

Francis of Assisi

Long ago in Italy there were people wondering. They were wondering about the Roman Catholic church. "Why are its officials so rich?" they wondered. "Why are they so worldly? What does the Bible say? They do not tell us." What could these people do? Could they join a better church? One that followed the Bible?

Some people did this. They got into a lot of trouble. There were not many of them. The church officials were cruel to them. They had to hide away in the mountains.

Some people did not do this. "We will make the Catholic church better from inside." they said.

Francis of Assisi, was 25 years old. He went to church. He heard about Jesus' disciples. Jesus sent them out. They took no money with them. They had no extra clothes. "This is what preachers should do!" he said. "I will do it." Francis was a wonderful preacher. He believed what he said. He was joyful too. People flocked to hear him. "Jesus and the apostles were poor," he said.

Other people came to help him preach. Francis made up some rules for them. Mostly they were good rules. His preachers must love their enemies. They must be peacemakers. They must pray always. They must not use bad words. They must be poor. "I will make the Catholic church better from inside." said Francis. "Jesus and the apostles were poor. Preachers should be poor too." Those who followed Francis took his name. They were called Franciscans.

Francis went to Rome. Some Franciscans went with him. He told the pope what he was doing. The pope was not keen on Francis's ideas. The pope was rich. The pope was worldly. He did not want things to change. In the end he said, "Yes, Francis, you may preach. You may have your rules." He did not write down what he had said. He might want to change his mind.

Francis heard about people far from Italy. They did not know about Christianity. He wanted them to hear. He sent his Franciscans out to tell them. They went all over the world. Soon there were many, many Franciscans. Francis did not know them all. He could not talk to them all. Other men began to tell the Franciscans what to do. Francis

wanted the Franciscans to be poor. Some Franciscans changed that idea.

Then the pope decided. He wanted riches. He wanted pleasures. "Christ and the apostles were not so poor," he said. He was glad he had not written down what he had said to Francis. "Franciscans must obey the Catholic church," he said. The Franciscans did as they were told.

The Franciscans' ideas were not just from the Bible. They were mixed with made up ideas. Sometimes the Franciscans found some of those people who tried to follow the Bible better – people who were not part of the Catholic church. Now the Franciscans treated these people with wicked cruelty. Francis had tried to make the Catholic church better. He tried to do it from inside. It did not work in the end. His Franciscans became just as bad as the rest of the Catholic church.