

Sanctitatis nova signa prodiérunt laude digna

Sequence for the Feast of Saint Francis Assisi (4 October)

Author: ascribed to Thomas of Celano. Meter: trochaic dimeter mostly. Metrical: O'Connor. Use: Sequence in the Mass of St. Francis.

Preliminary note. The first three stanzas recount the foundation and nature of the new order; the next two tell of the saint's prayerful sojourn on Mount Alvernia; the next three narrate the wonder of the stigmata; the final two form a prayer.

1. "New signs of sanctity, worthy of praise, have evidenced that things exceedingly wonderful and beautiful were reposed in Francis. To the regulars of his new flock are given the rules of a new law; and the King's commands, bestowed through Francis, are renewed." *Nova*, new in the sense of unusual, striking. Every saint, especially when chosen for some great work in the Church, bears distinctive marks of holiness, "for a testimony to all nations" (Matt. 24:14) that he is "sent from God" (John 1:6). Cf. stanza 1 of hymn 119. *Credita*, for the good of others as well as the recipient. *Regulatis*, those who have vowed to live by rule; religious, regulars. *Gregis*, the newly formed order. *Legis*, the Franciscan rule, as formulated by St. Francis. *Renovantur*. The great aim of St. Francis was to renew the world in the grand simplicity of the pristine Christian life, chiefly by poverty (cf. Acts 2:44-47). *Jussa*, counsels of Christ (*Regis*).

2. "There rises in the world a new order, a new and unheard-of life; the approved rule has restored the evangelical state. Conformable to the law of Christ, a rule of like nature is fashioned, and the manner of the given rule observes the apostolic height." *Inaudita*, in the sense that in Francis' time, a life based on voluntary poverty was considered almost a madness, an impossibility. "For all seek the things that are their own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:21). *Sancita*, approved by the Pope. *Formæ*, format, structure. *Culmen*, height, perfection.

3. "A rough cord, a coarse garment surrounds (him); he clothes without care; bread is given in measure; shoes are cast aside. He seeks poverty alone; takes nothing of the earth; a purse is disdained; Francis here treads upon all things." St. Francis based his mode of life upon three statements of Christ. (a) "If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me" (Matt. 19:21). (b) "Take nothing for your journey, neither staff nor scrip nor bread nor money, neither have two coats" (Luke 9:3). (c) "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). We are told that the saint, after hearing these three statements read to him, gleefully said: "Brothers, this is our life and rule for ourselves and for all who will join our company" (Cuthbert,

St. Francis of Assisi, p. 64). *Corda*, the well-known Franciscan cincture or girdle. *Vestis*, the habit of rough cloth.

4. "He seeks places for tears; his bitter heart gives forth sighs; he bemoans in grief the precious time lost in the world. Sequestered in a cavern on the mountain, he weeps; prostrate on the ground, he prays; calm of soul at last, he hides away in his prison." *Loca*, places where he might weep in solitude. "Depart from me: I will weep bitterly" (Isa. 22:4). *Amarum*, penitent, sorrowful. "I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul" (Isa. 38:15). *Montis*, Mount Alvernia, the scene of the stigmata, where the saint remained for some time in prayerful communion with God. *Serenatus*, his grief over the early years of his life was replaced by a peaceful calm.

5. "There he abides, concealed by the rock; he is uplifted to things divine; a good judge, he spurns the low things and chooses the heavenly things. He curbs under censure his flesh which was transformed in figure; he takes his food from the Scripture, and repels earthly things." *Vectus*, in an ecstasy. *Censura*, the punishment of penance (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27). *Transformatam*, spiritualized in a sense. *Figura*, appearance. *Cibum*. Cf. stanza 2 of hymn 102.

6. "Behold, then cometh from on high a seraph, a royal prince; the patriarch is fearful, frightened by the vision. He (seraph) bears the signs of Christ; he bestows them on him (Francis), while he is wondering on the Passion, silent with a sad heart." Since stanzas 6, 7, 8 are dedicated to the marvel of the stigmata, we give Cuthbert's account. "He saw one who was a man and yet a Seraph. His arms were extended and his feet conjoined, and his body was fastened to a cross. Two wings were raised above his head, two were extended as in flight and two covered the body. But the face was beauteous beyond all earthly beauty; and yet it was the face of suffering. . . . Suddenly in a moment of great agony the Seraph smote him as it were in body and soul, so that Francis was in great fear; and yet again the Seraph spoke to him as a friend making clear

many things which had hitherto been hidden from him. And then after a moment which seemed an age the vision had disappeared. . . . When Francis came to himself . . . the meaning was made clear: for in the body of Francis appeared the marks of the crucified Seraph. In his hands and feet were the scars of wounds, and in the scars were the impressions of nails, so formed that they might be taken for the nails of the cross; the round heads black in appearance, protruding in the palms of the hands and on the insteps of the feet; whilst on the back of the hands and on the soles of the feet were the bended points of the nails: and his right side was as though pierced by a lance. The Seraph of the vision was the spirit of the Crucified suffering through love, which now had taken entire possession of God's dear poor one; of which possession the external marks were the sign and seal" (Cuthbert, *St. Francis of Assisi*, p. 409). *Hierarcha*, a high member of the celestial hierarchy. St. Bonaventure holds that it was Christ, under the form of a seraph, that appeared to Francis. *Rex* refers to the seraph. "I am a prince of the host of the Lord" (Jos. 5:14). Cf. stanza 2 of hymn 147. *Patriarcha*. Francis is so styled since he is the spiritual head, or progenitor, of the vast Franciscan family.

7. "His holy body is marked in the hand: he is wounded in the foot: his right side is pierced: he is stained with blood. While conversing, many of the future secrets are made clear; the saint understands the sense of the words by a supernatural inspiration." *Verba miscens*, mingling words, conversing. "Our conversation is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). *Mystico*, mysterious, supernatural. *Spiramine*, a breathing, inspiring; used of the action of the Holy Ghost (cf. stanza 1 of hymn 2). *Vim*, force, meaning. *Videt*, understands. *Dictorum*, what was revealed to him by the seraph.

8. "Forthwith appear the wondrous nails, outwardly black, but inwardly red; the suffering penetrates; the points torment with a grievous pain. In the wounding of his members the armor of art yielded (nothing); neither did nature impress them, nor the torture of the mallet." The latter half of the stanza denies three false explanations of the stigmata. *Armatura*, i.e., no piece of armor (e.g., lance, spear). *Natura*, no plausible or possible natural happening. *Mallei*, not impressed, e.g., by an artist's mallet or chisel. "For I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body" (Gal. 6:17).

9. "By the signs of the Cross which thou dost bear and by which thou dost triumph over the world and conquer the fleshly foe by a glorious victory: O Francis, may we be defended and protected in adversity, so that we may enjoy the reward in celestial glory!" *Mercede*. "To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with Me on My throne" (Apoc. 3:21).

10. "O loving Father, holy Father: may thy devoted people, with thy help, in company with a multitude of the brethren, merit the rewards! Make to be companions of the blessed those whom thou dost fashion in the life of morals! May the Company of the Minors obtain the everlasting joys!" *Informas*, mold, form, fashion.