

The Rule of the Little Brothers consists in observing the Holy Gospel . . . Those Brothers who live thus will certainly not become a powerful Order. But wherever they go they will create free communities of friends . . . They will be free men because nothing will limit their horizons. And the spirit of the Lord will blow through them at will.

ST FRANCIS SPEAKING TO ST CLARE

You know now what it is to be a Little Brother: a poor man according to the Gospel: a man who, quite freely, renounces all exercise of power, any kind of domination over others, and yet is not guided by any spirit of slavery, but by the most noble spirit there is — that of our Lord.

ST FRANCIS SPEAKING TO RUFINO

Conversations reconstructed by **Fr Eloi Leclerc** in
SAGESSE D'UN PAUVRE

The question is whether we can make the necessary adjustments willingly and collectively or whether they will be forced on us by a series of crises that we cannot survive . . .

The kind of changes I suggest will require an act of collective will on the part of the rich beyond anything we have ever experienced . . . It will take a moral and spiritual revolution which goes far enough to alter our life-style and penetrate our political and industrial systems.

Maurice Strong, when Executive Director,
UN Environment Programme

The whole point about St Francis Assisi is that he certainly was ascetical and he certainly was not gloomy . . . There was nothing negative about it . . . It was as positive as passion; it had all the air of being positive as pleasure. He devoured fasting as a man devours food. He plunged after poverty as men have dug madly for gold.

G K Chesterton, ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

It is truly said that Francis of Assisi was one of the founders of the medieval drama, and therefore of the modern drama. He was the very reverse of the theatrical person in the selfish sense; but for all that he was pre-eminently a dramatic person . . . From the moment when he rent his robes and flung them at his father's feet to the moment when he stretched himself in death on the bare earth in the pattern of the Cross, his life was made up of these unconscious attitudes and unhesitating gestures.

G K Chesterton, ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

The profession of freely embraced poverty made the Franciscans acutely aware of the needs of the poor. There is a close bond between professing poverty and loving the poor. But loving the poor never meant encouraging them to accept passively the situation in which they found themselves. On the contrary, it led the friars to strive to destroy poverty and to better the conditions of the poor... It is no exaggeration to suggest that his (Francis') philosophy of work and his theory and practice of freely embraced poverty would make noteworthy contributions to a plan to deliver the western world from its idolatrous materialism, to which the unmitigated and uncontrolled pursuit of profit and gain has brought it.

Fr Eric Doyle, OFM in his Foreword to Lord Longford's FRANCIS OF ASSISI, A LIFE FOR ALL SEASONS.

Poverty is no disgrace to a man, but it is confoundedly inconvenient.

The Rev Sydney Smith

When St Francis turned aside from the pursuit of happiness to the pursuit of God he signalled the occasion by embracing a leper. This was not a dramatic gesture, designed to overcome his repugnance for the leper's rotting flesh, but a joyous recognition that he had found in him a beloved brother. In other words, equality (which is what all our earthly conflicts are ultimately about) resides, not in the overthrowing of oppressors and the triumph of justice, but in the recognition that we are all members of one family whose Father is in Heaven.

Malcolm Muggeridge in his foreword to Alan Paton's INSTRUMENT OF THY PEACE

Men and women flocked to hear and follow him, not because he preached a 'popular', sentimental, emasculated version of the Christian faith, but because they felt the magnetic attraction of one who lived the Gospel literally and courageously. His purpose was not to make his hearers lovers of birds, beasts and flowers, but to inspire them to follow Christ and make them lovers of the Holy Cross. It was to teach them that, in the pattern of the Crucified, they were to show love and courtesy to all God's creatures, not only to birds and beasts, but to the wicked, stupid and unlovable among their fellow men.

Leo Shirley-Price in his introduction to his translation of THE LITTLE FLOWERS OF ST FRANCIS

Poor Man, Rich Man

*A one-man show, based on the life of
St Francis of Assisi*

by

HUGH STEADMAN WILLIAMS

with music by

KATHLEEN JOHNSON

WESTMINSTER PRODUCTIONS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH GROSVENOR BOOKS

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*The original production performed by Michel Orphelin and
directed by John Dryden.*

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Background to the script

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI: some useful dates

- 1181 or 1182 Born in Assisi, Italy
- 1202 A leader among the young revellers of Assisi, Francis divides his time between his father's cloth business and a full social life. But he has a generous heart and already shows great tenderness towards the poor.
- 1202-3 Spends a year in prison in Perugia after a skirmish between the two cities. He becomes seriously ill.
- 1204 Long convalescence.
- 1205 Dreaming of honour and glory he goes off to join the war in Apulia. But the next day he hears a voice in a dream telling him to go back to Assisi.
- 1206 The crucifix in the dilapidated church of San Damiano tells him to "rebuild my house, which is in ruins." Francis sells cloth belonging to his father to raise money for this task. Furious, his father takes him to court before the Bishop. Francis breaks with his father and becomes a hermit. He cares for lepers and rebuilds several churches.
- 1208 On hearing the tenth chapter of St Matthew at mass, Francis decides to obey it literally and adopts a life of complete poverty coupled with public preaching. His first followers ask to join him.
- 1212 Clare, daughter of an aristocratic Assisi family, runs away from home to join Francis and founds the Second Order of St Francis – the Poor Clares.
- 1213 Count Roland of Chiusi gives Francis Mount Verna as a place of retreat and prayer.
- 1217 First Franciscan missions overseas. Over five thousand brothers have now joined the Order.
- 1219 Francis goes to Egypt. Horrified by the godlessness and immorality in the Crusader camp before Damietta, he crosses the lines to meet with the commander of the opposing forces, Sultan Malek-el-Khamil. From there he visits the Holy Land.
- 1220 Francis returns in haste to Italy to try to reverse the

trend to dilute the absolute poverty and simplicity of life in the Order. When he fails to do this, he resigns the leadership. His aim now is to provide, through his own life, a model for his brothers in the Order to follow.

- 1221–22 Francis writes the Rule of 1221 which is accepted neither by the leaders of his Order, nor by the Pope because of its accent on rigorous poverty. He suffers periods of deep depression. It is Clare who at this point manages to save him from himself.
- 1223 Francis arranges the first Christmas crib – at a midnight mass at Greccio.
- 1224 He goes on an extended retreat and fast on Mount Verna. There he receives the stigmata.
- 1225 Very ill and almost blind he is given shelter in a hut at the bottom of the garden of Clare's convent. Early one morning, after a night of misery and pain, he composes the joyful Canticle of the Creatures, one of the earliest poems in any European language.
- 1226 He dies on October 3rd, after a long illness.
- 1228 He is canonised by Pope Gregory IX.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

Rich man's son	1
Look at me now	2
It doesn't satisfy	4
You turn it upside down	5
Is justice all that you can see?	8
To be poor	9
Hello there, good people	12
Clare	15
The Lord looked down from Heaven	15
When you go on a visit	17
Possessions	19
It wasn't like that to begin with	21
The cancer of bitterness	22
I cannot see her now	23
God's time	24
More like You	26
Hey, Brother Sun	28

The show proceeds without intermission.

The setting consists of a painted canvas cloth which starts downstage as a stage cloth and then curves upwards to the flies and out of sight. On the raised part of the cloth slides are projected. There is a tree and a curved bench.

Francis wears modern dress: brown dungarees over a light brown shirt.

POOR MAN, RICH MAN

OVERTURE

Francis, as a young man, is on stage, gradually picked out by a follow-spot. He is getting ready for a night out.

FRANCIS (sings)
Rich man's son,
Having fun.
There's singing and there's dancing and it's just begun
Oh yeah,
Just begun.

Get that beat,
Tap your feet,
They can hear the music playing in the street,
Oh yeah,
In the street.

Dazzling girls,
Sparkling wine,
There's money in my pocket and the night is mine,
Oh yeah,
Night is mine.

Mime. Francis arrives at the party. He meets many friends. Dances with a girl. Someone treads on his foot. They decide to go to the bar for a drink. But by the time the drinks arrive the girl has gone off to dance with someone else. Francis drinks both glasses. Francis leaves the party a little drunk.

FRANCIS Dazzling girls,
Sparkling wine,
There's money in my pocket and the night is mine,
Oh yeah! Night is mine!

Rich man's son,
Having fun.
There's singing and there's dancing and it's just begun
Oh yeah! Just begun!

Francis is now in a park. He is accosted by a particularly repulsive-looking beggar who appears in several slide projections on the screen. We hear his voice over the loudspeakers.

A VOICE Have you got a couple of bob? (or a quarter?)

FRANCIS *(As if the man is in front of him)* Out of my way, there's a good fellow.
(As if the man stands still) Look, you don't own this park, you know.

The beggar holds out a hand.

A VOICE For God's sake spare me a couple of bob. (a quarter)

FRANCIS 'For God's sake,' did you say? Odd, when you think about it. Strange words to use. What a nerve! Let me pass.

He pushes the man out of the way and walks on, then stops to reconsider.

FRANCIS 'For God's sake'?

In mime, he goes back to find the beggar and give him some money. At first he feels the same revulsion at the man's appearance and smell. But this turns to compassion. Realising the man is shivering with cold he takes off his own fine smart coat and puts it on the man's shoulders. Then he embraces him. This is victory for Francis. He has overcome his fear and nausea and revulsion. He watches the beggar leave. He is happy and light-hearted. He dances as he sings.

FRANCIS (Sings)
Look at me now, I feel free now:
Something broke, like a spring, like a dam.
Yes, it's done now: I've begun now:
What I was can become what I am!
What I was can become what I am!
Crazy feeling, head is reeling,

Up all night yet I still can't go home:
Should I jump right on the next flight –
For Monte-Carlo, Tokyo, Venice, Capri,
Copenhagen, Paris, New York, Honolulu,
Acapulco, Rio de Janeiro or Rome?

Prizes beckon. Now I reckon
There's no power can stand in my way.
Joy and pleasure without measure:
So many gifts I can't hope to repay.
What I was can become what I am!
What I am can become what I'll be!

I feel free
Free, to give,
Free to live
To be – ME.

Overcome with joy Francis collapses onto the bench and gazes up at the starry sky.

FRANCIS Hello stars! I would like to reach up and touch you
 . . . but not now, I'm too tired.

He yawns and lies down on the bench. He starts to dream.

(Slide projection)

Francis dreams of being a war hero. Loud cheering. Bands play.

A VOICE Francis!

Francis stirs but does not wake. Francis this time dreams he is a politician winning an election.

VOICE and for Francis Bernadone – twenty thousand,
 five hundred and sixty-three votes.

(Loud cheering)

I hereby declare that Mr. Francis Bernadone has been
duly elected Member of Parliament for this
constituency.

(Cheering).

A VOICE Francis! *(Again he stirs but does not wake)* Francis

dreams of being a clown doing a high-wire act. Sounds of a circus – applause. But the voice is heard again over loudspeakers, in a loud whisper.

A VOICE Francis. (*pause*) Francis, is it better to serve the servant, or to serve the Master?

FRANCIS (*waking from his sleep*) The master, of course. The master.

A VOICE Then why do you dream of only following the servant?
Why, Francis, Why?
Serve the Master!

Francis, now fully awake, speaks with slow realisation.

FRANCIS The master? What does it mean? What master? Why, of course – *the* Master! Who else could it be?

(Sounds of a party in progress)

OTHER VOICES

Hurry up! Francis! You're keeping us all waiting!
We're having a great time!

FRANCIS O.K. I am coming, but later. I'll join you in a few minutes.

Francis starts to get ready for the party but he turns away from the lights and sounds.

FRANCIS (*Sings*)
It doesn't satisfy,
It never has, it never will,
Not when I'm quiet, not when I'm still.
The fun is all right,
But at dead of night
I hear
Something deeper, calling me.
Something stronger pulling me away.
Dare I admit –

It's the need –
To pray.

A VOICE Francis!

Francis looks around and above him

FRANCIS Who are You?
Where are You?
Was it You who spoke to me through that wretched
man?
Was it You who spoke to me that night, in the
open, when I dreamed of glory?
What is this great emptiness I feel? This restlessness?
This searching – searching to find . . . what?
I don't even know what it is I want to discover.

(Sings)

You turn it upside down
The world I knew;
And looking at it upside down –
Amazing view –
When down is up and up is down
It seems at last the right way round,
Because of you!

You turn it inside out
The world I knew;
And looking at it inside out –
Fantastic view –
When out is in and in is out
I see what life is all about,
Because of you!

You turn it back to front,
The world I knew:
And looking at it back to front –
A funny view –
When front is back and back is front
Our laughter rings out jubilant –
Because of you!

*(A crucifix appears on the back-cloth.)
(Speaks. He is praying on his knees)*

Oh You, who've been generous to me,
I want to live generously.
Let Your spotlight shine
Into this heart of mine
And make its darkness light.

Give me a faith that's right,
A hope that's firm as heaven above
And Your most perfect love.
I need humility,
And wisdom, Lord, to see
What truly is Your will.
I want to do Your will.
Please show what is Your will.
Your will, Your will.

(The crucifix gives way to photos of violence and injustice. Then the crucifix appears again.) Finally Francis speaks with growing realisation.

VOICE Rebuild!

FRANCIS Rebuild?

VOICE Rebuild!

FRANCIS Rebuild . . . Rebuild!

*He mimes writing a cheque and putting it in a collecting box for 'International Aid' which appears as a slide.
Exit Francis.*

FATHER'S VOICE

Francis! Francis! What've you done?

Re-enter Francis as if thrown into a room by his father

FRANCIS But, Dad, I . . .

(Door slams). Francis is disconsolate. After a while he mimes making a telephone call

Hello: International Aid? Francis Bernadone speaking. Look, this is all a bit embarrassing, but I sent you a cheque last week. *(Pause)* Yes, that's the one. Five thousand pounds. *(Pause)* Very generous of me? . . . Yes, I suppose it was . . . A wonderful surprise for you? . . . Oh, dear . . . *(Pause)* The thing is, you see, it wasn't mine. *(Pause)* The cheque, yes, but not the money. Not really. It was my father's. Or rather it was his stuff I sold. *(Pause)* Oh, twelve dozen silk shirts, five dozen silk ties, seven dozen silk scarves – and I don't know how many pairs of silk pyjamas. *(Pause)* Of course he doesn't wear them all. He sells them. Wholesale. Oh, and I sold the van too. *(Pause)* No, he's been away, you see, abroad. Exports, that sort of thing. *(Pause)* Well, how was I to know he would take this hard-nosed attitude? He's always been very free with his money. Always given me everything I've wanted. *(Pause)* Look, if you don't mind, the last thing I need just now is a sermon. My father is back and he's furious. Now he is even threatening to take me to court! His own son! That's why I need the cheque. *(Pause)* What? You've already paid it in at your bank? My God, what do I do now? *(Pause)* Go to court? *(Pause)* We can't sort it out any other way? Well, I'll have to speak to my lawyer if that's the way you want it . . .

(Sound of a gavel)

VOICE Silence in court! The court will rise.

Francis mimes the entry of the judge, elderly and infirm.

VOICE Calling the plaintiff – Mr. Peter Bernadone.

He mimes the entrance of his father, corpulent and full of the rightness of his case.

VOICE The defendant – Mr. Francis Bernadone

He mimes his own entry into court. He turns to his imaginary father.

FRANCIS (*Sings*)
Is justice all that you can see?
Just to get even with me?
Has love no meaning left at all?
You loved me Dad when I was small.
Look, I know that I have been rash.
Don't reject me, Dad – for cash.

I'm sorry for selling your wares;
I only thought I'd like to share
Our riches – O.K., *your* riches –
With the poor and the needy out there.

I know you think that I've been bad,
But I'm no criminal, Dad.
So why then bring me here to court?
I need your help and your support
For the work God's called me to do.
(*Speaks*)
He's forgiven me, Dad, won't you?

Faced with the evident refusal of his father, Francis mimes taking off all his clothes. He takes them in a bundle and throws them at his father's feet.

(*Speaks*)
Now the break is all complete,
My old life lies at your feet.
(*Sings*)
Your values I cannot respect,
Your way of life I must reject.
My Father's in heaven on high,
Dad – goodbye!

Francis leaves abruptly.

(*Blackout*)

He starts singing in the darkness. The lighting gradually returns as Francis walks slowly on stage, in silhouette at first.

FRANCIS

(Sings)

To be poor,
Poorer than poor,
To know what it feels to be poor.
Then there's no-one who can say to me,
'You'll never know for sure
'What it's like to be poor'.

He mimes hard toil – digging the earth, breaking stones etc.

To earn my bread with my sweat,
Pulling weeds, breaking stones,
Getting cold, getting wet,
'Til it seeps into my bones.
Then the hunger strikes again,
And I cry aloud with pain.
Now I know, I know,
What it's like

To be poor,
Poorer than poor,
To know what it feels to be poor.
Then there's no one who can say to me,
'You'll never know for sure
'What it's like to be poor'.
Yet now I'm poor I am free;
Free of men and their might,
Free of fear, free of me.
Doing only what is right
Shall my energies employ.
So I cry aloud with joy –
Now I know, I know,
What it's like

To be poor,
Poorer than poor,
To know what it feels to be poor.
Then there's no-one who can say to me,
'You'll never know for sure
'What it's like to be poor'.

For He was born in a shed;
As a boy, worked with wood,

With His hands, for His bread.
And to copy One so good
Is a privilege and gain
I'm not worthy to obtain.
For He knew. He knew.
He knew what it felt
To be poor.
Then there's no one who can say to me,
'You'll never know for sure
'What it's like to be poor'.

He sits under the tree and mimes drawing with his finger in the earth

FRANCIS Rebuild. What does it mean? If it isn't giving money –
and now I haven't got any to give – then it must mean
something else. Perhaps just . . . rebuild!

*(On the screen, an outline of a church drawn in the sand. Then a
completed church of the same shape, in a developing country.)*

A whistle

VOICE 'Ere mate, catch the bricks!

*Francis mimes building – first of all piling up the bricks, then heaving
them into a wheelbarrow, trundling them along to the building site;
finally placing them in position and cementing them in. At last one wall
is built. Francis steps back proudly to survey his work but the wall
begins to fall. Desperately he holds it up. Finally, exhausted after his
day's work, he drops down on the bench. He takes a little food and
drink from his haversack. He mimes offering some food to a bird
perched in a tree above his head. The bird eats rather greedily and then
flies back up into the tree to sleep. Francis covers himself with his coat
and goes to sleep on the bench.*

*(Lights fade. The image of a church window appears on the screen. An
organ starts to play softly).*

*Francis wakes, and slowly realises he is inside the church he has helped
to build. He gets up and straightens his dress and appearance.*

*(The organ stops playing. The voice of a priest is heard over the
loudspeakers)*

VOICE The Gospel for this morning is taken from the tenth chapter of St. Matthew.

Francis stands, listening intently.

VOICE ‘And, as you go, proclaim the good news: “The kingdom of heaven is upon you”. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out devils. You received without cost; give without charge. Provide no gold, silver nor copper to fill your purse, no pack for the road, no second coat, no shoes, no stick: the worker earns his keep.’

During each of these injunctions, Francis obeys them literally. He empties his pockets, but there is nothing there. He throws away his haversack, with a laugh; likewise his coat. He takes off his shoes, even before the words are spoken. He is about to break his stick – but returns it to the tree instead.

FRANCIS *(Speaks)* Now I really am poor!

*Francis steps out, joyfully, on his way.
(Blackout)*

VOICE *(Echo)* And, as you go, proclaim the good news.

(Voice fades away in echoes)

(Bright signature music of TV station. A TV screen is projected and on it the logo of a weekly programme ‘Face to Face’.)

VOICE OF
ANNOUNCER

Our guest in this week’s ‘Face to Face’ programme is a young man who has already created quite a stir in the city. As usual there will be an opportunity for you to telephone in and to talk, face to face, with our guest of the week – Francis Bernadone.

(Spotlight on Francis)

FRANCIS

(Sings)

Hello there, good people
And thank you for listening to me.
I've nothing to sell you,
But good news to tell you:
That each of us can become free.

Our Father above us
Wants only to love us,
So clearly there's nothing to lose.
This Father in Heaven
Our sins has forgiven
And offers new life if we choose.

We ought to be glad,
No room to be sad,
The earth is so fair
And spring's in the air.
The winter is past,
There's sunshine at last,
Our Father is lavishing love everywhere.

Today then good people,
Each one of us can make a start.
For all we've been given
By God in His heaven,
Respond with the love in your heart.
We ought to be glad,
No room to be sad,
The earth is so fair
And spring's in the air.
The winter is past
There's sunshine at last
Our Father is lavishing love everywhere . . .

(Telephone rings. Slide projection of modern businessman)

FRANCIS

(Speaks into imaginary telephone)

Hello, Bernard? A company director? And you want to work with me? Amazing. *(Pause)* Yes, of course you can. It's . . . well, it's such a new idea to me that's all. What a surprise! *(Pause)* How should you begin? Why

not give away all that you hold most dear? . . . Yes,
everything that gives you power over other people.

(Sings)

We ought to be glad,
No room to be sad,
The earth is so fair
And spring's in the air.
The winter is past,
There's sunshine at last,
Our Father is lavishing love everywhere.

(Telephone rings. Slide projection of a lawyer)

Peter, – a lawyer? *(Pause)* And you want to live the life
I have chosen? Incredible! But I must warn you, Peter,
I am not an intellectual. My ideas are very simple.

(Pause) How do you start? Why not just reconsider
your standard of living – your whole life-style.

(Sings)

Our Father in heaven, our sins has forgiven
And offers new life if we choose.

(Telephone rings. Slide projection of a clergyman)

FRANCIS Sylvester? Forgive me! Reverend Father Sylvester
(Pause) No, Father, allow me to point out to you,
respectfully, that you cannot serve *me*. You are a priest
of God's church. I shall serve you. You shall be our
chaplain. *(Puts down the phone)* A Priest! Now we are
really legit.

(Sings)

We ought to be glad,
No room to be sad,
The earth is so fair
And spring's in the air,
The winter is past
There's sunshine at last,
Our Father is lavishing love everywhere.

(Telephone rings. Slide projection of a young farmer with his sheep.)

Giles . . . you want to leave your farm and your sheep?
Listen, Giles, together we shall feed the flock entrusted

to us. And like The Good Shepherd, we shall lay down our lives for the sheep.

(Sings)

I've good news to tell you:

Each one of us can make a start.

For all we've been given

By God in His heaven

Respond with the love in your heart.

We ought to be glad,

No room to be sad,

The earth is so fair

And spring's in the air,

The winter is past,

There's sunshine at last,

Our Father is lavishing love everywhere.

Respond . . . Respond . . . with the love in your heart.

(Telephone rings. Slide projection of a beautiful modern girl)

Francis speaks into the phone

FRANCIS Clare! The Honourable Clare. Well, yes of course I know who you are. I've seen you around town. *(Pause)* And you want to join . . . certainly not! Because . . . well, how can you? You are a woman! *(Pause)* Of course I've heard of the Equal Opportunities Board. But you are a woman – and a young and beautiful woman too, if I remember rightly. So you see . . . *(He holds the phone away from his ear)* Yes, and you're very forceful too, by the sound of it. *(Pause)* But your family – I've heard of them – I'm sure they will never stand for it. *(Pause)* That's very courageous. Now I understand. *(Pause)* Very well, if you're really sure. *(He puts down the imaginary phone)* What have I done? I must be mad!

But then he indicates that he knows, after all, that he has done the right thing.

(More slide projections of 'Clare' during song, she leaves her home and makes her way to a country church)

FRANCIS

(Sings)

Clare, so young and free and fair,
For this new life to live,
What will you freely give?

Clare, one time girls cut their hair;
What is it now today?
What will you cut away?

Dreams of love – to be the centre of affection,
To be secure inside another's care?
Now through you, love takes a new direction:
Your love will be for all to share.

(Music. Projection of Clare kneeling in the fields and then entering the church)

Clare, I see you kneel in prayer,
The self inside will break, as now your vows you take.
Clare, you've chosen now to dare,
To heed the highest call,
To give your life, your all – Clare.

(Different newspaper headings are flashed on to the screen indicating the growth of the movement and that as many as five thousand people have now joined Francis)

Francis is discovered sitting on the bench and miming reading a newspaper.

FRANCIS

Come in! Why, it's you, Maseo. More newspaper clippings. Isn't it amazing that all these people want to come and join me? I mean, what is so special about me? *(Pause)* You were just wondering the same thing? Thanks. No! It's a very interesting question. *(Pause)* What about this for an answer?

(Sings)

The Lord looked down from heaven
Upon this crazy earth,
And tried to find the vilest man,
The wickedest since birth,
And when He'd searched the valleys,
The city streets and alleys,

He suddenly found
Me, me, me,
The worst of all was me!

And through this hopeless creature
So weak and second-rate,
He works amazing miracles
To show that God is great.
And anything of merit,
From Him we do inherit
And not from men like
Me, me, me,
That's why He picked on me!

So God confounds the clever,
The beautiful, the wise,
The powerful and the masterful,
And cuts them down to size.
The boastful He makes humble –
The proud He makes to stumble
Over a worm like . . .
(*He points at himself*) That's why He's chosen me!

(Lights fade.)

When lighting returns Francis is discovered praying. He is conversing with God.

FRANCIS (*Speaks*)
Look, Lord, I'll do anything you ask of me. Anything.
(*Pause*) No, I've never been to the Middle East. But I'm keen to go anywhere for your cause, anywhere.
(*Pause*) Yes, I read the newspapers, I know there's a war on there. (*Pause*) Oh, but that would be marvellous, if that happened to me! I mean, You died for me. I would be proud to die for You. What an honour. But . . . (*Pause*) Well, it's just that I'm so unimportant. I mean, who's going to listen to me?
(*Pause*) Both of them? You mean the leaders on both sides? You must be joking. Sorry, Lord, but You do joke sometimes, don't You? (*Pause*) No, of course not, not about this. (*Pause*) Well, naturally I'm keen to go, if You command me. (*Pause*) You do? I thought so.

You had that sort of commanding tone to Your voice.
But if I make a mess of this . . . *(Pause)* Sorry, Lord.
Yes, You're quite right. I make a mess of everything.
So why entrust me with something so . . . *(Pause)* Yes,
Lord, I'll go. Right away.

He gets up from prayer and sings

A visit turns a key,
It can open up a long-locked door,
A visit can make history,
You never know when you go
on a visit.

Tension's mounting, hour by hour,
Total deadlock, clash of power,
Threat of war
And it's happened before,
Time and time again
Since the world began.

Reason tells you hope is vain,
Yet a thought rings in your brain
Loud and clear,
Seems a crazy idea –
'Go on a visit man to man.'

To make a visit mayn't seem much
And it may not change things overnight,
But a visit shows that human touch
You never know, when you go on a visit.

Guns are firing, bombs explode,
Desperation stalks the road,
Panic's rife
And you're risking your life,
Your reputation, for this plan.

A visit turns a key,
It can open up a long-locked door;
A visit can make history.
You never know when you go. . . .
You never know

He suddenly stops singing, as if interrupted by a voice in his ear

FRANCIS *(Speaks)* What?
 Oh! It's You, Lord! I should be there by now. O.K.
 I'm off – right away!

He goes out

(Blackout. Music continues. Slide projection of palm trees. We hear the voice of Francis, over loudspeakers)

FRANCIS *(Recorded voice over)*
 Lord make me an instrument of your Peace,
 Where there is hatred, may I sow love
 Where there is injury, may I sow pardon,
 Where there is discord may I bring harmony . . .
 Where there is darkness. . . .

(Recorded voice fades out)

When lighting returns, Francis is seated on bench.

FRANCIS *(Speaks)*
 As I thought, Lord, I made a complete hash of that.
 Oh, I got through to them all right. Both of them.
 And they listened. But neither of them really changed.
 I knew I would fail. And I didn't even get killed! Not
 even tortured! Isn't that awful? What a mess I made of
 it. *(Pause)* You mean it might not have been a
 complete waste of time? Oh, it's very nice of You,
 Lord, but I'm sure You're just saying that . . . *(Pause)*
 The beginning of something new in history? Oh, if
 only that could be true. But of course, if that happens
 it will have been none of my doing. I made a complete
 . . . *(Pause)* I see, that's what You want – someone
 who's willing to make a hash of things? Well, in that
 case You've certainly picked the right one here.
 (Pause) Stop talking and hurry home? Certainly.
 (Pause) Yes, I've messed things up on the home front
 too. If I can't leave them for a few months without
 everything going to pieces, then I'm a lousy leader,
 aren't I? A rotten shepherd.

Francis gets up and hurries off.

(Change of lighting)

Francis returns in a temper as if addressing his brothers on his return from the Middle East.

FRANCIS No! No! No! My brothers! I won't have it. Out! Do you hear me? Get out! And don't let me see you here again. So you want to settle down, do you! Own a building and sit there, in comfort and security. My brothers! Look at you – my whole work in ruins. Why has so much gone wrong? Why have you altered so much? *(Pause – as if hearing questions from the audience of brothers)* All right then, if that's what you want, we'll have it out here and now. Let me hear your questions – and I'll answer them if I can. 'Is my way too extreme?' *(Pause)* 'Am I asking too much?' *(Pause)* 'Surely we must have some sort of compromise with today's world?' *(Pause)* 'Is it possible to live strictly according to the Gospel?' *(Pause)* To think that you – my young brothers – should even ask such questions! If only you could grasp the vision! Simply to proclaim the peace of the Lord and live free . . . free . . . of the prison of structures and institutions. Free to be guided only by the Holy Spirit. What threatens this freedom, you ask me? You know as well as I do. It is our desire to have, and to acquire more and more possessions.

FRANCIS *(Sings)*
Possessions, possessions,
You want to own possessions?
Of course you do,
But, tell me brothers
Tell me true:
All you who want possessions,
Will you possess possessions –
Or will your possessions – possess you?

Speaks and mimes as if to one of the brothers

So, John, you want to own a book? Just a paperback. No harm in that, you think. Until you are no longer satisfied with a mere paperback, and want a hardback. Then you will want another hardback – and another. Soon you will want a whole library of books to read in comfort in a deep leather armchair. Then you will require other beautiful things to go in your library. Paintings. Vases. Sculptures. Hi-Fi stereo for Mozart ‘und’ Mahler, a colour television, a video-tape-recorder, and – why not? – your own computer terminal. Of course, when you have got all these things, you’ll find you have no time to use them. For you must also attend the latest plays, operas, ballets, concerts, exhibitions. You must be present at the most important receptions, cocktail parties and dinners, where you must be able to talk about politics, economics and science as well as rugby, tennis and the World Cup. You must also travel to the most famous historical sites in Italy, Greece, North Africa and India. While you are absent all this time, you must make sure that all your valuables at home are properly protected. Burglar alarms wired to the Police Station. Evening all! Guard-dogs in the grounds. A prison to put the burglars in if and when they are caught. You have become a rich and powerful man, over-eating, over-drinking, over-busy and over-tired, prone to ulcers and heart-attacks. And all this began with a mere paper-back! You think I exaggerate? Of course, I do!

(Sings)

Possessions, possessions,
You want to own possessions?
Of course you do.
But tell me brothers,
Tell me true:
All you who want possessions,
Will you possess possessions –
Or will your possessions – possess you?

He sits on the bench and speaks, again to the brothers

As for me, I am going to put God first and let Him
decide my standard of living. In that way I shall stay
free. Free to serve.

(Pause)

But you don't understand. You won't understand.
It's too extreme, too ridiculous, too naïve for all of
you.

(Sings)

It wasn't like this to begin with,
When we were a few at the start.

(Speaks)

Do you remember simple Johnnie?
He copied my every move:
If I shook my head he would shake his,
He was in a conformity groove.

(Sings)

Could it be that now we're too clever?
Is it learning that pulls us apart?
No, it wasn't like this at the start.

(Speaks)

That time we were lost at the cross-road,
I made Maseo here twist round and round;
We chose the road he was facing
When he finished – quite sick – on the ground.

(Sings)

It wasn't like this to begin with,
When we were a few at the start;
We were all so poor and so happy,
Could it be that now we're too many?
Is it numbers that pull us apart? –
No, it wasn't like this at the start.

(Speaks)

Then there is always dear faithful Leo,
My closest, my very best friend,
Though others may turn and desert me,
You will stay true to the end.

(Sings)

No, it wasn't like this to begin with,
When we were a few at the start;
We were all so free and spontaneous,
Could it be that I've grown too rigid?

Is it Francis who pulls you apart?
No, it wasn't like this. . . .

*In silence he gets up and begins to move off. He turns, pleading.
(Speaks)*

Oh, my friends! My dear blind wilful brothers! *(Pause. He realises it is no good)*. I must get away somewhere quiet alone. Someone else can take on the leadership now. And I expect that most of you will be glad to see me go. Oh, my friends we were so happy . . .

Pause. He is choking back the tears and finds it difficult to continue. Finally he speaks.

You must forgive me. It's . . . It's as if some of you had stabbed me in the back. Not all of you, of course. Not my first friends – Bernard, Peter, Sylvester, Giles, Leo, Angelo, Rufino, Masseo. Not you, my early brothers *(In mime he receives a letter)* Nor my very first sister.

*He opens letter
(Speaks)*

Clare! She cares. *(Reads the letter)* 'My dear little Father, I heard what happened' . . . *(Looks up)* She worries about me. Just like a woman. So full of commonsense . . . So down-to-earth. *(Reads aloud)* 'But I beg you, take care that no root of bitterness is allowed to grow in your heart'. *(Pause)* She's right!

*He puts down the letter
(Sings)*

Grab the crab,
The cancer crab,
The cause of my distress.
Grab the crab,
The monster crab,
The cancer of bitterness.

It eats away your life,
Replacing peace with strife,
Insidiously and slowly.

Dead cells just multiply,
You sicken and you die:
It happens to the high-born and lowly.

Grab the crab,
The cancer crab,
The cause of my distress.
Grab the crab,
The monster crab,
The cancer of bitterness.

Its pincers get a hold;
You find your heart grows cold
And hard and unforgiving.
Oh, will we never learn?
Far better cut or burn,
And find again the joy of healthy living.

Grab the crab,
The cancer crab,
The cause of my distress.
Grab the crab,
The monster crab,
The cancer. . . .

Reading from the letter once more

'If you could come here to spend a few days, I am sure
it would do you a lot of good . . . ' (*He puts letter down*)
She wants to help! She thinks she *can* help! If only she
could.

(*Sings*)

I cannot see her now,
I can't go in this state;
My mind is full of lust,
My heart is full of hate.
Folks say that I'm a Saint
But I know that I ain't.
I'm just a man, a fallen sinner.
A mere beginner.

I long to see you, Clare,
To share your cup of grace;

But now I do not dare
To meet you face to face.

(Snow effects. A howling wind)

(Speaks) Clare, I cannot come:
I must endure this night and this cold alone.

In mime Francis suffers from the cold and is tempted. He prays. He goes out into the blizzard and builds a snow woman, to whom he gives his heart, and two snow children – a boy and a girl.

(Speaks) Let these do me for a wife and children.

In mime he returns to his hut. There is a storm, thunder and lightning.

(Speaks) Oh why have You forsaken me?
Taken Your light away from me?
Light from my soul, my mind, my eye?
I raise my head once more
To plead and to implore
Is there one star still shining in the sky?

The storm continues. In mime Francis sleeps. The storm passes. Francis wakes up. The sun in on his face.

FRANCIS After so much darkness . . . light?

After winter it is spring.

In mime Francis goes outside to look for his snow wife and children. But they have melted in the warm sunshine. They have become pools of water. He splashes his face in the water and drinks from it.

FRANCIS Clare! Now, at last I feel that I can go to see her. She is so wise. She teaches me what it means to live in God's time.

(Sings)
My life's work is God's work
And not mine;
To be done in God's fashion
And God's time.

So there's no need to fret
If my work should be upset;
I can start the work all over
In God's time.

I shall run at God's pace
And not mine.
I shall dance to God's rhythm
And God's time.
So there's no need to fear
If the end is drawing near,
For an end is a beginning
In God's time.

Nothing to prove,
Nothing to justify,
No need to show what I'm worth!
Show me His love
And I am satisfied,
To be in God's time on earth.

My days are in God's hands
And not mine.
With my life in His keeping
All the time,
He will lead me, I know,
Where He wishes me to go,
If I only walk in God's space
And God's time.

Francis is quiet and still for some time. Then he skips joyfully around the stage, humming or whistling the tune. He picks up a couple of sticks and uses them as a violin and bow to accompany his whistling and joyful dancing.

Suddenly it occurs to him that the 'bow' across the 'violin' forms the shape of a cross. He stops suddenly and becomes very still. The joy disappears from his face and is replaced by a profound sadness. He holds the cross-shaped sticks outstretched in his hands and kneels before them and remains silent. Then, just as suddenly, joy and gladness return to him; he leaps to his feet and begins once again to dance round the stage and 'accompanies' himself with his two sticks as he leaps about for sheer joy.

FRANCIS *(Sings)*
If I only walk in God's space and God's time!

(The lighting changes. Francis is at prayer. Recorded voice over)

Oh, Lord, may I seek not so much to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive . . .
(Speaks) Oh, that reminds me, Lord. This big tycoon came and offered me what he called 'a little place in the country,' somewhere in the mountains where I could get some peace and quiet. Well, at first, I was interested, but then I discovered that it wasn't just a little *place* in the mountains, but a *whole mountain* . . . Me – own a whole mountain! It's crazy! *(Pause)* What? But, Lord it would go against all my principles! Since I began this new life I have never owned a single thing of my own, still less a mountain. *(Pause)* Follow my principles or follow You? I thought they were one and the same thing. *(Pause)* Well, if You put it like that of course I will accept. But only as a loan, and on Your behalf. *(Pause)* Well, You drive some pretty hard bargains Yourself, Lord. *(Pause)* All right. *(Pause)* I'll meet You there. I need time alone with You – to think and to pray. I'll meet You there – on my mountain – in September.

(Lighting changes). Francis mimes climbing a mountain path

FRANCIS *(Sings)*
I want to be
More like You;
I want to see
More like You;
I want to lose my life in Yours.
I want to feel
More like You;
I want to heal
Men, like You;
Like You, like You, like You.

I want to be
More like You;
I want to see
More like You;
I want to lose my life in Yours.
I want to feel
More like You;
I want to heal
Men, like You;
Like You, like You, like You.

(Music continues) Francis kneels

Take this life of mine
And make it wholly Thine.
Take my body, Lord, and take my heart and mind.
I want to follow You on every road,
I want to bear with You Your heavy load,
I want to be more like You.

Francis stops singing, but music continues. He looks at his hands as if he sees marks on them. He stands and stretches out his arms as if on a cross. Music reaches a climax.

FRANCIS *(Sings)*
Like You, like You, like You.

(Blackout.

Lights return)

Francis mimes his suffering and agony. He is blind. The sunlight hurts his eyes. He goes to his hut, feeling for the door. He enters, closes the door and feels his way across the room. He bumps against the bench and sits on it. He warms his hands in front of the fire. But the firelight is too bright for his eyes. He can bear it no longer. He turns away from the fire, stretches out on the bench and tries to sleep. But he is attacked by a swarm of mosquitoes. He tries to brush them away. But they continue to torment him. He rushes outside but the mosquitoes pursue him. He prays to be delivered from them. Then he finds peace and rest, asleep on the ground. The morning sun bathes his face and wakes him but he feels no pain. He opens his eyes.

FRANCIS

(Speaks, joyfully)

Most high, all-powerful, all good, Lord,
All praise is Yours; all glory, all honour,
and all blessing.
All praise be Yours my Lord, through all that
You have made.

(Sings)

Hey, brother sun,
Your course you run
In light and splendour.
Hey brother sun,
You radiant one,
You help us render
Praise to Him who made you.
Praise the Lord!
Praise to Him who made you
Oh, praise the Lord!

Hey, sister moon;
The stars all swoon
At your unveiling.
Hey, sister moon,
Don't set too soon;
Your light unfailing
Praises Him who made you,
Praise the Lord!
Praises Him who made you
Oh, praise the Lord!

Hey, brother man,
Give up your plan
To hurt your brother.
Hey, brother man,
You know you can
Forgive each other,
So praise Him who made you.
Praise the Lord!
Praise to Him who made you
Oh, praise the Lord!

Hey, mother earth,
Who brought to birth

Each son and daughter.
Hey, brother fire,
You never tire.
Hey sister water,
Cool and pure He made you.
Oh, praise the Lord!

Francis collapses and sinks slowly to the ground. With great effort he lifts himself up on one arm and sings yet another verse:

(Sings)
Hey, sister death,
I feel your breath
As now you face me.
Hey, sister death,
Self will is dead,
As you embrace me.
Praise to Him who sent you,
Praise the Lord!
Praise to Him who sent you
Oh, praise . . .

(As he dies the lights go down on the actor and an image of the real St. Francis of Assisi is on the backcloth)

FRANCIS *(Recorded voice over)*
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in forgiving that we shall be forgiven.
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

(Slow fade to blackout)

THE END