebody else do a thing I do well, without correcting them.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

NIGHT SIX Brother Angelo Tancredi

30 September. Fonte Colombo, above Rieti.

Before people arrive

- Somebody to read the voice of Angelo Tancredi. Give them this page beforehand.
- Somebody who is not the leader to read the Scripture.
- The big candle in the middle, and the nine small ones set around it, of which six will be lit tonight.

1. The greeting

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

2. The lamp

Light the candle in the middle, then the candles lit on the nights before, then tonight's.

Leader: Six small candles tonight. Tonight we hear from a knight who became a friar, and who was one of the four who nursed Francis through his last illness. Tonight we hear from Brother Angelo Tancredi.

3. The voice

Read aloud by one person, sitting down.

I was a knight before I was a friar. The many stories my brothers told about me say so, which tells you what they thought was worth writing down about me.

Courtesy is not manners. Courtesy is deciding how you are going to treat a person before you find out whether they deserve it.

I was there at Rieti when the doctors came for his eyes. The iron goes into the fire and comes out white, and it goes from the ear to the eyebrow. The brothers left the room. I do not blame them for it. Francis looked at the iron as it came toward him and spoke to it. My brother Fire, he said, noble and useful among all creatures, be courteous to me in this hour, because I have always loved you.

Then he let them do it, and afterward he said he had felt nothing, and the doctor did not believe him, and neither did I.

He was courteous to the thing that was about to burn him. I had been a soldier. I had never seen anything like it, and I gave him the rest of my life.

4. The virtue

Leader: Angelo's virtue is courtesy. Francis named that one himself.

5. A few words from the one leading

Two or three minutes. A friar, sister, or Secular Franciscan in a church; a parent, a grandparent, or whoever called the family together, at home. Everything below is here to help you. Take what is useful and leave the rest.

The thought from the teaching of the Church: Dignity, in daily size...

The first thing the Church teaches about society is that every person has a dignity which does not rise or fall with their health, their age, their usefulness or their papers. From that follow the things a person needs in order to live, and Pope John XXIII, in *Pacem in Terris*, lists medical care among them by name.

Courtesy is that teaching in daily size. In a hospital corridor, in a queue, on the telephone to an office that does not want to help you, the doctrine of human dignity looks like courtesy and like nothing grander than that.

What to speak about

Speak about illness. Your own, or somebody you have sat with.

Or name one person you find it hard to be courteous to, and say why, without making them the villain.

If you would rather not speak about yourself, use or adapt this short reflection:

I want to say one thing and then we will continue to pray.

Angelo was a soldier before he was a friar, so courtesy was his trade, in the tradition of Camelot. That is not a flourish. Francis called his own companions his knights of the Round Table. He does not mean manners. He means deciding how you will treat somebody before you find out whether they have earned it.

The Church teaches that every person has a dignity that does not rise or fall with their health or their usefulness. Our embodying courtesy is reflected in the way we speak to a receptionist or someone helping us on the other side of a phone or chat. Francis was courteous to a red-hot iron. We can manage the same to all who provide customer service.

One question

Leader: Let us now consider in our hearts and minds, who among us or near to us cannot get to a doctor, and why, and who decided that.

Somebody in the room tonight is in pain, or is waiting on a result. Do not let this turn into a lesson about the right attitude to suffering. Francis asked the fire to be gentle first, and was brave afterward. Keep it in that order.

6. The Canticle of Francis

Read all of it aloud, from the beginning. Tonight's new verse is the last one, printed in bold.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and every blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Pause.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, and especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, and bears a likeness of You, Most High.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars. In heaven You formed them, clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

He wrote this verse about the element that had been held against his face.

7. The reading

Read by somebody who is not the leader. Say the line below first, then the passage.

Leader: Contemplate a blind beggar who shouts, is told to be quiet, and shouts louder. Listen for the question Jesus asks him, which is the question nobody had bothered to ask him.

Mark 10:46–52

They came to Jericho. As he went out from Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, you son of David, have mercy on me!” Many rebuked him, that he should be quiet, but he cried out much more, “You son of David, have mercy on me!”

Jesus stood still and said, “Call him.”

They called the blind man, saying to him, “Cheer up! Get up. He is calling you!”

He, casting away his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus.

Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man said to him, “Rabboni, that I may see again.”

Jesus said to him, “Go your way. Your faith has made you well.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the way.

8. Silence

One minute. An actual minute. Groups give thirty seconds and call it a minute, so time it for the first three nights until people get used to it.

9. The prayer

Leader: For everyone waiting on a result this week.

All: Be courteous with us, Lord.

Leader: For the ones nursing somebody, whom nobody asks after.

All: Be courteous with us, Lord.

Leader: For the people we are short with because they cannot do anything for us.

All: Be courteous with us, Lord. Amen.

Then one Our Father, and only one. With Franciscan simplicity we leave off everything else that has gathered around novenas over the centuries.

Leader: With the poor, and in their name, let us pray as the Lord taught us.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

10. The one thing

Read it out, then have everybody say it back together.

Leader: Before tomorrow night, go with somebody to an appointment they are dreading. If nobody will let you, telephone one person who is ill and stay on the line longer than is comfortable.

All: Before tomorrow night, I will go with somebody to an appointment they are dreading, or I will telephone one person who is ill and stay on longer than is comfortable.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

NIGHT SEVEN Brother John of England

1 October. Foreign ground.

Before people arrive

- Somebody to read the voice of John of England. Give them this page beforehand.
- Somebody who is not the leader to read the Scripture.
- The big candle in the middle, and the nine small ones set around it, of which seven will be lit tonight.

1. The greeting

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

2. The lamp

Light the candle in the middle, then the candles lit on the nights before, then tonight's.

Leader: Seven small candles tonight. Tonight's companion left nothing behind him at all. We are lighting this one for a man whose words we do not have. Tonight we hear from Brother John of England.

3. The voice

There is no telling tonight, and that is deliberate. The person holding tonight's part reads the following, slowly.

There are only a few words.

He was English. He died around the year 1247. He was buried under the altar of Saint Elizabeth in the Lower Basilica, and a figure standing at the left of a painting that no longer exists was probably him. That is the whole record.

He lived, prayed and ministered with the other early friars for twenty years, and nobody wrote down one word he said.

Now keep thirty seconds of silence. Count them in your head, because thirty seconds is longer than you think and people will start reaching for the next page at about twelve. Then read the words below out loud, because the silence will not explain itself, and if you leave it unexplained some of the room will simply think you have lost your place.

Leader: Most of us will be remembered the way he is. Some people will remember us properly for forty years, and then nobody will, and the same is true of nearly everybody we have ever loved. The Church has never answered that by promising us fame. She answers it by burying people properly, by keeping their names written down, by praying for them by name in November, and by insisting that the ground holding them is a sister and not a rubbish tip.

4. The virtue

Leader: Though Francis surely knew, we do not know what John's virtue was, and we are going to leave it unknown. That is tonight.

5. A few words from the one leading

Two or three minutes. A friar, sister, or Secular Franciscan in a church; a parent, a grandparent, or whoever called the family together, at home. Everything below is here to help you. Take what is useful and leave the rest.

The thought from the teaching of the Church: What we throw away...

Pope Francis said that we have built a culture which throws things away and then starts throwing people away, and that the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one cry and not two. Care for creation is not an extra item on the end of a list. It is the same care, pointed at a river or a field instead of at a person.

The Church has always refused to treat the dead as disposable either. We bury them, we mark the place, and we read out their names. Tonight we do the oldest of those things, which costs nothing at all.

What to speak about

Say the names of your own dead out loud, and go first, before you ask anybody else to. If you do not go first, nobody will.

Or speak about the place near here that has been treated as disposable, and about what was in it before.

If you would rather not speak about yourself, use or adapt this short reflection:

I want to say one thing and then we will continue to pray.

We know four things about the friar we are praying with tonight. He was English. He died around 1247. He is buried under an altar in Assisi. There was a painting of him and it has gone. That is everything. He lived alongside Leo and Rufino and Masseo for twenty years and not one word of his was written down.

I am going to say the names of my own dead now, out loud, and then anyone who wants to may say theirs. Just the names. Nothing else is needed.

One question

Leader: Let us now consider in our hearts and minds the names of our own dead, and the ones nobody else here would think to mention. Say them out loud if you wish.

There will be no silence here. This is the night the room fills up. Let it take as long as it takes, do not comment on anybody's names afterward, and when it stops, wait, because somebody is always working up to one more.

6. The Canticle of Francis

Read all of it aloud, from the beginning. Tonight's new verse is the last one, printed in bold.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and every blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Pause.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, and especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, and bears a likeness of You, Most High.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars. In heaven You formed them, clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

He is under her floor, and she is called sister and mother in the same line.

7. The reading

Read by somebody who is not the leader. Say the line below first, then the passage.

Leader: Contemplate a grain of wheat falling into the ground. Listen to it, and do not try to work it out.

John 12:24–26

“Most certainly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

“He who loves his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life. If anyone serves me, let him follow me. Where I am, there my servant will also be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”

8. Silence

One minute, on top of the thirty seconds you already kept. Count it. Do not fill it.

9. The prayer

Leader: For the ones with no stone and no date.

All: Remember the ones we cannot name.

Leader: For those who died far from where they were born.

All: Remember the ones we cannot name.

Leader: For the ground that is holding all of them, and will hold us.

All: Remember the ones we cannot name. Amen.

Then one Our Father, and only one. With Franciscan simplicity we leave off everything else that has gathered around novenas over the centuries.

Leader: With the poor, and in their name, let us pray as the Lord taught us.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

10. The one thing

Read it out, then have everybody say it back together.

Leader: Before tomorrow night, do one good thing that nobody will know you did, and tell nobody at all, including us.

All: Before tomorrow night, I will do one good thing that nobody will know I did, and I will tell nobody at all.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

NIGHT EIGHT Brother Rufino

2 October. The courtyard of the bishop's house in Assisi.

Before people arrive

- Somebody to read the voice of Rufino. Give them this page beforehand.
- Somebody who is not the leader to read the Scripture.
- The big candle in the middle, and the nine small ones set around it, of which eight will be lit tonight.

1. The greeting

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

2. The lamp

Light the candle in the middle, then the candles lit on the nights before, then tonight's.

Leader: Eight small candles tonight. On the first night we stopped at the line that says no human being is worthy to say God's name, and since then we have let the sun and the moon and the wind and the water and the fire and the earth do the praising for us. Tonight we are let back in. The verse we add tonight is the one Francis wrote to stop a fight, and it is the verse where human beings are allowed back into the poem. Tonight we hear from Brother Rufino.

3. The voice

Read aloud by one person, sitting down.

My family were nobility. When the townspeople rose and burned the great houses we ran to Perugia, and Clare, who is my cousin, was a small child in that flight. So when I tell you that a town can tear itself in half, I am not speaking generally.

I prayed. That is what I did and it is very nearly all I did. I was no use in conversation, I could not preach, and when Francis made me go and preach anyway I did it half undressed and made a fool of myself, and then he came and did the same beside me so that I would not be the only fool in the town square.

Then the bishop excommunicated the mayor, and the mayor forbade the town to do business with the bishop, and not one churchman and not one layman went near either of them. Francis was in bed and going blind, and what he said was this. It is a disgrace to you, servants of God, that these two hate each other and nobody is doing anything about it. To us. He said it to us, the praying ones.

Then he wrote one verse, and he sent us to sing it.

I have no voice. I never had one. But he did not ask me to make a speech, and he did not ask me to be persuasive, and he did not ask me to be right. He asked me to carry his words across a courtyard and let them out of my mouth. So we stood in front of the bishop and the mayor and half the city and we sang, and the mayor knelt down on the stones, and the bishop said he was quick-tempered and sorry for it, and it was over.

I could not preach. I could sing another man's poem. It turned out that was enough.

Prayer that will not get up and walk across a courtyard is not yet prayer.

4. The virtue

Leader: Rufino's virtue is prayer without ceasing. Francis named that one himself. Notice tonight who Francis shamed when he wanted a fight stopped, and what he sent them out with.

5. A few words from the one leading

Two or three minutes. A friar, sister, or Secular Franciscan in a church; a parent, a grandparent, or whoever called the family together, at home. Everything below is here to help you. Take what is useful and leave the rest.

The thought from the teaching of the Church: Peace is built...

The Church teaches that peace is not what is left over when the shouting stops. It is the work of justice and the fruit of charity, and somebody has to build it. Pope Paul VI put it in five words: if you want peace, work for justice. Pope Francis wrote a whole letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, about friendship across the lines. And in 2016 the Church met in Rome with Pax Christi and asked all of us to take the nonviolence of the Gospel seriously again, as a way of life and not as a mood.

What Francis of Assisi contributed to a civil war in his own town was one verse of a poem, carried by two men on foot into a courtyard. He could not walk and he was going blind. None of us has an excuse.

What to speak about

Speak about a quarrel you are inside. Not one you have observed. One you are in.

If you are leading in a family and there is something that needs saying to somebody at this table, tonight is the night, and it will be better done here in front of the candles than not done at all.

If you would rather not speak about yourself, use or adapt this short reflection:

I want to say one thing and then we will continue to pray.

There was a fight in Assisi between the bishop and the mayor, and it had gone on long enough that the town had taken sides. Nobody went to either man. Not one priest and not one layman.

Francis was dying and could not walk. What he did was write one verse and send two brothers to sing it in the bishop's yard. The mayor knelt down on the stones and the bishop repented. The Church teaches that peace is something you build, not something that happens when people calm down. It gets built by whoever is willing to go to both sides. Usually that is nobody, which is why it took a dying man to show the way.

One question

Leader: Let us now consider in our hearts and minds the split in this room, or in this community, that we have all quietly agreed to call a difference of opinion.

6. The Canticle of Francis

Read all of it aloud, from the beginning. Tonight's new verse is the last one, printed in bold.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and every blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Pause.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, and especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, and bears a likeness of You, Most High.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars. In heaven You formed them, clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and who bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace, for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

This is the verse he wrote for the bishop and the mayor, and it is the one that lets us back into the poem. It is also the verse Rufino carried.

7. The reading

Read by somebody who is not the leader. Say the line below first, then the passage.

Leader: Contemplate someone standing at the altar with a gift in their hands, remembering something. Listen for the order of the two things, which is the opposite of the way we usually do it.

Matthew 5:23–24

"If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

8. Silence

One minute. An actual minute. Groups give thirty seconds and call it a minute, so time it for the first three nights until people get used to it.

9. The prayer

Leader: For the two we could go to, and have not.

All: Send us to both of them.

Leader: For everyone bearing something long, quietly, with no end in sight.

All: Send us to both of them.

Leader: For the towns and the households that have taken sides.

All: Send us to both of them. Amen.

Then one Our Father, and only one. With Franciscan simplicity we leave off everything else that has gathered around novenas over the centuries.

Leader: With the poor, and in their name, let us pray as the Lord taught us.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

10. The one thing

Read it out, then have everybody say it back together.

Leader: Before tomorrow night, go to one side of a quarrel you have stayed out of. Say nothing clever.

All: Before tomorrow night, I will go to one side of a quarrel I have stayed out of, and I will say nothing clever.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

NIGHT NINE Brother Leo

3 October, the night of the Transitus. The Porziuncola.

Before people arrive

- Somebody to read the voice of Leo. Give them this page beforehand.
- Somebody who is not the leader to read the Scripture.
- The big candle in the middle, and all nine small ones, lit again before people arrive.
- Nine readers for the litany of the nine, if you have nine people.
- Paper and a pen, to write down what people commit to.
- Longer than usual. Allow an hour and a quarter tonight.

1. The greeting

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.

2. The lamp

Light the candle in the middle, then the candles lit on the nights before, then tonight's.

Leader: On the first night there was one small light on this table. Tonight there are nine, and one in the middle. He did not do any of this on his own, and neither will we. Tonight we hear from the one who wrote it all down, Brother Leo.

3. The voice

Read aloud by one person, sitting down.

He called me his little sheep of God. He wrote it at the top of a letter and I kept it, and I kept the blessing he wrote on La Verna, and I kept very nearly everything, which is the only reason you have any of this.

At the end he asked to be put on the ground with nothing on. He borrowed the tunic back from the guardian so that he would not own the clothes he died in, and he said so out loud so that there would be a witness. He had bread brought and broke it with us. He asked for the Gospel of the washing of the feet.

Then he added the last verse, about our sister death, and told us to sing. Elias said the neighbors would hear and would think it unbecoming. He was not being small about it. He had a house full of brothers and a town full of opinion and his founder lying on the floor.

We sang anyway. For days. And at dusk on a Saturday he stopped, and the larks came down over the roof at an hour when larks do not fly, and none of us could tell then, and I cannot tell now, whether they were grieving or celebrating. I have decided that this is the correct answer.

4. The virtue

Leader: Leo's virtue is simplicity and purity. Francis named that one himself.

5. A few words from the one leading

Two or three minutes. A friar, sister, or Secular Franciscan in a church; a parent, a grandparent, or whoever called the family together, at home. Everything below is here to help you. Take what is useful and leave the rest.

The thought from the teaching of the Church: Love walks on two feet...

Solidarity is not a feeling of being sorry for people. Pope John Paul II defined it as a firm and lasting determination to commit yourself to the good of everybody, because we really are all responsible for all.

And the Church says that love walks on two feet. One foot is the works of mercy, which meet the need standing in front of you. The other is the work of justice, which goes after whatever keeps producing that need. Most of us have one foot well developed and are shy about the other, and a person standing on one foot does not get very far. Francis used both. He washed the wounds of lepers, and he also wrote to the rulers of the peoples and reminded them who they would be standing in front of one day.

What to speak about

Say which of the two feet you personally have not used this year, and what you are going to do about it in the year ahead.

If you would rather not speak about yourself, use or adapt this short reflection:

I want to say one thing and then we will continue to pray.

Leo wrote it all down. That is why we have any of this at all. He was there when Francis was laid on the ground with nothing on, and when the bread was broken, and when they sang, and when the larks came, and he kept the parchment for fifty years afterward.

The Church asks two things of us and calls them the two feet of love. Help the person in front of you. Then go after whatever put them there. Most of us are good at one of those and shy about the other. Before we finish tonight, I am going to tell you which foot I have not used this year...

One question

Leader: The Church says that love walks on two feet. One foot is the works of mercy, which meet the person standing in front of us. The other is the work of justice, which goes after whatever put them there. Let us now consider in our hearts and minds which of the two we have not used this year, individually and together as a community.

The larger question, the one the brothers put to Francis, comes later tonight. Do not use it up here.

6. The Canticle of Francis

Read all of it aloud, from the beginning. Tonight's new verse is the last one, printed in bold.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and every blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Pause.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, and especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, and bears a likeness of You, Most High.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars. In heaven You formed them, clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and who bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace, for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks, and serve Him with great humility.

Tonight two verses are added and the poem is finished. The whole of it may be sung here, in a local setting if you have one, or recited from the page as on every other night. The last line is not a description of anything. It is an instruction. Read it as one.

7. The reading

Read by somebody who is not the leader. Say the line below first, then the passage.

Leader: Contemplate Francis lying on the bare ground as the light goes, singing this psalm. Listen for the line about prison.

Psalm 142

A contemplation by David, when he was in the cave. A prayer.

I cry with my voice to the LORD. With my voice, I ask the LORD for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him. I tell him my troubles.

When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, you knew my route. On the path in which I walk, they have hidden a snare for me. Look on my right, and see; for there is no one who is concerned for me. Refuge has fled from me. No one cares for my soul.

I cried to you, LORD. I said, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me.

Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name. The righteous will surround me, for you will be good to me.

8. Silence

One minute. An actual minute. Groups give thirty seconds and call it a minute, so time it for the first three nights until people get used to it.

9. The prayer

Tonight the prayer is the litany of the nine, which is printed on the pages after this night. Turn to it now and come back here afterward.

Then one Our Father, and only one. With Franciscan simplicity we leave off everything else that has gathered around novenas over the centuries.

Leader: With the poor, and in their name, let us pray as the Lord taught us.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

10. The one thing

Read it out, then have everybody say it back together.

Leader: Tell somebody what happened this week. Not what you learned. What happened, and who said what. And give the story back to the people who are in it before you tell it to anybody else, because a story taken without permission is one more injustice.

All: I will tell somebody what happened this week, and I will give the story back to the people who are in it before I tell it to anybody else.

Do not go out yet. Turn now to the pages that follow, which carry the rest of the ninth night.

The ninth night, continued

The litany of the nine

The Francis candle and all nine companion candles are burning.

Leader: Sylvester sold him the stones and came back to complain.

All: Teach us to say what we are.

Leader: Bernard lay awake upstairs and watched a man pray all night.

All: Loosen our grip.

Leader: Jacoba arrived before the letter had even been sent.

All: Open the door and set a place.

Leader: Masseo spun at the crossroads until he fell over.

All: Turn us until we are pointing the right way.

Leader: William was asked to stop, and he stopped.

All: Teach us when to stop.

Leader: Angelo watched him speak courteously to the iron.

All: Be courteous with us, Lord.

Leader: John left nothing behind, and the ground is holding him.

All: Remember the ones we cannot name.

Leader: Rufino prayed, and then he walked into the courtyard.

All: Send us to both of them.

Leader: Leo wrote it all down, and they sang, and the larks came.

All: May the Lord give us peace.

Leader: Eight hundred years ago tonight, on the floor, in the dark, with nothing on, singing.

All: May the Lord give us peace. Amen.

The question the brothers asked him

Leader: Once the brothers asked Francis what a good Friar Minor would look like, and instead of describing a virtue he started naming his brothers, one at a time, and built a whole man out of the nine or ten of them. So here is his question, put to us. What is our virtue, and what are the virtues of each one around us?

Then hand it over

If there is a Transitus service in a church near you, the flame goes there and this novena stops. It should hand over and not compete.

Where there is no Transitus service and no Franciscan service nearby, then this is the Transitus. Do not end here. Turn to the account of the passing, which is printed at the back of this book, and read it, and then keep silence, and then go out.

The account of the passing

For the ninth night, in any place where there is no Transitus service to go to. Read it slowly, after the Canticle. It takes about four minutes. This is written from the early sources and is not a quotation from any one of them.

In the last week of September, in the year 1226, they carried him down from the bishop's house in Assisi toward Saint Mary of the Angels, which he called the Porziuncola, and which was the one place in the world he called home. He was forty-four years old. He had been blind for a long time and he weighed almost nothing.

On the road, at the turn below the leper house, he asked the brothers to set the litter down and turn him around to face the city. He could not see it. He blessed it anyway, and asked God to bless the people in it, and said that it had once been a den of thieves and was now a holy place, and then he asked to be carried on.

At the Porziuncola he sent a letter to Rome, to the Lady Jacoba, asking her to bring cloth to wrap his body in, and wax for candles, and the almond sweets she used to make him. Before the letter left there was knocking at the door and she was already there with all three things.

He asked to be taken off the bed and laid on the bare ground. He asked for the tunic he was wearing to be given to him as a loan, so that he would not own the clothes he died in, and he said so out loud so that there would be a witness to it. He said: I have done what is mine to do. May Christ teach you what is yours.

He had bread brought and broke it and gave a piece to each of them, in memory of the Last Supper. He asked for the Gospel of the washing of the feet to be read to him.

He blessed Bernard first, who was the first of them, and put his hand on his head and called him his firstborn. He blessed the brothers who were in the room, and the ones who were not, and the ones who were not yet born.

Then he added the last verse to his song, about our Sister Bodily Death, and asked them to sing. Brother Elias said that the neighbors would hear it and would think it unbecoming for a man to die singing. He sang anyway, and they sang with him, for two days.

At the end he asked for Psalm 142, and they sang it, and he sang it with them. With my voice I cry to the Lord. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name.

He died as the light was going, on the evening of Saturday the third of October. Larks came down over the roof of that house and circled it, singing, at an hour when larks do not fly.

In the morning they carried him up to the city with branches and candles, and they turned aside at San Damiano and held him up at the grille so that Clare and the sisters could see him once. Then they took him to San Giorgio, where he had learned to read.

Then keep silence, as long as the room can bear. Then the greeting, and nothing else.

Leader: May the Lord give us peace.

All: Peace and Goodness.