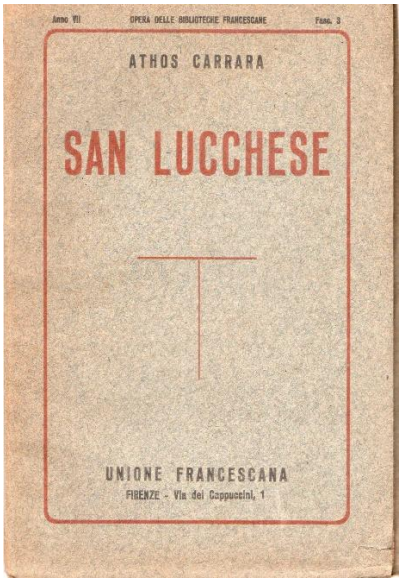


ENGLISH TRANSLATION



PRESENTATION

Lucchese — or Luchesio, or Lucesio — would not be entitled to the title of Saint, because canonically he is only Blessed; but the people venerate him with that title, and the Basilica that preserves his remains confirms it for him.

He was born at Caggiano, in the Val d'Elsa, a few kilometres from Poggibonsi. In those days Poggibonsi was not in the valley as it is now. It was called Poggiobonizzo, or Poggibonizzo: it stood on the flat hilltop at whose feet the present-day Poggibonsi lies. It was a fortified and wealthy city, built by the nobleman Bonizzo Segni to defend his people from the raids of armed men. Down in the valley, where Poggibonsi now stands, there was Borgo Marturi, founded by the Romans of Catiline — and some maintain it existed even earlier, through the work of the Etruscans, though there is no sure proof of this.

Lucchese was born a year before Saint Francis, in 1181. The year is certain, the month is not; but his name, which rests on no local tradition, suggests a connection with the election of Lucius III as Pontiff — elected in September — and therefore with his birth in the last months of that year.

Of Poggiobonizzo there remain the walls, dismantled by the Florentines at the end of the thirteenth century and crenellated by time, and a few fountains: few things that reveal its past grandeur.

Of Saint Lucchese more has remained: the beautiful Basilica, enriched in recent times with lodging works for pilgrims, and a living memory that seven centuries have not wearied, but have nourished.

Poggibonsi has crossed the Sienese bank of the Elsa and has spilled over into Florentine territory, rich in industry and commerce; but Saint Lucchese remains its jealously beloved soul, which gives it more vigour than any other wealth.

Athos Carrara

The Times

The rumour that Francis was in Tuscany came down to Poggibonizzo from San Gimignano.

Who knows how those people up there had learned of it — so high up, so well shut within their walls and perched on their towers, divided among themselves, armed, watchful, and suspicious of enemies and friends alike.

But perhaps it was only the rumour of a hope. It was known that love guided that barefoot pilgrim wherever there was the greatest need, and at San Gimignano the need for love was in proportion to the power that the nobles had magnified with the height of their towers and the horror of their prisons.

And hope became certainty for Poggibonizzo as well. The Ghibelline city seemed flattened and blurred by the mists in the sight of the sentinels keeping watch on the walls of San Gimignano; but the servants who grew thin breaking the soil of their lords in that mist by the river had the city up above, and they knew that Poggibonizzo too suffered the ills of San Gimignano and of the other flourishing and sorrowing Italian cities at the beginning of that tormented century. In that century of arms and heresies, the art of commerce was spreading and growing powerful alongside the Communes.

And commerce, which had been born among wars and heresies, favoured wars and stirred up heresies. The powerful feudal lords had sown centuries of war to defend and increase their power. The people had finally learned, from the use of arms and from cunning, to know their own strength, and had turned arms and cunning against the very masters themselves. Arms had made the people warriors; cunning had made them merchants. The merchants had grown rich and had replaced the old nobility: they had become the leaders of public life, to which they had given the impulse of their new energies. And together with the trade in our native wool and in Eastern fabrics, art developed and poets were welcomed. But ambition and cunning always found an outlet in war and in the oppression of servants.

War prevented a spiritual unification, which even the Church — embroiled and divided by armed men — was incapable of achieving. The oppressed sought new paths of revolt, and, having failed at the open path of struggle, they listened to preachers of new ideas, which seemed religious and were political, which spoke of the kingdom of the spirit in words that served to quiet the hope of a pretended kingdom of earthly justice.

It was the century of iron, of fabrics, of heresies. Commerce was the grandeur of the age, and it was also its danger.

Out of this grandeur, and against this danger, the shining Franciscan revolution was born at Assisi and completed at Poggibonizzo.

Lucchese was, at Poggibonizzo, the richest grain merchant. Between him and the son of Pietro di Bernardone, the wool merchant, there was a great affinity of spirit.

Both were pleasant young men, leaders of companies and festivities, carefree and generous singers.

Their difference of choice was merely the sign of the difference of their land and their mission. Green and mystical Umbria invited Francis to song and contemplation; dry and varied Tuscany kept Lucchese close to events and prepared him for action. Francis was the initiator and had to keep intact his fresh energies as a young singer of love, and he was never a merchant. Lucchese was to be the executor and remained a merchant, transformed in spirit in order to transform the spirit of commerce and of every other art of men. Of Lucchese we know his humble origins. Of his wife, Bona, it is known instead that she came from the noble Segni family. This marriage too, between a merchant and the daughter of nobles, is an indication of the power the merchants had attained. Lucchese already possessed some land and some houses on the banks of the Elsa.

He began with the small trade in cured meats, which he managed so well that he saw it expand in scope and allow him to pass, with his wife and two children, through the walls of Poggibonizzo to become a citizen merchant of grain — and a money-changer. Poggibonizzo was then one of the most powerful Communes in Italy, and the city shone with wealth. It was divided into nine districts, all competing in the splendour of their marble and works of art.

Lucchese entered with a little fear, like all those who climb up from the countryside to the life of the city, but within a few years he succeeded in owning one of the richest palazzi and in making it the centre of a business movement that he directed with surprising ability. Wealth grew. Bona was satisfied with those successes, because the children were growing too, and the noble mother cherished ideas of nobility for her sons. For this reason money, even a great deal of it, was always precious. It was precious to Lucchese too, because it bore witness to his will and his intelligence.

But a narrow soul, attached to money for money's sake, Lucchese can never have had. He would not have desired Francis's arrival with such anxiety. He would not have had that spiritual affinity with the Poor Man of Assisi, whom he loved without ever having seen him. He would not have felt the need of his visit so urgently, to the point of leading a delegation of citizens ready to climb to San Gimignano as

soon as that uncertain rumour of Francis's coming had taken on the substance of an imminent fact.

He would not have said to Bona, his face alight with joy: *"We will beg him so long that he will have to agree to stop at Poggibonizzo."*

The Meeting

In October 1211 the delegation of citizens, presided over by Lucchese, swelled at the moment of departure with a great multitude of people.

On the climb (and the red earth was fresh from ploughing) they met other processions of people, so that the halt at the iron gate of San Gimignano was long, and the beautiful piazza could not contain the crowd.

Lucchese was pushed against an arch and remained there almost crushed, unable to draw any closer. Up there on the steps stood a simple little friar, gaunt, short of stature, with an ascetic face, small and short-sighted eyes, his arms raised with hands that showed translucent against the light, a grey and tattered habit cinched at the waist, and bare feet. Lucchese, who was taller, more pleasant, and stronger, was almost disappointed by him.

He listened to him speak. That little friar did not even have a robust voice, and it seemed a miracle that his words

reached everyone's ears clearly. He was not an orator, one of those who enchant with the timbre of their voice and the embroidery of their words.

Francis spoke in fits and starts, his eyes to heaven, as though, instead of speaking to so vast a multitude, he were singing for himself alone and for the birds of the air.

He was saying: *"I greet you, O Queen Wisdom, may the Lord save you with your sister, holy simplicity. O Lady holy poverty, may the Lord save you with your sister, holy humility. O Lady holy charity, may the Lord save you with your sister, holy obedience. O all you holy virtues, may the Lord save you, from whom you proceed and come!"*

"Holy simplicity. Holy poverty. Holy humility. Holy charity. Holy obedience."

Francis sang them in the city of pride, of wealth, of arrogance, of hatred, of disorder.

Lucchese understood the terms of that unarmed and marvellous revolutionary, and grew ever more attentive, until the warmth that emanated from the heart of the frail friar warmed him and he could no longer hold back. Pushing his way with vigour and determination, he succeeded in cleaving the compact crowd of the unarmed and the armed, of nobles, merchants, and servants, and in making his way beneath the steps, to the feet of Francis.

As soon as Francis had finished speaking, the crowd pressed forward, climbed the steps, swept Lucchese aside, and stifled the Preacher, who was all a flame of charity for each of those sons — guilty and innocent, oppressors and oppressed. Lucchese managed to rise and kneel before Francis. He shone with enthusiasm. He clasped his hands and pleaded: *"I ask you, Father, in the name of all my people, to stop at Poggibonizzo."* Francis raised him up and embraced him. The two looked at each other with great consolation, as if they recognised one another after so long a time.

Francis promised: *"Tell the dear sons of Poggibonizzo that I hold them all in my heart. I will stop there soon: in the meantime, let them do penance and keep peace among themselves."* Lucchese returned home with that great news, and with a different light in his eyes.

He reported on the embassy and repeated in all nine districts Francis's warning: *"Let us make peace and do penance. Our salvation is near!"*

To his wife Bona, who looked at him with admiration and fear, he said:

"I shall put on a simpler garment. This one I am wearing you will give to the poorest family."

Lucchese was joyful: it seemed to him that he was breathing purer air for the first time. He felt free — literally

free, with a new and boundless freedom. *"Yesterday,"* he said again to his wife, *"I made a bad bargain. I took advantage of the famine and sold my grain at too high a price: send one of our sons to the buyer with this purse of coins. He will say: Lucchese gives it back to you and begs your forgiveness."*

Bona, who was gentle and never contradicted her husband, opened her eyes wide.

Lucchese said again, some days later:

"From today my grain will be given at half price to poor buyers."

Then Bona, alarmed, stayed the movement of his arm, which was pointing to the granaries full of wheat:

"Lucchese, why are you doing this?"

Lucchese smiled:

"Do not fear. I am doing nothing but giving back to those who have a right to my restitution."

Bona, however, was afraid: *"You will reduce us to misery!"*

Lucchese, who loved her, drew near and stroked her hair:

"Do not distress yourself: nothing will be lacking, neither to you nor to the children."

Bona had not listened to Friar Francis, and that dangerous turning of her lord gave her bitterness and unease.

Yet Lucchese did not have the manner of a madman: his manner, as he gave, was calm and sure, as when he had accumulated. His eye was more serene, his face more smiling. With her he was more loving, with the children more patient. His work was always prudent, and the best deals in commerce were always made by him: his intelligence was clearer, his work wiser. Lucchese spent more hours in church: he entered with his hands full of coins, or his shoulders bowed under a sack of flour. He came out lightened of the gift and enlightened in soul.

He knew that the poor knock by preference at the house of the Father, and that the priest has among his sorrows the great sorrow of poverty, when he is poor among the rich and cannot be rich for his poor.

The new things that were in Lucchese — the poverty of his garment, the weights on his shoulders as a rich merchant, and his sudden and, to many, absurd generosity — had made an impression in Poggibonizzo: an impression of admiration among the poor, and an impression of contempt among the rich.

Lucchese seemed not to care about that change of esteem, and went on smiling, stripping himself, toiling.

And taking an interest in the steps of Friar Francis, exulting with joy when he learned that those untiring steps were bringing him closer to Poggibonizzo.

Poggibonizzo had no less need than San Gimignano of the word and work of Francis.

And Francis, though the spur of love hastened him toward new lands, had to stop for several days, renewing the miracle of peace of San Gimignano. The leading men of the Commune and of the various Guilds also paid homage to the Poor Man and offered him gifts, but Francis would not even touch the coins and the objects. He said to his friars: *"Distribute to the poor what belongs to them."*

Lucchese was radiant with happiness. But Francis gave him the bitterness, and the example, of refusing to accept a place at table in his rich palazzo and lodging in the precious inlaid bed.

Francis begged his own morsel of bread and at night withdrew to weep over the miseries of men, and to pray to a merciful God, in an abandoned hut outside the walls. Some at Poggibonizzo asked him to become one of his friars, and Francis accepted them; he clothed them in sackcloth and sent them to the novitiate for the trial of their vocation.

Lucchese and others grieved with him that they could not follow him because they were bound to their families, and Francis reassured them, saying: *"I have thought of you too. I*

will give you a rule that will let you sanctify yourselves without taking vows and without leaving your occupations."

Meanwhile he anticipated for them some of its norms, as he had done in other places, to help them live according to the simple and perfect application of the Gospel.

The leading men of the Commune, moved by the ardour and love of the little Friar, and grieved to see him depart, asked him to allow them to offer him a token of their gratitude.

Francis, straining his eyes, painful from weeping and from vigils, had seen outside the city, on the open space of a hill, a church with some houses around it. His heart had at once made him desire to possess it, to leave that people a living sign of his love: the permanent presence of the friars. He expressed that desire to the offerers and to the people, and the Commune, as is confirmed by the written Acts of 1213, made him a gift of the church and two houses. Thus was born that little Franciscan convent of S. Maria in Camaldo, which gladdened Lucchese — for whose enlargement Lucchese himself was to work — and which was to become his beautiful Sanctuary, cradle and glory of our Order.

The Land and the Creatures

Lucchese had had, in the years of his commerce and before his meeting with Francis, the anxieties, the unease, the suspicions, and the discontent of every man who works and has a noble soul, and who feels that profit is not true wealth and does not suffice for the needs of the heart.

In the struggles between the Ghibellines of the German Emperor and the Guelphs of the Pope, he had been a Guelph in a Ghibelline city, and had entered the fray, besmirching himself with dust and perhaps with blood, before the money he had earned advised him to greater prudence and to becoming a Ghibelline.

That money was beginning to become his master. After he had toiled for well-being, he found himself a slave — more a slave than his own servants — of his supposed fortune.

He had had to begin granting credit, and he would wake suddenly in the night, beset by doubt and remorse. He enjoyed esteem and sympathy. And so he had to become, perhaps against his will, an agent of loans as well. To the credits of commerce were added those of advances of money.

And deals, deals, an incessant race of deals! People proposed them to him, forced them on him, tormented him, left him no peace. A troublesome cloud of brokers,

agents, sellers, buyers. And there was no lack of melancholy quarrels to force the wilfully defaulting and to press the unwilling debtors ruined by reverses of fortune. Lucchese was tired of his wealth, and in his heart he envied the gladness of the Poor Man's barefoot friars, even before he had met him.

The first providential meeting with Saint Francis found that ground ready for sowing. Lucchese in a short time became unrecognisable. Every sack of grain that left the granaries and every little bag of coins that left the strongboxes lightened his soul. Bona, who in turn had seen Francis, strove to understand her husband more. But she had not had his anxieties, his former discontents. She had not found herself ill at ease in comfort, and watching her children grow she considered with complacency their secure and brilliant future. The ground of her soul was less ready for the new sowing.

So she was uneasy, and held her breath when she saw her husband too busy impoverishing himself and too little busy furnishing himself with new wealth. That delay of his wife on the path of gladness was Lucchese's new anguish within the new joy of his days. He would have wanted her at his side, he would have wanted to speak freely with her of the light of charity, without seeing her hostile, contrary, sulking. But he did not lose heart. His days had become a song of joy and its echo filled the house. With his wife he was ever

more tender and affectionate. With his children, an exemplary father, a stern educator and at the same time a pleasant friend.

One morning in May, with the dew soaking his feet and giving him a sense of freshness in his soul,

he went down to the flats of the Elsa, where the expanses of his fields lay.

Along the road he met thin people, bent under their tools, going to work. They knew him and greeted him. They said: *"Good morning, my lord. Good morning, master."*

These were greetings that had gladdened him countless times. Now they suddenly gave him a sense of unease. His feet still trod the pearled grass that belonged to him, but he was no longer happy.

Before, he had enjoyed the greetings, but he had never looked the greeters in the face. Their words that morning had a new sound, almost a plea and a reproach.

They were the words of poorly paid servants, laden with children, bony and bent from the enormous disproportion between their toil and their mouthfuls of bread. *"My lord, Your Lordship, Master."* And perhaps in their hearts, feelings of rebellion and hatred.

An old woman passed too, with hands like papier-mâché and tools on her collarbones. She bowed almost to the ground:

"I salute you, my lord." Lucchese was quick to raise her up. She stopped, struck, as if caught in an attitude of guilt.

The master said to her: *"Where are you going?"* The woman looked at him humbly: *"I am going to your fields, sir."*

"How much do you earn?" The woman smiled sadly, and did not answer. *"From today,"* Lucchese told her, *"you will earn double."*

The woman looked at him with enchanted eyes and set off at a swifter pace. Her tools made festive sounds.

Lucchese went on his way and stopped in the middle of his fields. The first news we have of him is tied to the land. It is known that he owned lands; it is said that he himself worked his land. Commerce had not turned him away from the fields, and the very goods of his trade were savoury fruits of his land.

Lucchese was bound to the land by a constant and tenacious love, and those visits, those hours spent with his feet sunk in the earth fresh from ploughing, were his rests, his most jealous enjoyment.

That morning his eye rose from the caress of the fields and lingered, insisted on the bent backs of the workers. In his

soul ached the conflict between the tenacious love for the brown furrows and the flourishing meadows, and Francis's invitation to the new love of creatures.

Lucchese climbed back to Poggibonizzo late, with an uneasy soul. He did not go straight to his shops. Passing by, he entered a church and came out a long time later. He went home and said to his astonished wife:

"I have decided to sell my fields!"

The Miracle of the Bread

Bona opposed that sale. *"Coins vanish with bad fortune; the land remains and is faithful,"* said the wise consort. And she did not yet know that the coins were destined

to vanish sooner than she had feared.

They vanished very quickly, without a sound, like all good things. They scattered in every direction, like a generous fanning of good seed. They entered the poor houses of the sick, the hungry, the disheartened. And to all they did the right good, a prompt good, and therefore doubly effective.

More good than to all, however, they did to the soul of the giver, who nevertheless did not rid himself of all his land. He kept for himself a sunny field, with apple and peach trees laden with soft fruit. That field of excellent soil he kept for himself. He turned it into a garden for his family, a

garden that the rich Lucchese worked alone for the joy of the new savour that produce has on the table after it has cost the toil of one's own arms. Lucchese could no longer stop on the new path. Goodness too confers a fame, a fame different from that of wealth: a fame not of fearful respect, but of loving respect. And when this fame arrives with surprise, unexpected and impetuous, like the flooding of rivers in spring, it assumes agitated aspects, which prove its power of resistance. Like all rich cities, Poggibonizzo brooded over sullen, sorrowful, exhausting miseries. Miseries of the body and miseries of the spirit, which almost always go together, each the cause and product of the other. This fearful flood of miseries, once the protective sluice-gates had fallen, channelled itself, choked, and overflowed into the palazzo of the rich Lucchese. The palazzo was swept away by it.

Within a few months Lucchese found himself, after hearing the voices of children echo in the empty granaries, having to sell the inlaid furniture, the precious objects, the very silk and soft-wool garments of his wife and children, and finally having to sell the palazzo, one of the finest palazzi of Poggibonizzo.

As with the land, so Lucchese acted with the walls. He kept a modest house, enough for himself and his family. A house where Bona is said to have sulked for a good while, perhaps

not truly alarmed for herself, but for those two boys, who had been stripped of all their substance.

That disconcerting father, strange and generous, poor and cheerful, who came home bathed in sweat with tools on his shoulders still fresh with earth, pleased the boys more than before. And Bona was left alone to fret and suffer over it. And there was one thing that truly frightened her.

Those poor people, who had stripped them of everything, were insatiable. They were hungry, always hungry. And they went on besieging the house of someone who was now poor like them and earned his bread like them by his own toil. They went on crowding in, and Lucchese, that incredible Lucchese, did not drive them off. He welcomed them instead with a great smile and thanked them for having come to him. An unheard-of thing! He goes and gives away the last coin he has on him, the last drop of wine, the last slice of bread. Precisely the last slice of bread. And he had to go that far, for the merciful Lord to grant him what then lay closest to his heart: Bona's surrender to the love of Christ without reserve.

Lucchese, in giving, in prayer, in sacrifice, always asked for that: *"Lord, I am bound to this woman. For her sake I cannot be a friar of Francis, and I nonetheless desire to do penance and to live in poverty. But I cannot compel the will of this woman who is bound to me. You willed that we should be*

two in one flesh: grant, so that the union may be perfect, that we may be two in one spirit."

One grey November morning the rain came down monotone and sad. Toward Lucchese's little house, the dripping of the water was interrupted for the whole stretch, at irregular intervals, by the sound of footsteps and taps of a stick. In the rain, and soaked with rain, the procession of the poor. People seeking bread and seeking the sun. And who knew they would find bread and sun in the pantry and in the soul of Lucchese. But the bread was dwindling, even if the sun grew brighter by the reflection of the alms. Lucchese went on giving bread and sun. At a certain point Bona, who was watchful, shook her husband's arm: *"There is almost no bread left*." Her husband smiled and answered: *"Give more bread to these poor people*."

It was nearly noon and the rain had thinned, but the poor had not thinned. The procession, slow, discordant, and plaintive, continued. Lucchese said to his wife: *"Give more bread*."

Bona, her voice trembling with discouragement, finally answered: *"It is impossible: you have given away the last slice, and the pantry is empty."* Lucchese, without changing his tone, insisted with a smile: *"Give more bread*." Bona lost her calm: *"Don't you understand? There is no more, I assure you there is no more! There — you have acted like a*

madman and you have nothing with which to feed your children!"

Lucchese, imperturbable, repeated: *"Go again to the pantry and take a loaf."* Bona, conquered by that firmness, and although she had clearly seen a moment before that the pantry was empty, went and lifted the lid of the floured cupboard: the pantry was full of fresh, fragrant bread! Bona, faced with the evidence of the miracle, was seized with emotion, and ran to her spouse: *"The pantry is full, the pantry is full!"* She knelt, weeping, at her husband's feet: *"Forgive me!"*

Lucchese raised her up and embraced her tenderly. The Lord had heard him: from that day the path of the two toward perfection would be more beautiful and more consoling.

The Emigrants

Saint Francis began his career as a lover of Christ with the kiss of the leper. Of Lucchese the terms of his beginning are not known with equal precision; it is known, however, that immediately after his first meeting with the Poor Man at San Gimignano he went in search of the sick. Poggibonizzo had its shelters and its hospitals. Lucchese became a visitor of the inmates, and a simple, attentive, humble, tireless nurse. He accepted and sought out the lowest services

among the sick who inspired the most repulsion and who were therefore often the most abandoned.

At a certain point he was no longer content to care for the sick in the hospitals. He learned that not all the infirm were admitted or could reach the places of care, and he went to seek them in their hovels or along the edges of the roads. He sought them out and carried them himself to the shelters. In times of epidemic he was seen with two, even three sick at a time on his shoulders and by the hand. But charity is a fire that does not stagnate: it feeds on our flesh, blazes up, and makes us radiant. Lucchese had searched every corner of Poggibonizzo. And one day he realised that the massive walls of the city were taking his breath away. They marked for him a boundary that oppressed his need for love. So he bought himself a donkey, took provisions and medicines, and set out from Poggibonizzo. His first loving forays were made in the surrounding countryside: he healed the sick and fed the hungry.

He mingled with the people to listen to their needs. Once he heard that groups of men were going to the Maremma — not the Maremma of today, which has become a jewel of land, but the Maremma of that time, a devourer of human lives.

He saw them again on their return and realised that not all had come back. He grieved over it, and the following year he went with them. Lucchese, our first tertiary, is thus also

the precursor of the movement of assistance to emigrants, which today has reached particular splendour.

He went with the workers to the Maremma. And he was the provident workman of the Lord, the most ready, the most tireless, the most joyful. He healed and fed, advised and saved. He was not a priest and could not absolve the dying, but his donkey had to learn all the impassable roads of the lost parishes of the Maremma. On his donkey the Viaticum often travelled.

"It is a great honour for me and for you," he said to the donkey, stroking it. *"Let us do it gladly."*

But the provisions the patient animal carried ran out quickly. Lucchese did not lose heart and went himself, under an implacable sun, to beg charity and to bring gladness to the villages crouched on the cliffs, around the castles, like birds of prey. Then in the evening, in certain hot and sultry sunsets that prostrated his strength and disjointed his bones, and perhaps when he had a fever, after Lucchese had recited his prayers on his knees on the thirsty earth, he felt a poignant need to see Francis again.

It was true that he had given him norms of life to which he had adhered scrupulously, but it seemed to him too little. He felt alone and isolated, whereas his work ought to have been inserted into the common tasks of a great family, which Francis had let him glimpse. Meanwhile every year

he returned to the Maremma and from time to time scanned the distant horizon toward the sea, or toward the ring of the mountains, in the hope of seeing rise from the shore or descend from up there the gaunt figure of the Poor Man. Besides, he himself by now, with his unkempt beard and tattered garment, had the appearance of a poor friar of fasting and penance.

Those who did not yet know him for charity — and they were only the stubborn disowners of love — knew him for the singularity of his dress and manners. The people, however, who are straightforward, knew him by the inner light, even in the Maremma, in all the Maremma, as at Poggibonizzo.

But the young are carefree and fond of pranks. One day Lucchese was climbing with his donkey toward Massa Marittima and was probably urging the little beast on under the spur of the help he had to bring. A small group of six young men was coming down from the city, and right after meeting Lucchese, who had his head bowed and was reciting prayers, one of them said to his friends:

"Shall we put it to the test whether this man is truly good and holy as they say?"

The others, scenting the prank, crowed with joy: *"Let's do it!"*

"Then," suggested that stranger, *"let's beat him well, strip him, and steal his donkey. If he does not rebel, he will truly be a saint. But you'll see what protests!"*

And he laughed heartily. The others laughed too and turned back to reach Lucchese, who was already far off on the climb.

But what was that barefoot man doing? He had stopped the donkey and was now reversing his course and coming toward them.

Those rascals were left uncertain. Meanwhile Lucchese drew near, and with his benevolent smile he said: *"I know that you have resolved to reduce me to a bad state. It is useless for you to try: God is with me and you can do nothing to me!"*

The unlucky ones looked at one another. They wanted proof of his holiness? Here it was, served to them: Lucchese had known their thoughts! Therefore God was truly with him. All six found themselves on their knees in the dust, imploring forgiveness, mortified and confused. This other fine specimen earned himself an even more solemn lesson. Lucchese had loaded a sick man onto his shoulders to carry him to the city. It may be that the sick man was known as a dangerous face, but Lucchese did not ask the needy for personal papers.

A foolish and insolent young man looked at the sick man and warned Lucchese: *"Careful, Lucchese, you are carrying the devil!"* But he could say no more: he had lost his speech! Frightened, he too threw himself on his knees, imploring forgiveness with tears.

Lucchese, grieved by the offence that this time was not done to him, prayed for that wretch: *"Christ the Lord, whom I know I carry on my shoulders in this sick man, have pity on your offender."*

The prayer was heard: the mute spoke. He spoke to make amends and to praise the Lord of His mercy, and His servant Lucchese for his virtues. And to ask Lucchese for forgiveness once more. The first tertiary answered the offence with the spirit of the Gospel: *"Go in peace, and offend the Lord no more."*

Birth of the Third Order

Bona had become the first follower, faithful and loving, of her Lucchese. And their conversations, in the brief rests between the long labours of charity and prolonged fasts (they had come to eating often only bread and cooked greens), were consoling. They were the same conversations that Francis, at a distance, enjoyed with his friars, more rarely with Clare, more often directly with God.

They were the sweet conversations of souls. But there was also much longing: those two poor laypeople were too alone, and by now the need for a rule to guide them and bind them to a great family had become burning. In their conversations there was the growing longing for a blessing and a precise order from Francis, so much so that they pricked up their ears, and Lucchese was the first to know at Poggibonizzo that Friar Francis was at Florence and would take the Roman road that passed through their city. They did not know, however, that Francis had not forgotten them and was passing by for their sake.

The meeting was moving, but the Poor Man could not stop for long: the ground scorched under his feet. How changed Francis was! Love had consumed him: although he was not yet forty, he already had to lead a great family of thousands of Friars Minor of the First Order and of sisters of Clare, gathered in the Second Order of the Poor Ladies. The government of so numerous a family, and the labours, the fasts, the roads travelled, the seas crossed, without rest and without *"a stone whereon to lay his head,"* had left him bent, his limbs shrivelled and his eyes diseased and almost extinguished.

But how much light in that ruined body! What fragrance of heaven in his acts and in his words!

Francis was urgent for the meeting with Lucchese and Bona, with a longing no less than theirs. Francis felt the

vigour of his brother body slipping away, too ill-treated and too poorly nourished to resist any longer, and he wanted to complete his work and bring it to perfection.

Lucchese and Bona had not finished expressing their ardent desire when Francis clothed them in a poor and grey garment, girt at the waist by a white cord, very similar to the habit of the Friars Minor. And he dictated to them the Rule of the *"Order of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance,"* a rule severe but simple, demanding but joyful, showing the way to perfection but encouraging and possible for all. Francis said:

1) You shall observe the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Church.

2) You shall be faithful to the duties of your state.

3) You shall bear no arms, unless in defence of religion and country.

4) You shall abstain from quarrels, from usury, from avarice.

5) You shall practise temperance in food, modesty in dress, abstention from immoral pastimes.

Then he added that whoever wished to enrol in that his Order of Penance must commit himself to make peace with his enemies, to restore ill-gotten wealth, to pay tithes to the Church punctually, to make his will justly, to accept no

public honours. The penitents, later called tertiaries, would then have to gather monthly, communicate at least three times a year, visit the sick, pray for the dead. Penance, which was the spirit of the Order, implicitly included poverty, though this was not obligatory. In all, twelve articles of crystalline clarity.

The Third Order was born, the most characteristic expression and the crowning of the Franciscan Work, the application of the vastest social and religious reform in the world. Lucchese and Bona have had this glory: to be its initiators, and that greater one of having deserved it.

The new garment imposed nothing more than what they had by now been doing for several years, but to them, with the extreme sensitivity of the saints that makes them perceive the nuances of responsibility, it no longer seemed sufficient. What they did they no longer did in isolation as simple individuals, but as members of the great Franciscan family, in whose spirit they now lived and breathed, and without which they would no longer have known how to live.

For this family, to try to make themselves worthy of this family, as in their humility they believed they were not, they refined themselves in charity. Even the little house became too large for their spirit. They kept a small room for themselves, and the other rooms they turned into shelter for the sick. They themselves then maintained and cared for the guests. Several times, when the inmates were too

many, Lucchese and Bona also gave up their own room and slept on the floor in the entrance hall.

At this point we know nothing more of their two sons. It seems they died young, but we have no proof. The sources of the most certain news admit as almost certain the hypothesis of death, because nothing more is known of them, whereas there is news of other tertiaries and young followers of Lucchese. And also because we know that Lucchese, frightened by the corruption of the time, prayed the Lord to take them rather than to see them alive on earth and dead to Grace.

The Third Order followed the happy fate of the two major Orders in age and dignity: it spread! It spread along two natural lines: that of Francis and his friars, as a legitimate filiation, and that of Lucchese, as a direct and irrepressible expansion by the force it possessed.

The first two Orders — the masculine one of preaching and the feminine one of prayer — were the driving centre of the movement. The Third was its highly mobile, generous, effective army of manoeuvre, which, with peripheral and capillary action, penetrated all environments, all social classes, from the palace of the emperor to the meanest peasant hovel, surprising, overturning, and reforming the restless and disoriented society of the century.

And the most marvellous fact was that the Tertiary did not need special gifts of conquest. Every Tertiary became forthwith a reformer of society as soon as he agreed to reform himself.

There were partisan brawls: the Tertiary was obliged to bear no arms and to bind himself to no party. If he had been bound to one, he had to free himself from it. And he performed an act of peace.

There was usury: the Tertiary had to restore wealth that did not gladden his conscience. And it was an act of justice.

There was ferocious egoism: the Tertiary had to forgive, make amends, give. And they were acts of love.

There was the anxiety for wealth; the Tertiary had to have the anxiety for poverty. There was ambition; the Tertiary dressed in coarse grey. There was the unbridled pursuit of pleasure; the Tertiary had to be temperate and chaste. There was rancour in the poor; the Tertiary had to appease that rancour with alms. Every citizen who wore the grey garment of penance transformed himself from an element of war into a herald of peace.

And it is easy to imagine that with the prompt and marvellous multiplication of men and women in grey garments with the cord at their waists, the masses were soon informed of this blessed leaven. The Third Order, the perfection of Francis's work, was the greatest, the true

regenerator of a society vitiated and led astray by false ideals and heretical beliefs.

Freshness of the Order

Lucchese and Bona were the first; they had to be the perfect Tertiaries, a fixed point of comfort for the legions of tertiaries of the centuries to come.

That is why they never abandoned their occupations, as they never abandoned their home. They sanctified themselves within the rule, sanctifying work and family.

Lucchese remained a merchant, and Bona remained the faithful companion of the merchant. But commerce, a profession that so often debases the soul, had itself become Franciscan, that is, perfectly Christian, a means of sustenance and an instrument of charity. It had been ennobled and sanctified as everything is ennobled and sanctified in the light of the Gospel. Lucchese remained a merchant, but a serene and joyful merchant, who fears nothing more, no longer makes risky speculations, no longer awaits reverses. A merchant of the Lord, who keeps his place in gladness, secure and happy. Lucchese had one of the finest certainties of the Tertiary: he abandoned himself actively — not *passively*, of the [original reads: *non freschezza dell'Ordine passivamente*] — to the loving and solicitous care of Divine Providence. He worked as much as

he ought, in serenity. He no longer fretted more than he ought, nor abandoned himself to idleness.

Every Tertiary — worker, professional, executive, man of science, of industry, of politics, of arms — if he fears for himself, let him look to Lucchese, let him pray to Lucchese. He will be enlightened and comforted. Our work is always defective and cannot but be defective, but if there is no sure consciousness of sin in us, our imperfections as employees or as employers will not fall as a harm either on our family or on our neighbour. If our day is offered with purity of intent to the Lord, and the heart is free of resentments, no one can harm us more than the Lord wills to turn to our advantage, no one can subtract us from the maternal attention of Providence.

Lucchese helped his competitors. This too is a surprising aspect of the Franciscan revolution. More: he loved them. He suffered to see them distressed on his account. He did not perform unreasonable acts, no, depriving himself of his own deals to let the competitors conclude them, because he knew that the Lord must never be tempted. But he held his competitors among his dearest neighbours, and advised, encouraged, defended them. Under Lucchese's guidance this phenomenon has persisted through the centuries, and even today in the greyness of commerce one encounters this consoling light of charity in Franciscan tertiary merchants.

Bona was a perfect tertiary, because she was perfect in her humble state of companion — ready, obedient, cooperator of her husband. With Lucchese, Bona restored the dignity of the Christian family. Tertiary wives, daughters, mothers maintain through the centuries the dignity of the Christian family.

There are deviations, there are heretical gusts, there are illegitimate social motives that corrode, crumble, and disintegrate the holy institution of the family. There have been in all centuries and there are also in our troubled century. But Lucchese and Bona are not dead. They are not dead because they are Saints, because they are Franciscans, and everything that is Franciscan will not die, by the solemn promise of the Divine Master to his faithful imitator.

Lucchese and Bona are alive in our tertiaries. The Third Order is still the unfailing bulwark of the family. If there is a need, if there is a cry of the heart that would have tormented Saint Francis and his first Tertiaries, it is this, to be shouted in all the streets and in all the houses: *"Restore everything in Christ! Reform yourselves and you will reform the world, and wars will cease."* In substance: *"Spread the Order of Penance!" "Order." "Penance."* These are the terms on which the peace of the world rests and grows strong, a peace that has the bulwark of family unity in the Franciscan spirit. Lucchese reproached by example and by word the

deserters of the domestic hearth. The tertiaries alive today reproach by example and by word the deserters and corrupters of the family. Bona shone with faithfulness, simplicity, obedience, self-denial. Tertiary wives shine with virtue — courageous and at times heroic and inflexible virtue — in a vicious society. The sons and daughters who have already girded the cord of purity and obedience are a living reproach, timely, hammering, to unbridled and unadvised adolescents.

Let not our heart be discouraged! The world may have other collapses, may redden with other fires, may lose itself in other faults, but it will not perish. It will not perish because Christ does not die, as Saint Francis does not perish, and neither Lucchese nor Bona perish, nor the Franciscan Third Order.

Every tertiary family is a living cell of a marvellous tissue that wraps the world and prevents its disintegration. And this band of protection grows prodigiously stronger in proportion to the greater effort the times demand.

Thus one witnesses that phenomenon which amazes and consoles: today, when the common moral level falls, that of the tertiaries is refined and has points of contact with the splendour of the first centuries. At a distance of seven centuries the century of glowing iron has returned: and so the freshness of the Franciscan lay movement has returned, as a bulwark of our hope.

Lucchese had another great and beautiful Franciscan virtue: he was a beggar with beggars, but he was also noble with nobles, and his followers are high and low, in all social classes. He was a free man. And with the freedom of love one knows how to be noble and dignified, even when one climbs up from the furrows of the fields, from the ward of a hospital, from the hovel of a wretch.

The poor man of worth needs to change his garment to change his appearance. The Franciscan — the good Franciscan — while he so often has voluntary poverty of means, never has this poverty of worth. Because his worth comes from his very dignity as a Franciscan. He may be a jester, but he knows how to keep himself always a lord. He may suffer the pangs of hunger, but he will never descend from his lordliness of serene and virile acceptance.

At once whoever comes among us marvels at this astonishing faculty of easy fellowship. Then, as soon as the Franciscan spirit has permeated and gladdened him, he no longer marvels at it. Usually, even in Christian apostolate in general, each person exercises his influence only in the social environment in which he lives. Among us, no: among us the worker "conquers" the university professor, and the man of letters brings the illiterate to the clothing ceremony. Then in our house — a great house without encircling walls — worker and professor, man of letters and illiterate disappear. The tertiaries remain, all equal, all brothers, all

exceedingly happy to love one another and to help one another without stinting.

This beautiful gift Saint Francis handed on, with the Rule, to Lucchese, for succession to all of us, precisely so that it might be used, as Lucchese did, to pass through all doors, the massive ones and the ramshackle ones, so as to be able to find ourselves at ease both before a Head of State and beside a robust dock labourer, smiling with the humble and intrepid with all.

The Interior Life

The strength of the Third Order is in its spirituality. An indirect spirituality, which circulates in its organism from its attachment to the first two Orders, and a direct spirituality, its own, most luminous: the high spirituality of Francis, of Clare, of Lucchese.

Lucchese could not have refined himself so in penance and in love if he had not been a giant of the interior life. Like all the great apostles of action, he was a man of deep, ceaseless, enlightened prayer. He was tireless in toil because he was tireless in prayer.

Lucchese and Bona heard Mass every morning, together when they were together and separately when they were apart. They often received Communion, several times a week, a rare thing then.

Lucchese was in love with Jesus. He received him in the Eucharist and adored him in the Crucifix. He meditated on the Crucifix. He spent long hours, and to him very brief, of day and night, at the foot of the Crucifix. The union with Jesus was perfect and continuous. Lucchese saw and loved Jesus in all creatures, in all labours, and in all the movements of his own soul. He loved Jesus and enjoyed Jesus because he suffered with Him.

He had, among other supernatural gifts, the singular one of levitation. He was seen several times in ecstasy before the Crucifix, in the act of prayer, his face shining, raised to the height of the Crucifix, a metre and a half above the ground. In that attitude he was insensible to external impressions. If they called him he did not answer. Once, when a Franciscan Father pointed this out to him, Lucchese answered with humility: *"Father and dearest friend, when you called me I was elsewhere."*

One evening he was in church praying. Lucchese had been motionless with clasped hands for a good while, and the sacristan had jingled his keys to no avail, trying to make the other understand that he wanted to close up. Lucchese was in conversation with God and could understand nothing. Then the sacristan did what sacristans do in such cases. He approached him and warned him: *"It is time to leave. We are closing!"* Lucchese answered nothing. The sacristan, who had patience, resigned himself to

prolonging the closing hour and went off about other business. But time passed and from the church came no sound. Lucchese did not move. The sacristan, struck, returned toward him to make sure he had not been taken ill, and saw him lifted from the ground, in ecstasy, most luminous.

Francis had charged him with directing the enlargement of the convent of S. Maria in Camaldo on a design by friar Elia, the ingenious builder of the most beautiful Franciscan churches, and Lucchese, and Bona herself too, had worked on it for several years with fervour, directing, collecting the money needed among the people, and carrying lime and bricks. They knew they were working for the glory of the Lord, in obedience to Francis, and that was the greatest joy. They did not know they were also working for their own glory, which the Lord was already preparing.

In the same convent one day Lucchese was crossing the cloister to go to church. A friend passed beside him, hurrying out: *"What is the matter, that you leave so hurriedly? Are you abandoning Jesus?"*

The friend found himself mortified and answered: *"The church is falling down, there is an earthquake!"*

Lucchese smiled: *"It is a deceit of the devil! But he must not have the upper hand: let us trust in God and return to pray together."*

The friend trusted Lucchese and turned back. Later he told, moved, that he had seen Lucchese in ecstasy, lifted from the ground.

Lucchese had arrived at this splendour of spiritual life through the maceration of the flesh, the mortification of his spirit, and the care of the macerated flesh and restless spirit of his neighbour. Lucchese was, like Francis, a contemplative. One can be contemplative in action. More: one must be contemplative in action, if one does not want action to drag us along and submerge us.

Lucchese was a worker without weariness, but his spirit was detached from his work. His spirit was immersed in the contemplation of God.

Lucchese could have the impassive calm, the inextinguishable smile of charity, in the face of any contempt or offence, because he had touched the depths of humility. He considered himself a dead thing in Jesus and let Jesus act freely in him. This depth of perfect humility he had been able to touch through the ceaseless contemplation of God, reached through the various degrees of penance.

Penance in Lucchese was not cold. It was a need of love, it was a continuous act warmed by love. It was the Heart of Jesus that worked a lever on his heart. The Crucifix bled: the Redemption was in act. The Victim of sin still asked

reparation from generous souls, as it continues to ask it, so that the Justice of the Father may be appeased and sinners may meet mercy. Lucchese listened to the voice of the Crucifix, and penance became sweet to him.

He fasted the whole of Lent, taking a single meal a day, a scant and poor meal, like a poor pilgrim of Christ who has to follow the Master along the Sorrowful Way, for the splendour of the Resurrection. He fasted in Advent, as prescribed by the Rule, and added to it another forty days of abstinence in preparation for Pentecost, another forty for the feast of Saint Francis, and forty more for the feast of Saint Martin. Every Wednesday and every Friday he took only bread and water, for the sorrow of Judas's betrayal and of the crucifixion of the Redeemer.

Besides, even outside those days and periods his food gained little in variety and richness. He ate barely as much as was sufficient, and moreover his degree of spiritual life made him feel little need of food.

Austere and chaste, he wore a shirt of coarse cloth and on his flesh a hairshirt that tightened and pricked him. He also slept on the bare ground, for penance, his head on a block of wood or on a stone.

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, in memory of the sufferings of the Redeemer, he scourged himself.

And he was always consoled by his shining inner light. A light that has its continuity in the array of Tertiary Saints and reverberates through time over all the Third Order of Saint Francis.

Vicissitudes of War

The institution of the Militia of Penance had been too revolutionary an act — the most revolutionary of Saint Francis — for its founder not to foresee the reaction to it.

The Tertiaries could no longer bind themselves to any party in conflict, nor swear oaths, nor hold public office. In substance, the Tertiaries were withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the feudal lords and of the free communes. On the fire of passion that blazed, the Third Order was the ash that smothered it. The garment itself was the colour of ash. And that garment, which prevented the consummation of wickedness, drew upon itself the hatred of all the inflamed and wicked enemies of love. This hatred benefited Lucchese and benefited the Third Order. To Lucchese it caused material damages and humiliations that made him more resplendent in charity. To the Third Order it increased the solicitude of Saint Francis, who was jealous of it, and at once gave it a clearly religious tonality that distinguished it and detached it from the world. He made it almost a monastic Order, with its Rule, its Ministers, its Superiors, its Congregations — today Fraternities.

The Fraternity was and has remained the Monastery of the Third Order. An ingenious Monastery, typically Franciscan, where one lives in common, contributes what is left over, merges, breathes, lives, and enjoys life in common, drawing from it spiritual and moral advantages, and also temporal ones, incalculable. A Monastery as vast as the territory of the Fraternity, with its cells scattered in every tertiary's dwelling, but united in spirit as if all those cells were contiguous and grouped around the centre of the Fraternity.

The Third Order had from the very beginning an autonomous structure, distinct from the other two Franciscan Orders, and it grew so much in importance that the Pontiffs understood its great reforming quality and enriched it with privileges belonging only to Religious Orders, including that of immunity from interdict, by which a Tertiary could enjoy the celebration of the divine offices, the Sacraments, ecclesiastical burial, even when his whole city was struck by excommunication.

Poggibonizzo never arrived, as far as is known, at that misfortune. But of misfortunes, though always lesser than excommunication, it had several. It had them through the fault of its quarrelsome citizens and through the fault of the quarrelsome citizens of the powerful and not-too-distant enemy cities of Florence and Siena. Poggibonizzo had the misfortune of lying on their road, and from fear of one and the other it always ended up compromising itself in the fray

and bearing the most direct consequences, until at last it was destroyed, as has been said, but later than the period that concerns us.

Already the construction of the city, half a century before Lucchese's birth, had taken place in a troubled climate: the jealous eye of the Florentines and the Sienese was turned with unease on the men who toiled to raise robust walls and furnish them with defences and offences. Peace treaties and promises of alliance had been needed to avoid having to leave trowels and mortar-boards and take up swords.

But the Florentines especially were distrustful, and that city that was growing larger irritated them. Until in 1206 they turned up suddenly beneath the walls with a great number of men, who had passed through the countryside like hail. The Bonizzesi barred the gates and climbed onto the walls, but they had not prepared for war, and to keep their houses safe they had to empty them of gold, which they handed over to the Florentines together with a great pact of friendship and fidelity.

And that time they got off like that. But the Florentines proved to be unscrupulous friends, and so the equally unscrupulous Bonizzesi made an alliance with Siena, an alliance reconfirmed in 1226 by about two thousand of its citizens.

And there were the Florentines again on the attack, encamped, swelling with menace, along the Elsa, on the plain of Poggibonizzo. The Bonizzesi that time too managed to stop them with a peace treaty arbitrated in 1235 by the Pontiff's legate.

In 1255 there was again war between the Guelphs of Florence and the Ghibellines of Poggibonizzo and Siena, a war that turned into the league of San Donato in Poggio among the three rivals. But Siena and Poggibonizzo, staunch Ghibelline cities, exulted at the idea of the Emperor and on every occasion broke the pacts and hurled themselves against the Guelphs of Florence.

All this we have said in passing to cast light on the worth of Lucchese, as a man of a party and of the minority first, and as a Franciscan afterward, a loving enemy of all the enemies of peace.

War is one of the gravest trials for a people, in its spiritual causes and in its sorrowful consequences. It is one of the most powerful levers on generous souls for the exercise of charity, for self-denial, for sacrifice. It is the sorrow that generates reparation and salvation. It is the precious time that, beside fury, reveals the pity of man. It revealed the greatness of Lucchese and of his companion, tireless, inexhaustible, prodigious healers of wounds, of miseries, of souls. It always reveals the intact greatness of the Franciscan Third Order.

Lucchese and Bona suffered almost always, with the limpid serenity of soul, amid wars and rumours of wars.

And in old age they found themselves at the sack of their city, in 1257, a spectacle that drew tears of bitterness and transformed them into angels of consolation.

Manfred, king of Sicily, was victorious, and the Ghibellines crowed over it. The Sienese broke the treaty of friendship with the Florentines and dragged the Bonizzesi along with them.

The Florentine Guelphs marched against Siena and besieged Monteriggioni. The alarmed Sienese came to terms and made peace. The victorious army one evening, suddenly, asked for shelter in Poggibonizzo. The citizens wanted to refuse it, because they well knew that the Florentines were aware of their intrigues with the Sienese, but the treaty of alliance was still in force, and to avoid having to go back on it and openly reveal their hostility, they had to fling open the gates and let the battle-hardened militias burst into their beautiful streets.

The Florentines let the sun set on the side of San Gimignano, and prepared the torches. Then by the fantastic light of the wind-torches they burst into the defence posts, disarmed the defenders, and by that treachery made themselves masters of the gates, the walls, the crenellated towers.

For Poggibonizzo it was the night of terror. The city and the countryside were given over to sack. Whoever resisted was stopped forever by the edge of the sword. Women came out screaming into the streets, half-naked, with their children in their arms, in the instinctive need to flee. The men who were not slaughtered were bound and imprisoned. The women, the old, and the boys, after throwing themselves uselessly at the feet of the traitors, filled the churches with prayers and tears.

The next morning the sun rose on the side of the Chianti and contemplated that desolation. It rose high in the sky and contemplated the beginning of another wickedness. The Florentines had begun to dismantle the towers and to demolish the beautiful walls of the city.

Lucchese and Bona, after the night of sorrow and of love, though already so old and worn out by fasts and labours, were among the first citizens who, barefoot, in the sackcloth garment of penance and with a rope around their necks, presented themselves at Florence, to the leading men of the Republic, to implore mercy. But they did not obtain it — neither they, nor the others, neither with offerings nor with tears.

The Florentine militia continued its implacable destruction. It was halted only by a conciliatory intervention of Manfred and of the Emperor. But by now of the powerful Poggibonizzo there remained the squalor of a defenceless

city, desolate and devastated, where life resumed slowly and with frightened indecision.

This terror of men had stirred in the spirit of Lucchese and Bona the most shining irradiation of charity, but it had broken their tired bodies and hastened the longed-for union with the Seraphic Father in the rest promised to faithful servants.

The Journey

The last years of Lucchese and Bona were comforted, besides by a dense array of tertiaries, men and women, born from the first nucleus of 1221, by the care and friendship of their Director of Spirit, Fra' Ildebrandino, a Franciscan of the First Order, of the convent of Santa Maria in Camaldo. Father Ildebrandino had that responsibility and that glory of having accompanied along the way of perfection the two first tertiaries.

Their acquaintance was old; it dated from the distant years of the founding of the Convent of Santa Maria. As soon as a man draws near to God, he draws by instinct near to the Minister of God. The greatness of God would perhaps disorient him, would certainly trouble him, if he did not attach himself to that sure guide.

We laypeople in general, we Tertiaries in particular, by the promises made by Jesus to Saint Francis, have someone

who smooths for us the steep road of Paradise. For us, as soon as we wish it, there is someone who takes upon his shoulders his soul and ours: there is the Director of Spirit. For a distracted soul a simple confessor may suffice, who listens to sins and grants absolution. For an attentive soul the confessor no longer suffices; for a Tertiary of penance he never suffices. We do not have the grace of the priestly state, the special gift of the Holy Spirit reserved for the Anointed of the Lord. And therefore by ourselves we would not know how to guard ourselves. One would oscillate dangerously between the two extremes of an easy quiet and an extreme rigour.

The Director of Spirit is the infallible physician of our soul. It is enough to put it into his hands with simplicity, with confidence, with trust, and to let ourselves be guided. When one has told him everything — our thoughts, our doubts, our troubles, our aspirations — there remains for us only to listen to him and obey. We know that in obeying the Director of Spirit we obey Jesus. For us there is no more any fear: Paradise is open.

Any temptation that comes against the Director of Spirit is to be considered diabolical, even when it seems to us that the Spiritual Director demands too little and hinders us in perfection. He knows us better than we know ourselves, by the gift he has from God, and thoughts contrary to him are the thoughts of our imperfection.

It is understood that the Director of Spirit must be chosen with care, but then, once we have him, we would no longer know how to live without him: it would seem to us that we had suddenly become orphans. Better if one can do as Lucchese and Bona did: have the same Director of Spirit for all the family. Then the family acquires a unified spiritual direction, the grace of the Lord warms it, and the fragrance of charity makes it shine beyond its walls. Lucchese and Bona chose their spiritual director with care and never abandoned him again. And together, director and directees, they climbed the long and consoling ladder of perfection.

Father Ildebrandino, moreover, did a very simple thing: he helped them, on the road of the Seraphic Father, in love for Jesus Crucified and for creatures. He let Jesus work in them. And Jesus made of them two shining examples of His love. Under the Master's prompting and in the footsteps of the Father of the Order, friar Ildebrandino encouraged the two spouses toward the love of the young.

The story is known of one of them, the noblest and gentlest, the Blessed Davanzato Davanzati, whom Lucchese educated as a boy, clothed in the tunic and cord of the Third Order, brought to the Sacred Orders, and saw as rector of the Church of S. Lucia at Casciano in Val d'Elsa. Davanzato was not unworthy of his great educator. He emulated him in the spirit of penance and charity, led a holy life, studded with graces, supernatural gifts, and miracles.

In turn he had other pupils in the Third Order, among them another priest.

But Lucchese had many of them, young people, around him. He had a host — alive, cheerful, generous — that was forever renewed around Lucchese the young man, Lucchese the mature man, Lucchese the old man.

And this is another consoling characteristic of the first Tertiary, left to us in abundant inheritance: the faculty of remaining young in spirit in order to attract the young to us, that is, to Saint Francis, that is, to Christ the Lord. The ever-fresh, joyful, and lively movement of our corded boys around all the Fraternities, and the recent institution of Franciscan Youth, bear witness to it. We see the corded boys and the young people invade the severe arches of the convents of the First Order, where *"Silentium"* is written. There our boys too fall silent and become pensive. These are the first contacts with the spirit of the Founder: gladness and recollection, songs and silences, in the sublime life of the soul.

The boys and the young people return to their homes, schools, and workshops: they have around their waists the cord of Saint Francis, they are a bulwark, hope, certainty of the spiritual renewal of the world. They are the young shoots of the Third Order that we love with a tender and boundless love. They are our continuation, they are the prolongation of Francis's arms outstretched in blessing over

creatures. Many of them are also Aspirants in Catholic Action. They are the best Aspirants, as the readiest in helping the Parish Priest and in parish life. Saint Francis kindles them with love, Catholic Action employs them in love, for the new needs of the modern apostolate.

Lucchese, amid the ruins of war, went in search of the boys. His living successors, amid the ruins of the spirit, sought the boys and brought them to salvation. Saint Francis lives today in us, and the Church resists, prospers, and triumphs, also through the merit of the spirit that animates us poor lay little brothers of the Lord.

The Shining Passing

Father Ildebrandino was warned that Lucchese was ill. It was news he had long expected and feared. In his last years Lucchese grew ever more conformed to the Founder, even in body. He had grown extraordinarily thin, his shoulders had become bent, and his clouded eyes saw little beyond the walls of his house and the face of whoever drew near him. He could barely distinguish the little path of the garden any more, and his fleshless arms no longer lifted above his shoulder, impeded by pain.

Others worked for him, out of love for him. Bona too, who kept in better health, helped and comforted him.

Lucchese was undone in body, but was most luminous in soul. The transparency of his body almost left bare the beauty of his soul. And an enormous crowd hurried to him, now that he could no longer run on his donkey to meet the miseries of others. It hurried to him especially after the calamity of the passage of the Florentine soldiers.

Lucchese no longer possessed anything: he himself now lived on charity. But the crowd no longer asked for bread for the body: it asked for his word, which was the limpid and luminous word of God. Men are always much poorer in love than in goods. And this poverty of love shows itself when they discover a generous giver: they besiege him, torment him, rob him insatiably.

The poor and squalid house saw again the procession of beggars from when it was rich and well stocked. Poverty had clothed itself in light. And the light shone on the faces of those returning from that pilgrimage to the man of God.

Father Ildebrandino came down from S. Maria in Camaldo toward the still desolate and half-destroyed city. He entered a narrow, sloping street and stopped at Lucchese's house, where the crowd let him pass.

"Father and dearest friend," Lucchese said to him with a smile, *"I thank you for coming. Brother body is about to finish his toil, and I must prepare for the last journey."*

Instead the illness lasted a long time. Lucchese lay on his little bed and there continued to receive the crowd of beggars of the soul. He continued to compose dissensions, to heal wounds, to give advice, to foretell events, to work healings and other supernatural prodigies. The Lord wanted to glorify his good and faithful servant even in life. And He refined him all the more with continuous and tormenting pains of the body.

Lucchese bore them and remained smiling. Bona cared for him in silence. But she too was by now old and tired. When they remained alone and had prayed for a long time, together they recalled the long years of their union and the road they had travelled. They were moved with gratitude to the Lord and to Saint Francis. But then Bona grieved at the thought that her Lucchese would leave her alone, so old, after having made together the whole journey of the earthly passage.

She spoke of it to her husband: *"I beg you, Lucchese, do not leave me alone. Ask that, after having lived together, we may be granted to die together."*

Lucchese asked Father Ildebrandino about it, and the Spiritual Director authorised him to ask for that grace.

Lucchese asked for it with fervour. Love for the Lord had not prevented love for his spouse. Rather, it had raised it to the perfect degree of sanctified love. So Lucchese too had at

heart what Bona asked. He prayed ardently, and as the days passed and the end drew near, he felt that this grace too had been granted.

Indeed Bona fell ill. She fell ill and lay on her little bed, beside Lucchese's, in the poor room. The Tertiaries did not permit the two sick ones to go to the hospital. They cared for them themselves in the house of penance and shining love: the Lord wanted the two first Tertiaries, sanctifiers of the family, to remain to the very end the sanctifiers of love for the home, in which the family lives and has its holiest joys and its most sorrowful trials, where one is born and where one wishes to die. It does not matter that the house be poor; it matters that it be warm with affections.

After a few days Bona suddenly worsened. Father Ildebrandino administered the Last Sacraments to her, which Bona received with the emotion and the light of the just.

Then she worsened further. She no longer spoke, and with her eyes she implored from Lucchese the last farewell, before the reunion. Then Lucchese raised himself on his pallet, came down to the floor, drew near the bed of the dying woman, made the Sign of the Cross over her and blessed her in the name of Jesus Christ. Then he took her hands with affection and spoke to her of things of Paradise. Bona smiled, and with that celestial smile, purified by

penance and rich in merits, she ended her earthly pilgrimage.

Lucchese kissed her, and let them carry him back to his bed.

Bona preceded, with the weeping of the people, her Lucchese on the last journey toward the new church of Santa Maria in Camaldo, rebuilt by them, and which was to become their Sanctuary. She was buried in the Choir, behind the high Altar, and beside it was the place for the holy consort. Father Ildebrandino saw that Lucchese was at the point of death. He said to him with love:

"Dearest brother Lucchese, prepare your soul with devotion before the arrival of the Saviour. Arm yourself against the last snares of the devil and abandon yourself into the arms of the Heavenly Father, for your salvation is near and the crown of your glory."

Lucchese stroked the hand of his consoler:

"Father Ildebrandino, if I had waited until now to prepare my soul, I would trust just the same in the goodness and mercy of God, but I would have more fear of the dangers of death."

He crossed his hands on his breast and turned his gaze upward. His lips barely moved. The Tertiaries present held their breath and their sobs. That passing, in the squalor of the bare walls, had a disconcerting greatness.

Father Ildebrandino, by now old himself, extremely moved, bent over the face of the dying man to hear his last words. Lucchese said, at intervals:

"I thank the Most Holy Trinity.... the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.... The Most Blessed ever-Virgin Mary.... my Blessed Father Francis.... and all the Saints.... because by the merits of the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.... and despite my faults.... I feel that I shall be free from the snares of the devil."

His friend administered to him for the last time the radiant Host and anointed him with the Chrism of salvation. The old Lucchese shone with gladness and a living light emanated from his face.

The men and women present contemplated him kneeling and saw that that light lasted beyond his death. They could not manage to rise, moved as they were, until the news spread and the crowd of the thousands of beneficiaries burst in for the last visit and to proclaim the holiness of the deceased. It was 28 April 1260, and Lucchese was 79 years old. The body had to remain two days exposed to the veneration of the Tertiaries and the people. And when it was carried with an interminable procession to rest beside faithful Bona, the water poured down, but none of those present found himself wet.

That was the prodigious fact that most moved the people, who cried out at Lucchese's holiness and proclaimed that cult which spread in a marvellous way and which has never since weakened.

But it was not one great and solitary miracle. During the exposure of the body, which was visited by all the people of the Val d'Elsa, the Val di Pesa, and the Val d'Era, the miracles multiplied. Father Ildebrandino himself recounts that a brother of his, ill with dropsy, swollen like a barrel, managed to kiss the saint's hand and was healed immediately. He became a Friar Minor and followed his brother along the way of perfection. Father Ildebrandino also asserts that in his presence a Bonizzese, seized by an excess of devotion, drew a big knife from his pocket and cut off the tip of one of the dead man's thumbs. From the wound spurted living blood. The wounder was struck by it and enlightened.

And the dozens healed by contact with the holy body, or merely by the invocation of the name, became ardent heralds of the new Order of salvation.

The Miracles

Miracles are the concrete proofs that the Lord offers to our incredulity to glorify his Saints.

The Blessed Lucchese, for his glory and for our consolation, has added after burial a beautiful crown, and will continue to add to it as long as veneration of him endures among the people and gratitude and the pilgrimage of love to his Sanctuary endure among the tertiaries.

Not all the miracles can be listed, but to give an idea of the Saint's charitable power it will suffice to cite a few.

A nobleman of the Boninsegni family of Poggibonizzo one morning saw his wife coming toward him, livid in the face: their eight-month-old son had died suffocated in the night. The two spouses began to invoke the other two spouses who rested in S. Maria in Camaldo, and especially Lucchese. They felt in their souls a great certainty, and shortly afterward the child returned to colour and to cry, healthy and hungry. On the grassy plain of Pontedera a young man was mowing and singing. At sunset he loaded himself with the scythe and a bundle of fresh grass, and crossed a thicket to shorten the road. Suddenly he let out a scream: the ground, beneath the brushwood, had given way under his feet and he had sunk into a pit of freezing water. It was useless to go on screaming and calling for

help: no one heard him. Then the poor wretch, as he struggled to keep himself afloat and felt with terror that his strength was running out, remembered Saint Lucchese and clung with hope and with invocation to his help. When at dead of night they came to look for him, the scythe and the bundle of grass were under three metres of water, but the mower was on the water, joyful, comfortably seated.

At Ricineto it must have been difficult to save one's skin for anyone who wanted to live in peace, if the lord of those lands was forced, to curb that desire to spill human blood, to promise and keep the promise to bury the living man along with the dead man he had killed.

Two of those Ricineto men, brothers to each other and not exactly among the worst, began to discuss some interests. At a certain point one of them, to get more of his due, gave the other a slap. The offended one, forgetful of the upbringing he had received and letting the nature of his fellow citizens prevail, answered by killing his brother. The law was applied to them too, and dead and living were buried together in the cemetery of the Friars Minor. The next morning the boys were playing beside the little wall and felt the earth tremble. Frightened, they scattered like a flock of birds at the sound of a gunshot. Someone stopped, terrified, at the door of the convent and, breathless, reported what had happened. The friars went to the cemetery and from beneath the fresh heap over the two

brothers they distinctly heard these words: *"Have pity on us, for we are alive!"*

The friars, moved, dug the earth, and the Bishop, the Magistrate, and a great crowd came running. The mother of those two quarrelsome sons also came running, and was able to embrace them both, alive and well, and to hear these precise words:

"I," said the wounded one, *"before losing consciousness had forgiven my brother and prayed the Lord that through the intercession of Saint Lucchese he would forgive him." "I had made a vow,"* said the killer, head bowed, *"to enter the Order of Friars Minor if, through the intercession of Saint Lucchese, my brother and I were spared from death."* The mother, mad with joy, explained that she had raised her two sons in devotion to Saint Lucchese, and had in turn commended them to him after the killing. The fratricide did not betray his vow and became a Friar Minor.

All the miracles are historical and documented. Of this one, which among the miracles has the most singular aspects, testimony was given, among the many, by Friar Bonifacio, friar Francesco Squarcialupi, and father Casini of the Minors, who received the killer into their convent. This act of the law of charity had far more effect on the Ricineto men than the terrorist law of the feudal lord. Saint Lucchese continued to be the provident follower of the fiery reformer of Assisi.

The Florentines turned away Lucchese as he dragged himself, old and penitent, to implore clemency for his city. They could not, however, turn him away after his death, every time he went to take unfortunate prisoners out of their hands.

A certain Buondapescia, a man of Poggibonizzo, was taken by them to San Gimignano, bound like a sausage around a pole, and three soldiers were set to guard him. That man, who could do nothing more with his hands to free himself, asked Lucchese for help. Toward midnight the guards fell asleep and the bonds came loose. It was easy for him, therefore, to slip away and return to his home.

Domenico Bindi of Volterra, instead, had been thrown into a prison, again at San Gimignano, and there were others who had certain frightened eyes to make the skin crawl. They were prisoners who were starving to death. Domenico Bindi did not rejoice over it, and began to pray to Lucchese. Thus for several days he watched his fellow prisoners die slowly, and he did not feel hunger. The Lord satisfied him through the intercession of Lucchese. Domenico Bindi was not content with this and intensified his prayer. Then a stranger appeared in the cell, took him by the hand, and led him out. Bindi fled with the shackles in his hand and carried them, moved with gratitude, to the altar of the Blessed in his Sanctuary.

In the prisons of Florence there were three citizens of Poggibonizzo. They too had nothing to rejoice about in their treatment, for they were put to torture and reduced to a pitiful state, and in conclusion a harrowing death had been promised them. Seized with fright, they commended themselves together, at length, to their holy fellow citizen. At night a shining man arrived in the darkness of the prison and made a great light. The three prisoners, more frightened than ever, took refuge trembling in a corner. But the man smiled and took them by the hand, making them leave the prison and leading them through the city. Arriving at the walls, the gate opened by itself, and the man left the three prisoners on the free road toward Poggibonizzo.

Father Bartolomeo Tolomei, who wrote a life of Saint Lucchese in Latin, includes this testimony: *"I, friar Bartolomeo Tolomei, a Sienese, the least of the Order of Saint Francis, was returning from Marseille from the first General Chapter. I was with eighteen friars and many pilgrims on the ship of the lord Franceschino da Porto Venere. Off Savona we were struck by a fearful storm, which broke the oars, tore the sails, snapped the mast, and tore out the anchors. The ship was at the mercy of the waves and on the point of being swallowed by them. All of us, on our knees, wept and prayed. I commended myself with tears to God and to Father Saint Francis. Suddenly a man of Poggibonizzo stood up and, rising above the din of the storm, shouted to us: 'You have commended yourselves to*

all the saints, and you have not been heard. Let us all together invoke my Saint Lucchese!' Then we all, with loud voice and weeping, invoked Saint Lucchese. Shortly afterward that man cried out, full of joy: 'Bow down, companions, and venerate the Blessed Lucchese who approaches.' At that moment the storm was calmed. We, out of gratitude and devotion to the Blessed Lucchese, disembarked at Savona and went in procession, each with a candle of one pound, to the church of Saint Francis." The limited scope of this narration of ours does not permit us to prolong the list of Lucchese's supernatural interventions. Whoever would know more of them — and would do well to — should consult the small bibliography on the last page and search out its works. Or, and would do better, should set himself a pilgrimage to the most beautiful Romanesque sanctuary of San Lucchese and ask about it from the courtesy of the Friars Minor. By way of brief conclusion we report the episode of the "Judgment of God," which was then carried out as a guarantee of God's consent to the cult of the saints. The episode is well rendered in a fresh painting by Arturo Viligiardi, a Sienese, in the chapel of the Blessed, already decorated by Cennino Cennini and Taddeo Gaddi. The fame of the first Franciscan tertiary had reached the person most loved by Saint Francis: the Pope. And Gregory X rejoiced at that new testimony to the greatness of the Seraphic Founder. He rejoiced and wanted confirmation of it, involving the hierarchies of the Church.

Then he took advantage of a fine occasion to have direct confirmation. In 1273 he was to pass through Poggibonizzo together with Charles I, king of Sicily, and Baldwin II, emperor of Constantinople, on his way to the Council of Lyon. He stopped on the banks of the Elsa and climbed the hill of Camaldo. He entered the sanctuary, followed by his court and by an immense crowd of people. In the presence of all, a great fire was lit, and the head of Lucchese was thrown into the middle of it. If the flames had destroyed it, that would have meant that the "Judgment of God" was contrary to the cult of the deceased. Instead the head of Lucchese, as if it were alive, came out of the flames unharmed of itself and came to rest at the feet of the Pontiff. Then the Pope, amid the emotion of all and moved himself, granted that it be exposed to the veneration of the people and carried in solemn procession. And he declared that the cult of Lucchese was legitimate and praiseworthy. For us the Pope's declaration is a command, and love for Lucchese is love for the Order and a seraphic invitation to the knowledge and contemplation of God.

Athos Carrara

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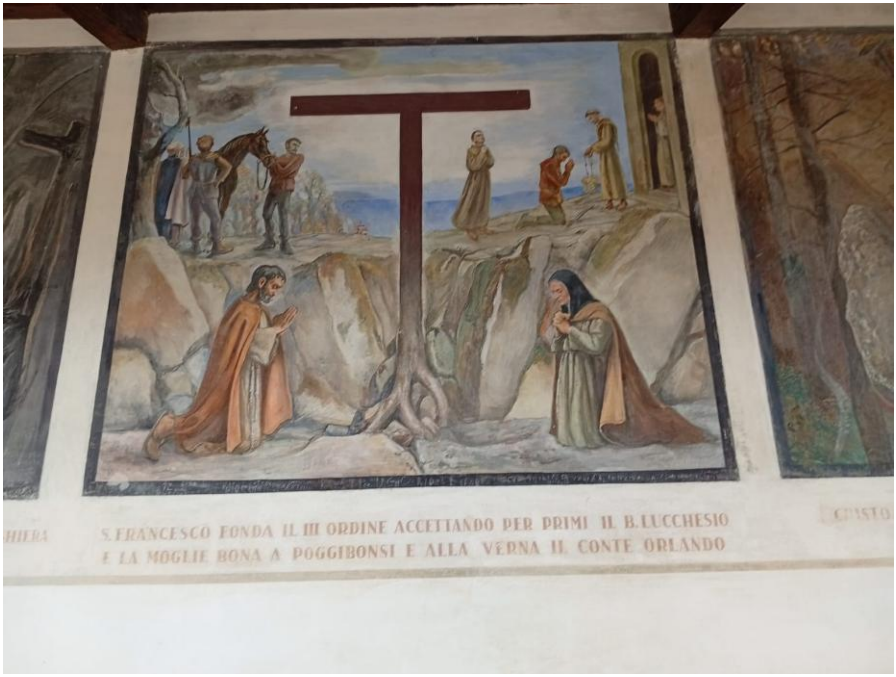
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Saint Lucchese, with his wife, is the saint of the Third Franciscan Order (the first order is the male one wanted by Saint Francis, the second is the female one created by Saint Clare and the third is that of the laity)



Body of Saint Lucchese – Basilica of Poggibonsi



Painting of Saint Lucchese with his wife Bona in the corridor of Franciscan images at La Verna