

whereas the members of the Third Order Secular live in the spirit of the vows in fraternal unity according their own separate Rule” (Ch. 2, Third Order Handbook). Pope Leo XIII explained that while all the Franciscan Orders are ordered to the perfection of their members, unlike the first two Franciscan Orders, “open to few...the Third Order... is accommodated to the many” (Constitution *Misericors Filius*). Even so, the Third Order is not indiscriminately open to all, and there are times of probation (*i.e.* the postulancy & novitiate), before one may be professed for life in the Order.

What is the purpose of the Third Order?

The purpose of secular Third Orders in the Church is the same as that of religious orders and congregations: they promote Christian perfection. And St. Francis had no other end in view when he established his Third Order. It is easily understood, then, that “*the first essential duty of Franciscan Tertiaries [Third Order members] is the striving after perfection by faithfully observing the Rule*” (Ch. 3, T.O. Handbook).

Pope St. Pius X proclaimed that the purpose of the Third Order of St. Francis consists in this: “*that its members put into everyday practice the precepts of Gospel perfection and serve as models of Christian life for the imitation of others*” (*Tertium Franciscalum Ordinem*, Sept. 8, 1912).

What is the Spirit of the Franciscan Order?

Every religious order has its specific spirit. It is the founder who, with his particular ideals, outstanding virtues, and activities gives his order its spirit. In St. Francis we see seraphic love, extreme poverty, deep humility, great penance and a chivalrous life according to the Gospel. Yet, how can one concisely express his spirit? Perhaps the best way is to say that his spirit consists in living out fully, the whole Gospel — not only its commands, but also its precepts, ideals and

implications. As his first biographer, Thomas of Celano wrote: “*He was the man with the evangelical vocation in truth and in faith the servant of the Gospel. ...His supreme desire, his ardent wish and his highest principle was to observe the Gospel in all things and above all things*” (Ch. 3, T.O. Handbook).

While other founders concentrated on one or the other characteristics of Christ such as zeal for souls or love of prayer, St. Francis concentrated on imitating Christ, the Divine Model as He is pictured in the Gospel. Thus, “*St. Francis approached God through the Sacred Humanity of Christ. This is the Gospel way, the way best adapted to human nature*” (Ch. 3, T.O. Handbook). From this we see the reason for Francis’s great devotion to the Babe in the Manger, the Man of Sorrows upon the Cross, as well as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament. Pope Pius XI has stated that in no other saint have the image of Christ and the ideal of the Gospel been more faithfully and strikingly expressed than in Francis who has been justly styled “the second Christ” (*Encyclicals Auspicato, Sacra Propediem, Rite Expiatis*).

To acquire the Franciscan Spirit Tertiaries are called to “*frequently fix their attention on Jesus Christ and endeavor to copy one trait after the other according to their station in life. Prayerful reading of the Gospel and regular meditation will fill their minds with Jesus so as to enkindle love for Him in their hearts, and move their wills to imitate Him. Observance of the letter and spirit of the Rule will detach them from the world and self and awaken a longing and a taste for intimate communion with Jesus*” (Ch. 3, T.O. Handbook).

Advantages of the Third Order

Following the spirit and letter of the Rule, members of the Third Order of St. Francis find “*a safe refuge in a sinful world and an excellent nursery of the choicest virtues.*” “*By its wise*

restrictions and abundant graces the Third Order provides a security akin to that of the cloister.” Thus, the Tertiary vocation “*is a great grace, approximating the call to religious life*” (Ch. 5, T.O. Handbook). The various apostolates of the Third Order gives the Tertiary many opportunities to merit through the works of mercy.

The Tertiary has more help in the spiritual life than the rest of the faithful. Besides the Rule, so wisely constructed for those who seek holiness of life while living in this sinful world, he also has the “*glorious examples of the holy Franciscans to guide him,*” and he has claim to a special share in the good works of the Three Orders that will support his efforts. Furthermore, in those places where the Third Order is already established, he has the advantage of “*novice instructions and monthly conferences to unfold the beauty and value, the means and obstacles of the spiritual life, and to explain the application of the spirit of St. Francis to modern everyday life*” (Ch. 5, T.O. Handbook). And, being in fraternal union with other Tertiaries who hold the same lofty Franciscan ideals is a priceless assistance providing joy and strength to persevere in this holy way of life.

All Tertiaries have the great privilege and duty of joining in the Public Prayer of the Church — the Divine Office. With the clergy and religious throughout the world, they become ambassadors of the Church, to officially offer praise to God in the name of all humanity. Yet, because the laity must live in the busy world, holy Church, wise mother that she is, has given her Tertiary children the choice of a much simpler office suited to their station in life known as the *Office of the Paters* or the *Seraphic Office*. This option makes it possible for persons of virtually any station in life to faithfully pray the daily office.

There are also, throughout the year, eight Franciscan Feasts in which Tertiaries can gain plenary indulgences.

The Fruit of the Third Order

The Third Order of St. Francis has done so much good over the centuries both in the sanctification of souls and in the building up of Christian society that many Popes have been moved to sing its praises. The number Franciscan Tertiaries now listed as Saints or Blesseds is enormous. As to its effect in the social sphere, Pope Pius XI stated:

A most wholesome change in society began to take shape, the new Order founded by Francis spreading far and wide among the peoples of Christendom and gaining in its members, while moral purity followed in the wake of the practice of penance. ...There was a beautiful, glorious revival of the choicest virtues in civil life. In fine the face of the earth was renewed” (Rite Expiatis).

Conditions for Entry to the Third Order of St. Francis under the Friars Minor Capuchin of Traditional Observance of Morgon, France

1. Candidates must be above the age of fourteen, in good character, peace-loving, and above all of tried fidelity in the practice of the Catholic Faith and in loyalty to the Roman Church and the Apostolic See. They must be in accord with the doctrinal position of the Capuchin Fathers of Morgon, France and the Priestly Society of St. Pius X.

2. Married women may not be received without the husband’s knowledge and consent, unless their confessor judges otherwise.

3. One must not belong to another Third Order.

4. Church law mandates that candidates undertake at least one year of novitiate before making their profession (the Capuchins of Morgon require 1½ years). At profession the candidates promise to observe the Rule for the rest of their lives.

A Synopsis of the Third Order Rule

1. Simplicity and modesty in dress.
2. Keeping away from dances and shows which savor of license and avoiding all forms of dissipation.
3. Temperance in eating and drinking.
4. Fasting and abstinence on particular days.
5. Monthly Confession and Holy Communion.
6. Praying daily one of three Offices approved by the Church.
7. Making a last will and testament.
8. Leading others by setting a good example.
9. Maintaining charity towards others.
10. Refraining from taking unnecessary oaths and using indecent language.
11. Attending Mass daily when possible and attending the monthly meetings.
12. Contributing to a common fund for the needs of poor members and for the dignity of worship.
13. Visiting sick members.
14. Praying for deceased members.

CONTACT INFORMATION

for the Traditional Third Order of St. Francis

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ARE YOU CALLED TO JOIN THE TRADITIONAL THIRD ORDER OF SAINT FRANCIS?*

The Third Order of St. Francis is “a most powerful antidote against all the evils which harass the present age, and...there is no means more apt to lead the world back to a true and solid observance of the Gospel.” “It is Our desire that all Christian families join the Third Order.”

~Pope Leo XIII

What is the Third Order of St. Francis?

“The Third Order Secular of St. Francis is an ecclesiastical association of the laity, originally founded by St. Francis of Assisi. It is a state of perfection for persons living in the world. The religious strive after perfection by observing the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and live in community according to their Rule,

* The following information (even where not directly quoted) was taken primarily from Chapters 2-5 of the *Handbook of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis of Assisi* (out of print), by Basil Gummerman, O.F.M. Cap. Patterson, NJ: St. Anthony’s Guild, 1947.