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Life of St. Zita of Lucca

(1212?-72)

translated by

Kenneth Baxter Wolf

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Medieval Texts in Translation

Zita (c. 1218-78) is a rare example of a servant saint. She spent her entire adult life in the service of the Fatinelli family of Lucca. Like other saints of low birth (cf Isidro of Madrid), she distinguished herself by embracing her humble profession, seeing it as a God-given means of penance. She was finally canonized in 1698, her cause championed by descendants of the Fatinellis who employed her.

Prologue

All scripture, divinely inspired, is useful for instructing, because it has been given [to us] by the Holy Spirit so that, from it, as if from a common font of sanctity, we might each receive from it the remedies for our own particular struggles, just as it is written: “Whatever was written was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and the consolation of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4) Whence in the past it was the didactic habit of the most erudite men to investigate the celebrated lives of the saints and to dutifully and rationally assign to the office of the pen the progression of their lives for the sake of posterity, so that anyone, by studying these lessons would be able, by imitating them in this world, someday partake in and benefit from their company in the glory of unending

life. Indeed to the extent that we hold in high esteem those who have done virtuous things, we honor those who are able to extol the lives of such as these and their most excellent geniuses using the written word.

Many, infused with the light of wisdom, have recorded with resplendant words the fragrant acts of the saints. When, in comparison to which, I measure the limitations of my own talent, to which flow the scanty streams of my own meager knowledge, a talent scarcely moistened by this attenuated drop of poor rain, my narrative ought to be passionately cut short lest an uncultivated word render me worthy of contempt, I who, shameless, occupied myself with material that should rightly be reserved for more knowledgeable writers. Still, although the golden life of such as these far transcends me, I do not reckon it injurious if my poor flute, played anyway, makes known things that are of some profit for the use of men. More to be feared is the prospect that, with the passage of fleeting time, the memory of the deeds of this remarkable life and the habits of this admirable woman, the excellent virgin Zita, might disappear from sight.

With regard to the almost innumerable miracles and prodigies performed after her death, may it be clear that I have related not a single one in this work. I have only poured out those which she performed while she was still living in her body, in particular those that occurred around her death. Because charity and humility toward others ought to be venerated more than signs of virtue (because the proof of sanctity is not the ability to work signs, but to love everyone as one loves oneself, to hold to truth with regard to God, and to think more about one's neighbor than about oneself, just as Truth itself has said: "In this way everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"--John 13:35), I have committed to this record just a few [examples]. For if I were to report everything about this perfect and [divinely] approved woman that either I know myself or I have learned from good men worthy of trust, it would take days, I reckon, before the words would cease.

I, who am about to record the life and deeds of this one, invoke her tenant, the Holy Spirit, who is the creator of all things, the giver of all gifts, manifold yet unique, subtle, learned, and mobile, certain and smooth, having all power in him, watching over all things, and dividing each thing as he sees fit; so that he who bestowed her virtues may give me the words for narrating them, from whom everything that is given is the best and every gift is perfect.

Chapter One: Her birth, her condition of life, her liberality toward the poor, the conversion of water into wine, and the multiplication of rations.

1. With the world setting and the corruption of the age slipping into senility, the clarity of divine light has shone, in these modern times, on the venerable handmaiden Zita, rising up in the province of Tuscany, in the diocesan city of Lucca, that is to say in a village called Monsagrati (1). God, who said that light was to shine from the darkness (2), chose an weak woman of the world, one who was dull and contemptible, so that she might confound the strong, and illuminated her with such rays of grace, that although her lineage was the lowest, she was nonetheless adorned with the highest virtues and filled with great quantities of merit. Indeed she shone with such innumerable miracles of signs and prodigies that everywhere that the Christian name is venerated, word of them has gone out and, as a result, many have rushed together from the edges of the earth following the fragrance of her ointments. By believing more fully in God than in herself, she clung in her faith to the first truth; by trusting more fully in God than in herself, she clung in her hope to the highest charity; by loving God more than she loved herself, she adhered in charity to the highest good. She had a father who was called John Lombard, a mother named Bonissima, an uncle named Gratian who was a layman, and a sister named Margarita who was a nun in a certain monastery of the Cistercian order. Both of whom, that is to say the uncle and the sister, were of such conduct and [manner of] life that, if it were not prohibited by law, they would have been regarded as saints by everyone.

2. Leaving her village at around the age of twelve, this virgin made her way to the city of Lucca to live. So that she might, in accordance with the apostle, minister with her own hands to those who were in need (3), lest perchance she eat the bread of pain; or so that she might offer assistance to invalids and the poor, she surrendered herself to a house of wealthy citizens of Lucca (4) not far from the venerable church of S. Frediano (5) of Lucca, in which this saint's venerable body rests. The venerable Zita spent her entire life in the home of these noblemen, that is, until she was almost sixty years of age, serving her lords and ladies blamelessly without complaint and offering consientious care regarding the management of the house and family members of both sexes and all ages. Whenever domestic duties did not encumber her, she would immediately rush back to work assiduously with her hands, especially avoiding all the leisure and curiosity--that is, the weapons of the ancient enemy for capturing wretched souls--that comes with this fickle age, as if they were the bites of fiery serpents. She sedulously fulfilled what is written in the book of Wisdom: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" (6). She zealously avoided womanly superstitions, designed for fulfilling one's desires. She esteemed service to God to be the most exquisite service of all, offering service that was glorious to God even though it was inglorious to the world.

3. a certain abundant mercy toward poor people—bestowed upon her by God--clung to the heart of this handmaiden of God along with a gentle kindness, which, growing in her from childhood, filled her heart with such goodness, that she never, if the opportunity presented itself, denied alms to any who asked them of her for the love of God. And so that she might find herself more prepared to do this, she not only prepared with vigilant care suitable things that seemed appropriate for this task, but she also solicitously collected small and humble fragments from her meager rations, watching closely so that no pauper would go away empty handed from her. Dedicating herself to this goal to the extent that she was able up to the time of her death, she attained greater increments of grace with respect to God. When one day a certain pilgrim, burning up with thirst and heat, asked alms from her, and she had nothing with which to relieve the poor man, she became very anxious wondering what she could do. Finally, after pondering the situation, and being inspired from on high, she encouraged the poor pilgrim and offered to sustain him with fresh water from the well. Taking in hand a brass vessel, according to the local custom, she offered the pilgrim the fresh water that she had drawn from the well, making the sign of the cross over it as she did. When he tasted the water--which had, with divine help, suddenly been turned into wine--and realized that it tasted like the best possible wine, he drank abundantly and with good cheer, asserting and contesting later that he had never in all his life drunk such a smooth wine.

4. The sweetness of piety flowed from the font of mercy into this servant of the Lord in such copious quantities that she seemed to possess a mother's heart for relieving the miseries of the wretched. Her grace melted for the weak and the poor and she zealously extended a hand to them, loving them all greatly with heartfelt and fraternal affection. And so that she might offer her sacrifice in a way more pleasing to God, she took delicious food--food necessary for nourishing her own tiny body—and, whenever the opportunity presented itself, personally brought it to those who were most oppressed by sickness and want. These she very often visited personally, taking care to show a great deal of respect for such disadvantaged ones. For one offers a more pleasing form of abstinence [as a sacrifice to God], if one is generous toward the indigent with things taken from one's own portion of food. If she were not able [to offer] a hand to such as these she at least showed affection, adding exhortations to patience along with her conciliatory words. For a word of instruction cannot penetrate the heart of the needy if a hand of mercy does not commend it in the presence of the soul. And that voice, which does not back up what it says with action, will not penetrate the heart of the one who listens. If therefore she discerned anything in the way of penury, any kind of defect in anyone, she brought to mind Christ with the sweetness of her pious heart. Because she saw the image of Christ in all

poor people, she generously conferred upon the needy people who rushed to meet her whatever in the way of necessities had been conferred on her, whether it be in the form of garments, cloth, shoes, or other such things; indeed she actually sought out such people, because she thought of it as giving back what was actually theirs. For when we distribute such necessities among indigent people, we are not being generous with our own things; instead it is as if we are returning their things. Thus we pay a debt of justice when we carry out works of mercy. She was so intent, carrying out works of this kind of mercy with such zeal, that in countless villages she found herself more ready to distribute alms to these miserable people than they were prepared to receive them. The meager wages that she received from the head of the household she either distributed to the needy or, with her customary humanity, gave to those many ones whom she took up from the sacred font of baptism (7).

5. One time, when, as a result of a growing famine, food was dearer than usual, the poor complained among themselves and the number of deaths grew as a result of their extreme penury. They rushed most urgently to Zita in their need just as one would rush to a mother or a nurse (subventrix). Under the weight of such demand, there was nothing left over for her to distribute, either from what she had or what she was able to obtain from others as a result of her pious efforts. That is when a wretched little poor woman, with a crowd of poor little children standing around her, approached her asking alms, bemoaning the fact that she and the children had to struggle under such unimaginable poverty, unable to survive much longer. This most kind servant of God was all at once pierced with the sword of compassion. But Zita did not have what she needed to extend her helping hands to this woman. But, divinely instructed with the idea, first of all, that in a time of need all things are to be shared, and second, that is it better to obey the Lord in heaven than to obey one's lord on earth, she approached one of her lord's chests, which contained a great quantity of beans--to be precise, easily a *starius* (8) worth of beans--and distributed a portion to the indigent woman and her children so that they were able to stave off the threat of hunger. For in vain do they think themselves innocent who claim privately for themselves what is in fact a common gift of God; who, while so many poor people die each, hide supplies for their own use. When they do not distribute the things that they have received, are implicated in the death of their neighbors. On account of which over the next few days Zita distributed [food] from this chest to as many of the poor as came seeking alms from her.

6. And although she was not a little afraid of the remonstration and cursing of her lord, she distributed the [beans] to the poor without him realizing it and without his permission. She said to herself: "I accept whatever

[punishment] he might wish to inflict upon me and I will pay the price, being prepared [to accept] beatings with joy." The chest had been practically emptied of beans as a result of her almsgiving, at least as far as Zita was able to reach into the chest with her hands and arms. No one up to that point had examined it, when the lord of the house, who was ignorant of what Zita had done, ordered beans which he had placed in the chest to be sold to someone. With this in mind, he ordered the quantity of beans to be measured so that their value might be assessed. Zita beseeched the Lord God with faith and trepidation in the hopes that God would render the soul of the head of the household more gentle toward her and not bitterly inveigh against her on account of her distribution of the beans. And behold the chest was found to have been divinely filled with beans, their amount having been in no way diminished. Thus the Lord, in whom she confided, protected his servant most wonderfully from any threat of harm in a manner that was wondrous and undetected by human beings. When Zita realized that the head of the household was not upset with her, she rejoiced in the presence of his wife, that is, her mistress, by giving thanks to God and by commending him for his great kindness. But because it is appropriate to be careful, lest while one is faring well, the mind be elevated with regard to the glory of such a distinction and looks down on everyone else, she humbly kept what had happened to herself. She was content not to describe the incident as a miracle, although many who knew about these things praised the divine power and its merits [that expressed themselves] in such a miracle.

Chapter Two: The various and great celestial favors of S. Zita and the bitterness of her life.

7. Zita, the hand-maiden of God, stood out as a imitator of that apostolic man, the blessed bishop Martin [of Tours], who, it is read, was deemed worthy of clothing the Lord Christ whether in person or in the form of one of his angels (9). On the most sacred night of the nativity of the Lord and Savior, when Zita was getting ready to go to matins, which the holy church was celebrating at that time, the harshness of the intense cold bore down more severely than usual. The head of the household said to her: "O Zita, how is it that you are about to hasten off to church at such a frigid time of night, when we, standing here under a roof fully clothed, are scarcely able to endure the affliction of this intense chill? How will you, largely spent from your previous fasting and covered with only poor, thin garments fare, huddled on the damp and cold marble of the [church] floor? Either spare yourself and pass this time of leisure in prayer here or put my fur cloak over your shoulders so that you can protect yourself against the intense cold." Refusing to be absent from the holy church on such a solemn night, Zita accepted her lord's fur cloak and headed off to church. Turning to speak, her

lord said--with a certain kind of foreknowledge, as subsequent events would reveal--“Be warned, Zita, and take care that you not give my cloak to anyone else or lose it anywhere. If it were to be lost, I would be grieved at the loss of one of my possessions and you will suffer a serious punishment that I will administer personally.” And she responded: “This cloak will be well cared for and kept safe for you, my lord.”

8. When Zita entered the church, her gaze immediately directed itself to a certain half-naked pauper who was muttering under his breath and whose teeth were chattering from the bitterness of the cold. Immediately Zita’s heart, pierced with compassion, melted as she considered the affliction of this trembling poor person. Coming near to him, she said: “Brother, what’s up with you? Why do you afflict yourself with such complaints?” The poor man, turning his placid face to her, reached out his hand and touched her cloak. Removing the cloak from her shoulders, Zita covered the pauper, saying: “Put these furs on until the divine offices have been completed, but then return them to me, making sure not to take them anywhere else. I will then lead you home and will protect you from the cold with a warm fire. These things having been said, Zita drew herself away to that part of the church where she was accustomed to stand in prayer and holy meditation and to listen to divine things. When the offices had been completed, all the men and women who had gathered there left to go home. Zita also needed to leave; but looking everywhere for the poor man, inside the church and out, she did not finding him. She thought to herself: “Where do you think he went? I fear that someone took the cloak from him and as a result he did not dare to show his face to me out of shame. He seemed to be a person of good enough appearance. I don’t believe that he would have stole the cloak and fled.”

9. With this and similar reasoning she piously excused the pauper in her own mind, not wishing to accuse him in any way whatsoever of theft or larceny. When she had gone about for some time asking for him and was still unable to find him, she returned home ashamed, but always bearing firm hope in the Lord that he would either render the head of the household peaceful toward her or inspire the pauper who had run off to come back and return the cloak to her. When ultimately Zita arrived home without the cloak, the head of the household approached her with bitter, abusive words, and voicing a great many many accusations. For her part, she responded without a word or sign of impatience, recounting the series of events to the head of the household plainly and with an exhortation of good faith. He listened attentively to her explanation, but did not cease his mumbling even by dinner time. O immense clemency of divine goodness! Behold, at the third hour, the pauper appeared at the steps in the middle of the house, with an appearance so comely it softened the souls of those who gazed upon him,

and presented the cloak draped over his arms. He gave it to Zita, while the head of the household watched and listened, and offered his thanks for the blessing that had been bestowed on him. Then suddenly, after both Zita and the head of the household had begun to speak to him, he disappeared from them, as if in a flash of lightning, placing in their hearts a certain new and hitherto unknown joy as a result of which they were both delighted. Indeed they marveled with this delight for a long time.

10. Happy Zita crucified her flesh along with its vices in such a disciplined and rigid way that she only very rarely experienced any sensual impulses. So strictly did she restrain herself with the laws of modesty that she scarcely consumed any of the things necessary for sustaining her self. On the contrary, she rarely enjoyed the small portion of cooked food that was saved for and allotted to her at the table; instead she saved it to give to a sick or poor person, content to eat only the tiniest and vilest [bits of food]. She maintained such strict temperance with regard to the drinking of wine that for many days over the course of the year she would drink absolutely no wine. Once her flesh had been dominated through abstinence, her chastity led her to the perfect radiance of cleanliness. She afflicted herself with frequent fasts so that although she seemed rather corpulent in appearance, she in fact scarcely adhered to her bones. Her mouth grew pale with fasting but her mind was kindled with heavenly desires, to the point that she seemed for the most part to be less than a human body; nothing but a phantasm or a spirit. She did not, as most people would do, then go prepare a more copious or abundant meal for herself, lest she conceal in her desires the concern of the flesh. She took pains to prohibit—and to good effect—her assistants from preparing anything for her, lest she become onerous to anyone in this regard.

11. With regard to the clothes with which she covered her little body, she was attentive neither to their quality nor their quantity, nor to their preciousness, their worthlessness, their color or their brightness; she did not have the slightest concern for such things. She avoided involving her soul [in such matters], wishing to keep it always free, and wisely asserting that Christian perfection consists not in the quality of one's clothing but the breadth of one's charity. Her human mind, with which she elevated herself so high so as to consider eternal matters, trembled with terror concerning temporal things. She went about at all times with bare feet; she did not permit herself to wear shoes even in the bitter season of winter. She passed her days with rope and cord wrapped around her loins on her bare skin, wrapped so tightly that after her death it was discovered that the skin and grown up and over the rope and that in many places the rope had torn her skin, which appeared lacerated. Although she had a comfortable enough bed, she only rarely laid down on it. Instead she brought poor people and

pilgrims in and revived them on her bed. She often brought to her bed prostitutes and other women serving the enticements and depravity of the flesh. She was motivated to do this by one simple consideration: to do whatever she could to keep them away from sin even if only for one night. Thus she strove with the most ardent charity for the salvation of all souls. Often it was the naked earth or the boards of a table that supported her weary little body, fatigued as it was by her labors and her innumerable genuflexions, worn out by her journeys out and back again for the purposes of charity. If you had seen her, you would have thought that the spirit had already left her. Nevertheless, as will now be made clear by the following, she administered the power of her tolerance to that same [spirit], which she served with a most fragrant love, in hunger, thrist, cold, and nakedness.

12. This most devout Zita, who was fasting most devoutly one day, set out to visit the church of S. James of Podio (10) near Pisa along with certain count who was an acquaintance of hers. (11) Arriving at the church, she humbly offered prayers to the Lord. Continuing on her journey, as was her original plan (12), she then made her way to the church of the Apostle Peter at Grado, which is toward the sea five miles on the other side of the city of Pisa. But the count left the city as soon as they had entered it and returned to the previously mentioned one. Aware that whoever sets out to undertake a greater good renders illegitimate a lesser good that is actually accomplished, Zita, would not forsake her firm proposal, but went on, her humble prayers joined to her devout fasting, to the church of the Prince of the Apostles.

13. It was almost the hour of vespers when Zita, returning through the city of Pisa, was invited to spend the night. But she did not wish to accept the invitation, and instead moved on to the baths of Mt. Pisa, the sun having already set. There she was asked by a certain man whom she knew if she would let him put her up there, but she was not content to stay. Instead, in the fervor of her spirit, this intrepid woman crossed over the mountain that is called S. Julian, where she was implored by a certain hermit with great insistence and entreaties to rest there, lest perchance she, during the lonely night, fall victim to thieves or wild animals. But she passed by with a deaf ear, her spirit presiding over her flesh. She passed by in a similar fashion the fortress of Massa and the men who were watching over that place, men who urgently invited her [to stay there], admiring the great determination of this feeble female. Bent over on account of her physical condition and enduring hunger because of her fast and her fatigue from the journey, she rested above a certain spring at about the time of the first cock’s crow. And when her flesh was thus troubled, lacking in no challenge, her unconquered spirit exulted in her exhausting deeds.

14. And while this handmaiden of God was rinsing her mouth with a little water, suddenly a woman appeared to her: the mother of the Son of God, as it is piously believed. She amicably touched Zita's side in a preordained act of greeting, saying: "Do you wish to go back [home]?" Not only was Zita unafraid of this gracious voice, but jumping up in her pious and sweet hunger, she received such fortitude, security, and comfort that suddenly all of the weariness of hunger and thirst vanished, and she immediately responded: "I would most gladly like to go. Let's go together." Then walking side by side, they arrived at the covered bridge at about midnight and behold, the door to the bridge was closed and secured in its usual manner. But it spontaneously opened to them and once they had passed through it closed and bolted itself. Arriving at last at the gate of the city [of Lucca], they found that it too had been diligently secured with iron bars. But it too opened in the blink of an eye in their presence, permitting both to enter freely. Finally they came to the door of Zita's dwelling, and, when Zita shouted, the servant of the house opened the door, grumbling and reproachful. And all at once the woman who had accompanied Zita disappeared. Zita, wishing to introduce her companion, extended her hand and turned her face. When she did not find or see anyone there, she wondered and was very confused, wondering in her heart where the one who had showed her companionship had come from and where she had gone. She had enjoyed her sweet conversation as she went along. Moreover she found that she was not weary from her journey; it was as if she had been nourished by food from heaven.

15. We remember one miraculous occurence in particular. For the entire time that she lived, Zita, the servant of God, made a habit of going to the monastery and church of S. Angelo once a week, mostly on Saturday. This church is located on a mountain above a river about six miles away from the city of Lucca. She did not restrain herself from her journey there even when it rained heavily or when there was a deadly storm. One day, when she had dispensed with all of her household duties, as the day was ending and evening was beginning to fall, she set out on her usual journey. And behold a man, mounted on a fast horse, came up from behind following the same path. He was hastening to the same church on a business matter involving his family. When he saw Zita making her way on foot with a curious and feeble gait he began: "Where are you heading at such a late hour, O stolid woman? All around you in the shadows of the night are men who commit hurtful crimes." Zita regarded all of this as nothing and responded humbly: "Go on your way. Christ will lead me through unharmed." The horseman then took off ahead of Zita at a fast and animated gait. Hastening for an hour, he galloped fairly quickly to get to where he wanted to go. And when he finally reached the church, he saw Zita praying before its doors. She, in whose mind was complete, pure, and simple faith, had arrived there before

him, the Lord leading the way. The horseman enquired of her with the greatest wonder how she had gotten there so long before him, arriving so quickly. She said what Job said: “As it pleases God, so is it done” (13).

Chapter three: The fervent and ecstatic prayer of Zita, and other favors bestowed on the same.

16. Zita, the handmaiden of Jesus Christ, sensing that she had wandered from the Lord in her body, prayed without interruption, trying to show by her prayers that her spirit was present with God, lest at any time she be without the consolation of her beloved Spouse. And hoping that her soul’s understanding would be rendered purer by the illumination of divine light, she continued to pray like this. She did this so that, while she worked with her hands, she might pour forth words of prayer from her heart and from her mouth, lest completely neglecting the quiet, she extinguish the flame of heavenly love in her. As a result of this, it happened sometimes that her manual labor turned out to be clumsy, because her heart was not involved in the work, but rather in the prayer. For walking and sitting, working and resting, inside and outside, she was intent in her mind on prayer, so that she seemed to dedicate to God not only whatever there was of her heart and her body, but also what there was of her time and her labor. This holy woman was frequently suspended in ecstasy, with such an excess of devotion and a fixed apex of *synderesis* (14) in heavenly spectacles, that, taken outside of herself, she sensed something beyond the human senses, so that she by no means knew what was happening around her. After many tears, cleaving her eyes to heaven, she seemed from her own perspective to be frequently among crowds of angels. By means of heavenly contemplation, she crossed over from the cloister of the flesh, drawing out the sweetest fragrances of super luminescent splendors and super burning love.

17. So that she might more peacefully accept the infusion of spiritual consolations and be inebriated with the exuberance of divine love, she sought the solitude of a [private] place within the walls of the habitation where she lived and frequently spent the night in it. There at night a bright light was often seen by members of her household, as if the sun, the source of light, had arisen there; those of saner mind figured that she was being consoled by the presence of the maker of light or by some angelic visitation. For almost the entire span of her life she rose [early] for matins, most often going to the nearby church of S. Frediano, where she remained intent on the office. Passing the time alone in the lower part of that very spacious church, she formed her prayers, sprinkled her tears, filled the place with her sighs, struck her breast with her hand or a stone, and in many ways shared all the secrets of her hidden thoughts with God. She was especially accustomed to pray in front of a certain crucifix that was almost consumed with age and as

a result had been placed in the inn at the cemetery. There she poured forth her soul, while being ever so sweetly and ever so gently refreshed with regard to her flesh, cooked in the oven of the lamb's cross.

18. The memory of the passion of Christ was deeply impressed in the viscera of her heart, so that it burned the inside of her mind with the fire of love and filled it with the absinth of compassion. In her fountain-like love, she burned most ardently for him, whose passion she so vehemently lamented. And when she, with the eyes of her mind, unceasingly observed the wounds of the Lord on the crucifix, she was scarcely able to restrain herself from tear-filled sighs. In other words, with countless sighs, she considered with own virginal heart how the bloody rivulets poured from the celestial limbs of Jesus and how, at the same time, his own most blessed spirit had lamented. She did not dispense with the blows on her breast until, chided invisibly by the Lord, her tranquility returned. And just as a human being is accustomed to speaking with a friend, so she spoke—in the midst of her sighs—to the Lord, as if he were present there in the flesh. Recounting the entire lovely sequence of the Lord's passion, she was often so struck by the sweetness of its fountain-like delightfulness and this super celestial speculation, with the previously consecrated celestial influxes, that many times the door keeper of the church, wanting to close up after the completion of the divine offices and the solemnities of the mass, was scarcely able with his scolding to drag her from the immense sweetness of such sweet contemplation. She was accustomed to leave after everyone had already left and to enter before the rest had arrived. When, as often happened, she found herself locked out of the church, she would perform her prayers in front of the church door. The immensity of the noteworthy calluses which had grown on the backs of her hands and her knees was discovered after her death; thus even her dead flesh bore witness to what her living spirit did. For the most part she did not pass her time at church in the company of other women--who so often took this as an opportunity for empty chatter--but made it her habit to select a place for praying next to the men. She controlled herself in church, remaining always silent and modest, that not only did she never try to look in the face of anyone, but turned nothing but her prayers in her mind and her mouth. For often when the tongue is not restrained from idle words, it is carried off toward the temerity of stupid loquacity.

19. It happened that once, while Zita lay in prayer longer than usual after matins, the brightness of the new day began to shine. When she, having finished her prayers, perceived this, she was terrified, remembering that there was no bread in the house of her lord, knowing that the task of making it had fallen to her that morning, and knowing that the hour to do so had passed. Returning home quickly, she intended to apply herself to the task. Approaching the chest, she found loaves of bread that had been most

excellently fashioned and took them to the oven. Then she went quickly to thank, with shame and fear, the lady of the house, whom she figured had made the loaves of bread. But in fact they had been fashioned from on high, as was revealed later by a clear sign. For despite diligent questioning, no mortal was found who had made the bread. Truly, as we have said before, although she made time at night to pray in church or in the secret recesses of her home, by day she personally visited the pious and holy sites of churches, monasteries, and hospices for the poor. She knew where the feasts of the saints were to be celebrated or where the first mass of a certain priest was to be sung, and out of devotion to the faith and for the sake of obtaining remission [from sin] as well as indulgence, she made it her habit to hurry off to that place. Thus she made time for herself to pray, conveniently and freely, asking for the intercession of God and of the saints in places where she was completely unknown.

20. Once, when the devout festival of blessed Mary Magdalene (15) was approaching, Zita, in her accustomed manner, strove to get to a remote church in the wilderness, called Creberia, some ten miles from the city of Lucca. She did this even though no one dared to go to this church on account of the dangers of the wars which had greatly afflicted the Luccans and the Pisans, for people going through this region had been frequently robbed and sometimes killed. But the servant of God, strengthened with the fervor of the spirit, would not on account of this [concern] refrain from making her way to this church, carrying a candle in her hands with the greatest devotion so that she could light it in honor of the most blessed Magdalene. Traveling alone and passing though the wilderness with determination, she arrived at the church at the end of one day and one night. There she found the church closed and locked so that no one could enter. Because of the war, no one lived there. So she lay down in prayer at the threshold of the door, persevering for a long time bent over in prayer, until, as a result of the weariness of her body and the length of her prayers, she fell asleep, overcome by fatigue. That same night a great storm blew in with torrential rains and ferocious winds. At the approach of dawn, venerable Zita, intrepid and uninjured, rose from her sleep and her prayer and discovered that the candle that she had brought with her unlit had been lit in her very hands by a divine fire, which neither the wind nor the rain had been able to extinguish. And in front of her face, the doors of the church, which had been opened by divine will, offered her free entrance. Later many others, arriving with the priest at the church after sunrise, found her there inside the church and praying. They were on account of this stupefied with great admiration.

Chapter four: The care with which she guarded his virginity, her humility, her gentleness, her prudence, and her zeal for souls.

21. We do not believe that the venerable name of blessed Zita was chosen by accident, but by divine foreknowledge and through the disposition of supernatural grace, to which future things are as if present things. In the Roman tongue Zita means “virgin” (16). Indeed she was a most pure virgin. Rigid in her discipline about the protection of her virginity, she most attentively watched over it, taking special care concerning the protection of the priceless treasure of chastity and virginity, that is, in its earthen vase. Because there is nothing so easy as doing evil, and no one is needed to teach it or to force one to do it, in her youth youth and while she was growing up, she strove after the most austere harshness by continually mortifying her flesh. As a result of this she learned, by means of her own reliable experience, to turn evil enemies to flight with harshness and bitterness, rather than to encourage their temptations with more delicate and gentle [responses] on her part. Strictly keeping her body away from illicit things, she thus prepared her mind for heavenly pursuits. Through exertions of this type, she began to radiate in her senses with the beauty of modesty, so much so that her soul seemed already to have been cut off from the world of her flesh. She seemed to have made a bargain with her eyes, that she not only be horrified by carnal appearances, but that she also by all means guarded against the curious consideration of vanity. In truth nothing seemed to her to be more important for a blessed life than, having closed out the carnal senses, to be made clean beyond the flesh and be turned inside herself; to make room in herself only for God by keeping her soul apart from mortal concerns. Having achieved purity of heart and body, she thus dominated the domestic enemy and subjected it to herself perfectly, so that she preserved the white vestment of her soul from the fire of pleasure and was determined to be a most sincere vessel of sanctification. She spurned with fear even the sound of lascivious language, providing intently for the purity of her inviolate conscience. For often words representing carnal things come into our ears and, even though reason rejects them and the tongue reproves them, they foment a war of temptation in the heart. And then only with effort are those things that are denounced on the outside actually conquered on the inside. Given this, it is essential that what the vigilant mind repels from entrance into its thought, not come to the ear, for when we are touched by the memory of our perpetrated iniquity, we are buffeted with thought, both wanting or not wanting illicit things.

22. One of the other servants of the house tried, with petulant shamefulness and scurrilous words, to incline Zita toward an incestuous embrace, adding indecent gestures to his words, rushing toward her with his arms extended in his stubborn audacity. And so that Zita would not be able to see the allurements of this mute delight, it happened during a night of iniquitous

perpetration. Though small in stature and having very little strength, Zita, not wanting anyone to know about this attempt on the part of this impudent youth, was ignited with zeal for protecting her purity, and manfully propelled him from herself with force and cut his face with her fingernails. She cleverly paid attention, so that, when he began to soften with guilt, he would know to what destruction his mind was being drawn. So this shameless one was in no way able to prevail over the servant of God, who benefited from God's help. It was fitting for her to use harsh language to suppress his lust and to threaten to denounce him to his lord if he ever should ever speak to her about any other shameless act; in which case he would be gravely punished by his lord; and of course he would also be punished by God if his mind did not move toward the lamentations of penance. For the mind is cleansed from pollution by the strict hand of penance, to the same degree as it consents to seeing itself as sordid and iniquitous. This altercation was not able to be covered up in the house of the Lord, what with the subtle interrogation and subsequent disclosure from the servant, with regard to who or what had been responsible for wounding his face. Zita gave her responses with modesty, answering courteously and without lying, not wanting the injuries inflicted on her to be punished nor to uncover her neighbor's attempt to commit this crime.

23. Humility, the protector and adornment of all virtues, had affected Zita, the servant of God, so much with its powers that, although a multifaceted privilege of virtues shown forth in her, and she was already venerated by many for the sanctity of her life, by her own account, confessing herself to be a sinner, she was nothing but a dirty earthen vessel, even though in fact that vessel had been chosen for sanctification and was adorned by the multifaceted grace of virtues. It was difficult, however, having accomplished such great things, for her not to have confidence, from her own perspective, concerning her great acts of sanctification. The same process by which she had so forcefully conquered vice might generate a presumption in her heart so that, while her mind had powerfully crushed external guilt, it might secretly swell up even more inside her. For reckoning herself to be of great merit, she might not have regarded it as a sin to think about her own value. The sin is worse before the eyes of a strict judge when the fault is perpetrated in hiding and is as a result practically uncorrectable. So when one's life is so greatly glorified, the pitfalls are carved out more widely. With this in mind, Zita governed herself with attentive moderation, lest praise for a previous accomplishment increase the appropriateness of blame later on. She was most intent on debasing herself in the eyes of others and revealing the defects hiding inside her not only to the priest during the sacrament of confession, which she frequented often, but with public assertions, and to hide in the recesses of her breast, the gifts, revelations, and graces [that she had received] from the Giver, so that by no means did she reveal her

glory, which could have become a cause of her ruin. For the false and empty presumption of glory is the greatest impediment to virtue for mankind, because it typically draws the dust of sin to a good work. For while the hearts of those who listen are cleansed, the footsteps of those who speak are soiled. Indeed so that she might fulfill the entire justice of perfect humility, which she regarded as more worthy than all the other virtues, not only did she act with zeal on behalf of her lords, who were her superiors, and to her equals, but she even subjected herself to her inferiors, to whom she would deny no request or service no matter how burdensome of difficult it seemed. Instead this freewoman, when something was suggested, persuaded, or commanded, always applied herself with joy to the fulfillment of the thing suggested, persuaded, or commanded thing. She never offered, by means either of a word or a gesture, any excuses with regard to time or place or difficulty, but, as she was replete with a meek and dovelike simplicity, she responded right away, that it would be possible for her to carry out the task, treating herself as if she were vile refuse.

24. Sometimes as a joke Zita was sent by certain young ladies to far-off places for frivolous reasons at times when it was raining hard so that she would return soaked with water and thus be subject to their laughter. Zita would indeed hurry off to carry out what had been commanded of her, but somehow she managed to return unaffected by the rain. It was determined that, due to her obedience and humility, not a drop of water had fallen on her. She decided that when she was on a journey, she would hold herself subject to those with whom she was traveling, so that she would not take a break, walk, eat, drink, or even speak unless she was invited to do so by them. And when she was questioned by them about something, she would respond, with deliberate moderation and a pious voice: “As it pleases you” or “Whatever you wish.” She always had her hands folded, this signaling her mental humility with her habits and gestures, never expressing her will in any way. So she was moved by the tongue in external matters while she remained in her conscience internally. She tried to speak humility, the master and mother of all virtues, in the way that she spoke and to show it in the way that she lived. But she desired to be humble more than she desired to to be seen as humble. If she ever happened to hear someone commend or praise her, however lightly, she let it be known with words and gestures that she had been struck and lethally wounded, declaring herself instead to be wretched, sad, and miserable. Because a just person may as well be struck down when he is praised. O what a perfect layperson of the feminine sex, worthy of imitation not only by men of the world but by churchmen, monks, and nuns! The grace of gentleness so decorated her that she was most worthily judged by everyone to be a true imitator of the Virgin Mary.

25. Zita venerated the mother of God with so much affection that she, with a

pious sense of reverence for the bearer of the Son of God, thought that any woman, even of low status, who was called Mary ought rightly to be preferred to herself in all things. Meek Zita rose to such a habit and perfection of humility, that she never responded passionately or negatively to rebukes or reproaches, curses or injuries, of insults aimed at her, as if she were dead to the world. Even when troubled by some disturbance, she was careful to show no mental turbulence or indications of the same on her face. Following the example of the Lord--who forgave every injury lest damn anyone by taking vengeance on him, or confound anyone by rebuking him, or love anyone less by accusing him--with a most serene and gracious modesty and beauty of countenance, she said, with a most gracious voice: “Spare me,” or “May the Lord be indulgent to you,” or “Do not be disturbed, for it is not expedient for you to speak or to act but rather to follow the perfection of greater patience.” He is indeed perfect who is not impatient with regard to the imperfections of his neighbor.

26. If it happened that the lord or lady of the house or the others were disturbed in the way people sometimes are as the result of an emergency, spoke to her with indignation, or complained about her or about some other person, the most meek Zita would lay down at the feet of the indignant ones and, with humility and lamentation, guiltlessly seek forgiveness, murmuring: “Oh, indeed I am guilty of these things!” It was not easy to prohibit her from this kind of humility. And when she received some offense from someone, she did whatever she could to beat the injuring party in seeking pardon. This is the duty of religion: to heal with the satisfaction of a word if there are some who are seen to be wounded by the darts of suspicion. It is proper for the human mind to dread having done to itself what it does [to others]. They think themselves despised who are accustomed to despise persons of good morals. They suspect that everyone is against them who themselves try to be against everyone. O who could possibly recount the many efforts and labors she undertook to take up the burdens of others, in her laborious concern for domestic matters and especially for the education of the young ones? She bore a more than maternal heart toward them, taking upon herself, in place of their nurses, their anxieties and their troubles. In truth, her mind, when it undertook the allocation of her concerns, considered what she owed to herself and what she owed to her neighbor. She neglected her duties not through immoderate concern, nor did she put anything off out of any consideration for her own advantge. In a marvelous manner she completed all of her duties perfectly because care for interior matters did not threaten her involvement with external matters, and she did not neglect her overseeing of external matters in her search for internal ones. She was governed by such circumspection, that never did she ever at any time of in any place purposely harm anyone or take anyone lightly in word or in deed regardless of his condition or standing.

27. She provided joy for the sad, compassion for the afflicted, spiritual counsel for the desolate, and admonitions of salvation for the learned, not with an acute urbanity, sown with eloquence, or with words of human wisdom that had been taught, but with a demonstration of her spirit and life. Certainly there are who are educated and who believe that they can prove themselves more educated than anyone else when they demonstrate their various forms of loquaciousness. But even though the servant of God very simple with regard to the workings of this world—that is, what they are composed of or caused by—almost as if she were alien to these things, not being from this world, nevertheless in all matters related to the perfection of the commandments of God and to those things that pertain to the salvation of souls and to the understanding of sacred texts, she seemed in her own way so wise and virtuous that she had essentially attained the studiousness of the doctors, shining with the glow of the eternal light. Indeed the Holy Spirit, master of all scripture, lived in her. The signs of profound humility were present in this handmaiden of God; that is to say, love of humble people, flight from all preeminent people, a contempt for her own desires, and an appetite for vile duties, [as well as a tendency to] spurn nothing, seek advice from the best, patiently bear words of insult, come prepared to obey in all things, and to be private about seeking after good things. She was found to be greatest in the last of these commendations, excelling all the rest. For she watched over her heart with complete protection, knowing God to be an inspector of hearts, and unceasingly prepared a worthy place for him in her mind. Thus [she lived] according to that which says: “It is the habit of good minds to acknowledge the existence of fault where no fault is to be found” (17). Judging herself strictly with regard not only to what might be considered to be the most insignificant acts but also to thoughts and superficial emotions, she confessed everything tearfully and humbly to the priest in the confessional. For often that mind that is victorious over many strong challenges does not bother to fight against a small one that is considered insignificant in itself. When the mind of the just is free from perverse actions, it sometimes rushes toward a perverse thought.

28. The zeal of heavenly salvation proceeded out of the firmness of her charity like a sharp and flaming sword, and passed through the innermost parts of the venerable Zita so that she seemed completely ignited by the ardor of emulation and afflicted with the melancholy of compassion. Whenever she discovered souls that had been redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ but were now abundantly polluted with some sordidness or contamination of sin, she bewailed them with the tenderness of such misery, as if pierced by a wondrous sting of pain. In this she was like the mother who, according to the apostle, gave birth in Christ to [her children] every day (18), zealously hoping that they would not be soiled by

such a stain. The sin that is perpetrated without any zeal of malice is quickly forgiven and the sin that causes embarrassment is easily corrected. To sin with intention is bad; not to engage in or to love sin is good. Whenever she was told what someone was doing wrong, or how someone had sinned by doing something, or what sin someone had committed, she immediately and appropriately excused it, or claimed that the report was not to be believed. Even if it was true, by no means was it to be repeated or laid bare or spread about through such reports, because the evils of our neighbors that cannot be corrected are to be kept in silence and be tolerated lest the venom of pain be hidden in their souls. Zita sighed vehemently whenever she discovered that a sin had been committed, since it would have been of little profit for her to restrain the flesh if her mind, through compassion, did not know to grow in its love of her neighbor.

29. And because the chastity of the flesh is nothing if it is not commended by the sweetness of mind, Zita persuaded everyone, whom she was able, to do works of piety and charity, seeking redemption for all sinners. She did not effabat or busy herself like some flatterer with other peoples' matters, because she was not involved in those things that did not have to do with her but were for others to speak about or concern themselves with. Especially if it happened to be motivated either by love or by hate, because truth is often hidden and corrupted by such emotions as these. She guarded her ears against detractions and whispers and put silence in her mouth. The gateway of circumstance through her lips was so narrow that rarely did she speak without opportune consultation or necessary utility. She was accustomed to admonish with the zeal of rectitude those who were delinquent concerning their families. But because she did this confidently, with as much skillful circumspection as is possible for human nature, she was protected from sin. No one in good faith censured anything about Zita, who had no confidence in her own blamelessness. It is human nature, that anyone who indulges himself too much, not to be vehemently angry with others.

30. Moreover whenever Zita heard the sound of the bells gathering the people together for an execution--in accordance with the customs of the city governors whenever they captured a criminal and condemned him to a bodily death--she would immediately and marvelously overflow with a gush of tears and, with a tender feeling of kindness, say, in the form of a prayer: "Lord, give succor to the soul of this wretched dying man. Lord, help the soul of this sinner." Nor did she cease after three or four days, but continued up to the seventh day to exhort the Lord with her prayers for the sake of liberating the soul of such a condemned man. The fervor of perfect charity, which bore this friend of the Bridegroom to God and to neighbor, is obvious from what has been said above; but it is most obvious in that she diligently

dedicated herself to extending and super extending herself, when, transfixed with the crucifix of the Lord, she thirsted, on account of her fervid zeal of souls, for the salvation of all those who were to be saved. She knew, as she was in the habit of saying, that one's neighbor was to be loved, because it is a commandment of God; because [one's neighbor] is one's natural partner; because he is the image of God, and because to love him is not only a proof of God's love, but nourishment for God's love and an increase in God's love. The display of divine mercies toward us--in the remission of all iniquity along with internal consolation, in offering help in our fragility for satisfying, sustaining, and resisting, and finally in the purely gracious gathering of the celestial kingdom--vehemently ignited her toward the same fervid love, mercies which she often considered while she waited patiently for a sinner and the conversion of his depraved will. Therefore, through the fervor of charity, in the exercise of the life of the spirit, a new creation was made everyday. While she acted in this way, despiding the present world and not loving transitory things, she humbly and deeply spread out her mind to God and to neighbor, maintained her patience against insults brought against her, repelled pain from her heart with guarded patience, gave what she had to the poor, had no desire for things that were not her own, loved friends in God and struggled against enemies on behalf of God and [in defense of] the affliction of her neighbor; all of which amounted to great signs of perfection in her.

Chapter five: Zita's final illness, her happy death, and the signs and miracles that followed the same.

31. When the venerable Zita arrived at the perfect age, the highest arc and perfection of all virtue, the discrete providence of the noble men whom she, ministering to their needs for so long, had served, could not bear any longer to have her as their own handmaiden but as a handmaiden of the highest God. And so permitting her to do whatever she wished to do, they venerated her with equal emotion as much for the maturity of her advanced age as in contemplation of her celebrated sanctity. They ministered to her as to one of their own daughters whenever an opportunity arose. Zita, always rising to loftier heights with the fervor of her spirit, did not desist from embracing voluntary poverty, which was always loved by her. Neither because of the burden of her age (an age at which others would typically live in a more relaxed manner) nor on account of the fragility of her sex or her physical weakness, did she allow the austerity of her path to be softened or diminished. She did not want to desist on any occasion from works of penance, from her accustomed vigils and fasts, or from the remaining austerities of the body, nor did she want to omit or relinquish her state of servitude and subjection. But, with careful consideration and with ample caution, polished by innumerable afflictions and beatings, she deserved to

inhabit celestial buildings and to be exalted with the greatest praises of sanctity, always most fervent--having spurned fleeting things--in her love of the Creator and in the labors of his marvelous works. Every step up is a struggle, an effort; every step down, a pleasure; for steps up require striving, steps down, only relaxing.

32. Everything below her soul was slipping away, and it stood out as by far the tallest of all the things which were pondered, since she thought about nothing but celestial things. Everything earthly had already lost all value as she accumulated celestial treasures for herself. She was ignited in her desire for the dwellings of eternity, and she was truly worthy of them, since she was released from all love of temporality; for he who is conquered by love of terrestrial things is by no means loved by God. She longed to quench her thirst, like a deer at a stream, at the living font of the blessed life and the celestial homeland, no less ardent to arrive at the bed of the celestial bridegroom, with her soul completely melted and her spirit anxious, and to enjoy the delicious banquet of eternal sweetness. She loved death, which practically everyone considers a punishment, as an entrance into life and a reward for her labors. Cooling in her zeal for this life to the same degree that she surged ardently in her love of God, she sought to be dissolved, in accordance with the Apostle, and to be with Christ (19). For when the mind is directed with strong intention toward God, whatever seems in this life to be bitter, is regarded as sweet; everything that afflicts, is thought of as a form of rest. She desired to pass through death so that she could reach the summit of happy eternity.

33. Faithful and true, Omnipotent God--who does not defraud the laborers at the vine of penance of their daily wages, but calls them with the trumpet of the gospel: “Come to me all of you who labor and who are burdened” (20)--, now wanting his beloved handmaid to rest and be refreshed, deigned to lead her in this manner to her celestial marriage to the Lamb. The weakened limbs of this now ancient virgin were agitated by soft fevers for almost five days, when she was around sixty years old. As the sickness grew stonger little by little, she was compelled to lie down in bed, even though it was not her custom to lie down in bed for any illness, but to stand, her spirit ready to do so despite her age, her abstenance, and her labors. In the year 1272 from the nativity of the Lord, on the 27th of April, on the third hour of the fourth ferial (21), Zita, that most fortunate virgin and martyr to her desire, passed on to heaven, having been most devoutly furnished with the reception of the holy sacraments, and showing no signs of pain or grief, anguish or concern, with her eyes intent on heaven and her hands folded in supplication, solicitude, as she mentally prayed and rejoiced. Her most blessed soul, which was about to come into possession of the endless Trinity, was released from the flesh and absorbed into the glory of peace and eternal

light. She would not be able to achieve the perfect joys of liberty if she had not paid the debt of her human condition. How sublime and meritorious was she to be in the presence of God, so deserving of elevation to heaven--she who, in her profound humility, held herself to be ineffably vile--once divine goodness opened up a passage for this dear spirit! For an especially bright star appeared clearly over the city of Lucca to all of those who were watching; a star whose appearance the serene brightness of the sun itself could not obscure as it normally does the other stars. As the consideration of pious people divulged and the subsequent multiplication of miracles proved, it was clear that a new rose had emerged among the other ones in the celestial garden of the saints and that it would illuminate the citizens of Lucca with the light of a new star.

34. On the day of her passing, the one who made the tongues of babes speak (22), brought forth praise from the mouths of babes and nurselings. All at once, after the departure of her most fortunate soul, on various streets and public ways of the city children without prompting cried out incessantly: “Let us go, let us go, let us run to the church of S. Frediano, because S. Zita has died.” This was done at the Lord’s direction, while fitting funeral rites were prepared by the noble Faytinelli family for the burial of their servant blessed Zita. Such an infinite multitude of indigent people of both sexes and all ages gathered there that they filled the church of S. Frediano, the spacious cloister, and even the adjacent streets. Only with great difficulty was that most precious treasure of her body brought into the church to its place, led by an assembly of monks. With every one struggling discordantly with one another to touch the body of the most revered servant of God, Zita, the priest was not able to carry out the funeral office nor to release the body for burial for a space of some days. Day and night that dense multitude of people remained right there next to the body. Those who were able busied themselves, inspired by their enormous devotion, removing a piece of her clothing, to the point that, she remained half naked in many places where she had previously been clothed. To prevent the holy body from being picked apart, certain ones who were more developed in their faith and devotion used various tricks and simulations to move that venerable body—with the irrational multitude being restrained by those who were more disciplined—so that it, placed in a wooden box that ended up being broken many times, was rescued, first locked in the choir, then in the cloister, then in the chapter, then in the refectory, then in the hospice as well as other places in the monastery.

35. Again signs radiated, prodigies shone, wonders came forth, and in the midst of the same hands and eyes of these people, crying for joy, many and manifest wonders were performed. There indeed the blind saw, the deaf heard, the infirm and withered were revived, the crippled and bent were

straightened out, the mute spoke, the feverish were healed, those who suffered from pain were cured, unclean spirits were banished from bodies, flows of blood were stopped, those in danger as they gave birth were assisted, the sterile were made fertile, the overweight were made light, the ulcerous were cleansed, those who had been taken or bitten by beasts were rescued, those who had been shipwrecked were succoured, those in prion were released, those tortured on the rack did not feel it, the heat of the fire and the liquid of the water seem to have been banished for many [who had been condenmed to them], those suspended from the gallows were snatched from the jaws of death, those on whom the doctors had given up due to of their intense fevers escaped; in short, all kinds of dangers, injuries, and illnesses were put to flight by her merits. When the people of the city finally left, they were neither hungry nor thirsty nor fatigued by heat, sweat, or heavy burdens, for indeed they assisted first these ones and then those ones in turn. Jacob of venerable memory, the prior of the church, and his brothers, having little or no faith in her sanctity (although they were great men of religion), having previously sought the counsel of prudent and religious men of both the Order of Preachers as well as of the Order of Friars Minor, agreed after meeting and discussing [this matter], that they would have the venerable body of Zita, redolent with a most fragrant aroma, enclosed in the stone sarcophagus, as they awaited the outcome of the test that had been agreed upon by the [friars]; namely, that if her works turned out to be false and human, [her body] would waste away quickly. But if her works came from God, and had proceeded from divine providence, no one of these mortals would be able to resist, but, against the will of all detractors, [her reputation] would prosper and grow to immense proportions. And this was fulfilled publicly in just this way.

36. After a few days, a salutary liquid began to emanate from the tomb where the holy body lay. Anointed with it, the limbs of weak and diseased people were restored to health. And just as that virginal body had remained unstained from all carnel pollution, so it remained day after day intact and continued to be whole, [protected] from the dissolution and corruption typical of other bodies; except that it appeared to be of somewhat drier consistency. That this was true can be testified to by many of the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, as well as archbishops, bishops, and many other venerable men, coming from various regions, who witnessed it; and by the many secular princes, barons, and knights, as well as by a great multitude of peoples, who came to her at various times. They saw with their own eyes, as they came in with great frequency—though consistent with the legal restrictions--for the sake of venerating her with pious devotion; and they did not desist from coming to her every day, especially those who, in their need, sought her interventions and benefits; and she, devoutly invoked for assistance in the face of dangers on land and sea, was there to help them

with their needs. Particularly worthy of devout admiration and wondrous devotion is the fact that, although she had, with regard to the preeminence of her holiness and life and the great multiplicity of miracles, no patrons, promoters, coadjutators, or promulgators—on the contrary, she had many detractors—nevertheless not only do an infinite multitude of people come from the many regions, cities, and dioceses of almost all of Italy every year on the anniversary of her glorification and passing to bear witness to the merits of her sanctity, but everyday there is an rush of visitors, from this side of the mountains (23) as well as from the other. She was and is present for them, invoked in need and in dangerous circumstances. They asserted not only with their voices but their experiences, with signs and interventions having been made manifest, that she was indeed remarkable and worthy of being heard in the presence of God.

37. Among the others, who recorded the miracles of this handmaiden of the highest God, Ugolino of Parma, a learned professor of law, said the following: “She cured 53 from various nations and of both sexes, who were afflicted with paralysis (24). Some of them were afflicted with it throughout their bodies; others only in parts. She cured sixteen who were without sight, of which some were blind in both eyes and others only in one. Supported with the pious intercession of the Virgin, she cured, with divine clemency, six mutes, some of whom were born mute, others suffered from it as the result of an accident. There were four deaf people, twelve demoniacs, and many others who struggled with the pain of other infirmities and tribulations.” That is what [Ugolino of Parma] said. We are all able to attest to the plain assertion of truth, that blessed Zita miraculously gave assistance to more than 150 people suffering from various afflictions, deadly diseases, and dangers, just as Faytinellus the notary, a man worthy of trust, recorded in a public manner with regard to each individual case. We can also attest to the fact that there are a great number of people for whom Zita, in many different ways and in various places and times, demonstrated the assistance of her grace and the deliverance of their bodies; and she has not ceased doing so. Such cases exceed a thousand, a number which seems almost unbelievable to anyone who hears it. I myself have seen a [dead] boy alive, walking upright and speaking, a boy whose father, worthy of trust, having been convinced to do so, prayed at the altar of the Gospels of God with his most intent prayers and tearful devotions--with myself and many others present--that his only son who had been truly thought to be dead be raised by the merits of this holy virgin.

38. Within… (25) of the death of this handmaiden of God, a certain youth, that is, Peter of the Faytinelli family, who had been raised in the Faytinelli house in Lucca, while journeying through the region of Provence, fell into a most serious illness, which took hold of him and afflicted him to the point

that three famous doctors, who actively dedicated themselves to curing him, ultimately despaired about his recovery. With one voice and utter certainty they assured him that he would die the very next day. When the sick man realized this, he invoked blessed Zita with a sweet and familiar voice, just as he had been accustomed to do as a small child (26), lamenting, among other things, that because he was away from his own [family], there was no support or advice to be had from his father, his mother, or anyone else, and so he turned to her, asking that she not permit such assistance to be absent. And behold the following night, when he was neither asleep nor fully awake, Venerable Zita appeared in his presence, dressed in silk--which looked wonderful with its various, crafted textures--wearing a shining crown decorated with large and precious gems. She appeared to him with the beautiful face that she wore in life so that Peter could recognize her without difficulty. Two shining lights, like torches or candles, preceded her and although Peter could not see who carried these lights, he recognized her right away, and said: “O my lady Zita, help me, destitute and afflicted as I am, for there is no one from my family who is able to give assistance to me.” And she replied to him: “Do not be afraid.” And he asked her: “Who are they who are with you?” And she responded: “Do not seek to know so much. Just be well.” Immediately extending her hand, she placed it on the forehead of the sick youth and healed him that very instant, while at the same time vanishing from his eyes. He arose healthy and said to his attendant: “Bring me something to eat for I am well.” And the attendant said to him: “O son, rest, so that you may truly be well. But tell me how it is that you are speaking to me? In fact I just heard you talking and heard another person, with whom you were discussing something, respond to you.” The youth revealed the entire sequence of events and added that he had seen and now knew that the three doctors who had predicted his death would themselves die before he would. And indeed that happened before too long.

39. Behold the God of sweetest peace--who lifts up the poor man from the dust and raises the pauper up from the dung and who bestows his word to evangelizers with such great power--who wished the deeds of his virgin to be narrated for our utility and erudition. Indeed the examples of the saints are passed down through writing so that anyone, regardless of their sex or their age, may maintain their regimens and contemplate the life of good people in such a mirror of pious consideration. But may greater testimonies to the glory of the most shining virgin be offered than those which I, a poor artist trying to paint a beautiful human subject, have shown, revealing what she was like and showing how one ought to live one’s life, in an effort to direct others to the shore of perfection who still live in the waves of sin. And so, O most splendid virgin, gracious to God and to all the angels, I beseech you: support me with the plank of your prayers in this shipwreck of life. Hold

me up with the hand of your merit, because I would surely sink under my own weight. We all pray at the same time, using whatever prayers we are able, that we may be worthy of being remembered, to the point that our Lord Jesus Christ, who handed to you the palm of all of your labors, may bestow his indulgence and the prosperity of salvation upon us. Glory, honor, virtue, nobility, and power to him in the infinite ages of ages. Amen.

Notes:

1. The village lies some eight miles northwest of Lucca.

2. II Corinthians 4:6.

3. Ephesians 4:28.

4. That is, the Faytinelli family.

5. Frediano (560-88), also known as Fridianus, Frigidanus, and Frigidian, was an Irish prince turned hermit who, after completing a pilgrimage to Rome, occupied a cell on Mt. Pisano, near Lucca. He was ultimately made bishop of Lucca. Gregory I recorded a miracle involving this saint in his Dialogues III:10.

6. Ecclesiastes 9:10.

7. Presumably a reference to Zita serving as a godmother to foundlings and other disadvantaged youths.

8. According to the editor, a starius is a weight measurement used for grain "containing a quantity of 50 or 60 common pounds."

9. The reference is to Sulpicius Severus's Life of St. Martin (d. 397) and his account of Martin dividing his cloak with a beggar only to have a dream in which he saw Christ wearing the same half of his cloak.

10. A village between Pisa and Lucca.

11. Cum quadam sibi familiari comite.

12. It is clear from what follows that Zita vowed to visit these two churches.

13. Job 1:21.

14. "*Synderesis*, or more correctly *synteresis*, is a term used by the Scholastic theologians to signify the habitual knowledge of the universal practical principles of moral action." *Catholic Encyclopedia*, on-line.

15. July 22.

16. It does mean virgin, but seems to have had Persian and Hebrew origins.

17. Gregory I, Register, Book 11, Letter 64 (response to the tenth question of Augustine).

18. Galatians 4:19.

19. Philippians 1:23.

20. Matthew 11:28.

21. That is, Wednesday.

22. Wisdom 10:21.

23. Presumably a reference to the Alps, her point being that Zita attracted the attention of non-Italians as well as Italians.

24. ...contractionis seu attractionis languore vexatos.

25. Lacuna.

26. He would seem to have spoken to Zita this way as a younger boy when she was still alive.

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