**ST FRANCIS’S LENTS**

Saint Francis lived the liturgical seasons intensely and Lent was a fundamental part of his spiritual journey. St Francis celebrated several Lents during the year: the first was what we normally live in the whole Church, the second is a Lent prior to Advent in preparation for Christmas. These latter ones, Francis asked his Order to be celebrated in a compulsory way (cf. RegB III, 6).

Personally, he observed three more Lents, one called Lent of the Epiphany or “Benedetta” (RegNB III, 11; LM IX, 2); where he sought to make a bridge between the time of Christmas and that of Easter, since for him they represent the two sides of a single mystery of salvation.

Another Lent that St Francis observed was in honour of Saints Peter and Paul; focusing on communion with the Church, which began on the feast day of Saint Peter and Saint Paul (June 29) and ended on the day of the Assumption of Mary (August 15).

A final Lent was in honour of the Archangel Saint Michael, to whom he had a special devotion, and which went from the day of the Assumption (August 15) to the feast of the Archangel Saint Michael (September 29).

Saint Francis' practice of observing several Lents meant that he spent at least two hundred days of the year in solitude, prayer, and mortification. Therefore, he spent more time in contemplation and penance than in action and apostolate. His practices teach us that the spiritual life is linked to our will, since celebrating Lent is an opportunity for conversion, a time of Grace on how to pause, assume a generous discipline, and make room to pray and build our relationship with God.

Chapter Seven of *The Little Flowers of St Francis* tells us that St Francis spent an entire Lent by himself, after the example of Jesus who fasted for forty days in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11).

HOW SAINT FRANCIS MADE A LENT

ON AN ISLAND IN THE LAKE OF PERUGIA

WHERE HE FASTED FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS

AND ATE NOTHING BUT HALF A LOAF OF BREAD

The true servant of Christ, Saint Francis, was in certain things like another Christ given to the world for the people’s salvation. So God the Father willed to make him in many of his actions conformed and similar to His Son, Jesus Christ. This is shown to us in the venerable company of the twelve companions and in the wondrous mystery of the sacred Stigmata and in the unbroken fast of the holy Lent which he made in the following way.

Once Saint Francis was alongside the Lake of Perugia on the day of Carnival, at the house of a man devoted to him, where he was lodged for the night. He was inspired by God to go to make that Lent on an island in the lake. So Saint Francis asked this devout man that, for love of Christ, he carry him with his little boat to an island of the lake where no one lived, and that he do this on the night of the Day of Ashes, so that no one would notice. And this man, out of love – from the great love he had for St Francis – promptly fulfilled his request and carried him to that island.

And Saint Francis took nothing with him except two small loaves of bread. Arriving at the island, as his friend was departing to return home, Saint Francis asked him kindly not to reveal to anyone that he was there, and that he should not come for him until Holy Thursday. And so that man departed, and Saint Francis remained alone.

Since there was no dwelling in which he could take shelter, he went into some very thick brush that was formed like a little den or a little hut by many bushes and saplings. And in this place he put himself in prayer and contemplation of heavenly things. And there he stayed the whole of Lent without eating or drinking, except for half of one of those little loaves, as his devoted friend found on Holy Thursday when he returned for him; for of the two loaves he found one whole one and a half; the other half, it is supposed, Saint Francis ate, out of reverence for the fast of the blessed Christ, who fasted for forty days and forty nights without taking any material food. And thus with that half of a loaf he drove away from himself vainglory, and after the example of Christ he fasted forty days and forty nights.

Later in that place where Saint Francis had done such marvelous abstinence, God did many miracles through his merits. For this reason, the people began to build houses and live there and in a brief time a good, large village was built there, and there was a place of the brothers there, called the Place of the Island, and the men and women of that village still have great reverence and devotion for that place where Saint Francis made that Lent.

To the praise of Jesus Christ

and the little poor man Francis.

Amen