CHAPTER 5

Celebrating Saints – Articulating Communal Identity through Liturgy

5.1 Selection of Feasts for Analysis; Methodology

As discussed in the previous chapter, liturgy is perceived by historians, anthropologists and sociologists of religion as one means by which a group can express its communal spiritual identity, primarily via the celebration of particular feasts and the exclusion of others. The underlying inference of this understanding of the liturgical commemoration of saints is that saints themselves can be read as symbolic indicators of the shared interests, concerns and anxieties of the community that commemorates them. Timothy Johnson's sensitive reading of Thomas of Celano's *Legenda ad usum chori* has explored the challenges the friars faced as they attempted ‘to structure, wherever they gathered, a common liturgical identity around the historical figure of the poor man from Assisi,’ and the new interpretations of this figure that arose with time and affected the friars’ commemoration of him.¹ In this sense, saints may be understood in the framework of sacred symbolism formulated by Mircea Eliade, in which ‘the essential function of the symbol is precisely in disclosing the structures of the real inaccessible to empirical existence.’² To follow Delooz’s definition of saints as necessarily constructed ‘for other people,’ saints are powerful symbols of the cultural and spiritual attitudes responsible for naming them as saints in the first place.³ As Eliade noted, a defining characteristic of the symbol is its multivalent nature: saints too are capable of shifting their meaning depending on context, absorbing and mirroring the concerns and interests of different communities.⁴

Scholars from a variety of disciplines (primarily history, art history, manuscript studies and sociology) have studied the cult of the saints at length, though their representation in liturgical calendars has only infrequently been the focus of such studies. Recent studies of the development of Franciscan

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calendars (the most notable being that by Fulvio Rampazzo, discussed in Chapters 2 and 4) rely heavily on the scholarship of van Dijk and other liturgical historians. These studies have sometimes opted not to make reference to any actual manuscript evidence, instead referring to the adoption of feasts in general terms. This assumes a high level of control on the part of the General Chapters of the Order, inferring that all friaries in all regions uniformly adopted the liturgical decisions of this ruling body. In this sense, such studies have failed to add new understandings of either the ‘grassroots’ evolution (as opposed to the official record of development) or function of the liturgical calendar for different communities within the Order. The present study instead focuses on manuscript evidence, from which conclusions can be drawn about the development and use of the Franciscan liturgical calendar in a specific region and time (central Italy in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries). This focus on manuscript evidence allows for potential diversity amongst different communities, and takes into account the variety of factors which affected the adoption of different feasts into liturgical calendars, such as local loyalties, regional differences, and the political relationships of different religious Orders (such as those connecting the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinian friars and Cistercians).

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, throughout the study of Franciscan liturgical history, it has been implicitly maintained that liturgy has been a distinguishing element of Franciscan spirituality (formulated in van Dijk’s notion of so-called ‘Regula’ editions of Franciscan breviaries and missals), and that this distinctive spirituality can itself be observed within the form and content of the mass as celebrated by the Order. The liturgical data presented in Chapter 4, drawn from the five missals under consideration here, will now be analysed and some conclusions drawn regarding the mechanics of expressing communal identity through liturgy. As the discussion in Chapter 3 has indicated, the decorative style of the Perugian Liturgical Group of manuscripts (particularly those studied here) is arguably more Perugian than it is Franciscan—distinguished by location rather than spiritual affiliation. Can the same be said of the liturgical contents of these missals? In order to explore this question, selected feasts from the calendars of the five Umbrian missals (four Franciscan and one Augustinian, as presented in Chapter 4) will be compared. The corresponding offices for these feasts in the Proper of the missals is left for a separate future study; the inclusion or absence of feasts from the calendars is taken as a sufficient indication of the basic ritual activity of the