

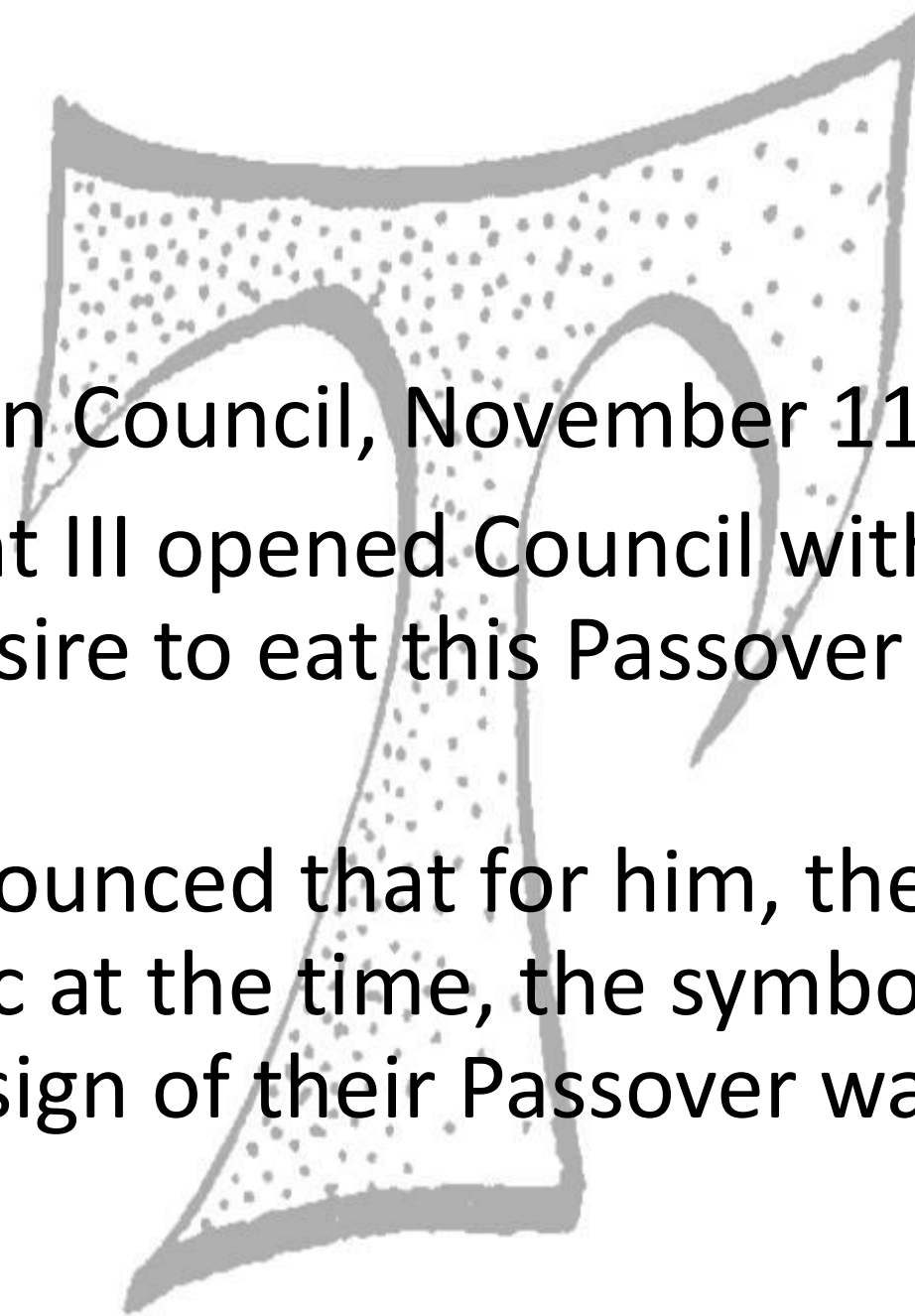
A HISTORY
OF THE
FRANCISCAN
TAU CROSS

Origin in Scripture

- TAU as a symbol of sanctify
- Ezekiel 9:4: “Go through the city of Jerusalem and put a Tau on the forehead of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.”
- Last letter of the Hebrew alphabet
- Looks very much like the letter "T."

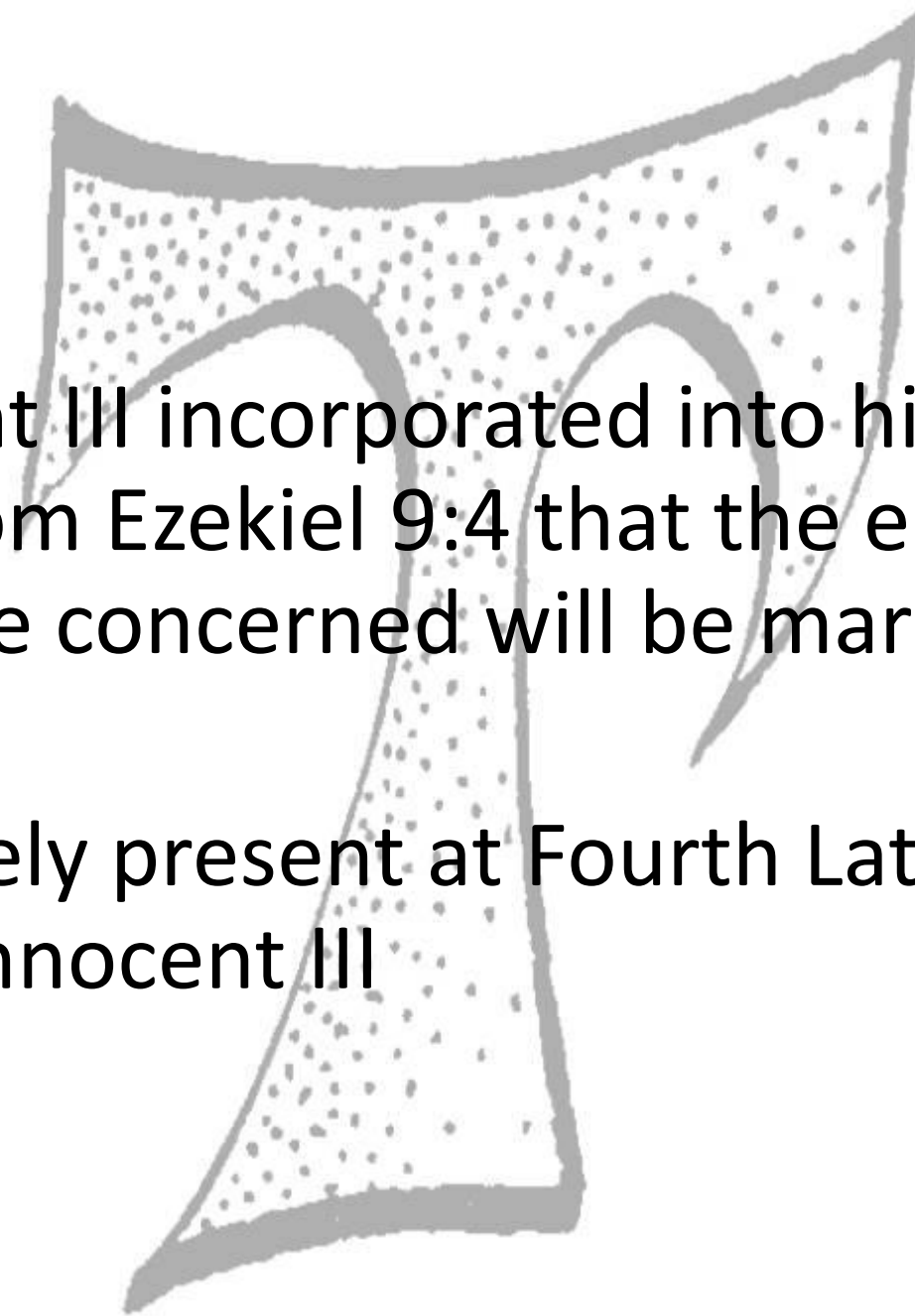
First Use

- Fourth Lateran Council, November 11, 1215
- Pope Innocent III opened Council with: "I have desired with great desire to eat this Passover with you." (Luke 22-15)
- Innocent announced that for him, the church, and for every Catholic at the time, the symbol they were to take as their sign of their Passover was their TAU Cross.



First Use

- Pope Innocent III incorporated into his homily the statement from Ezekiel 9:4 that the elect, the chosen, those who are concerned will be marked with the sign of the TAU.
- St. Francis likely present at Fourth Lateran Council, heard Pope Innocent III

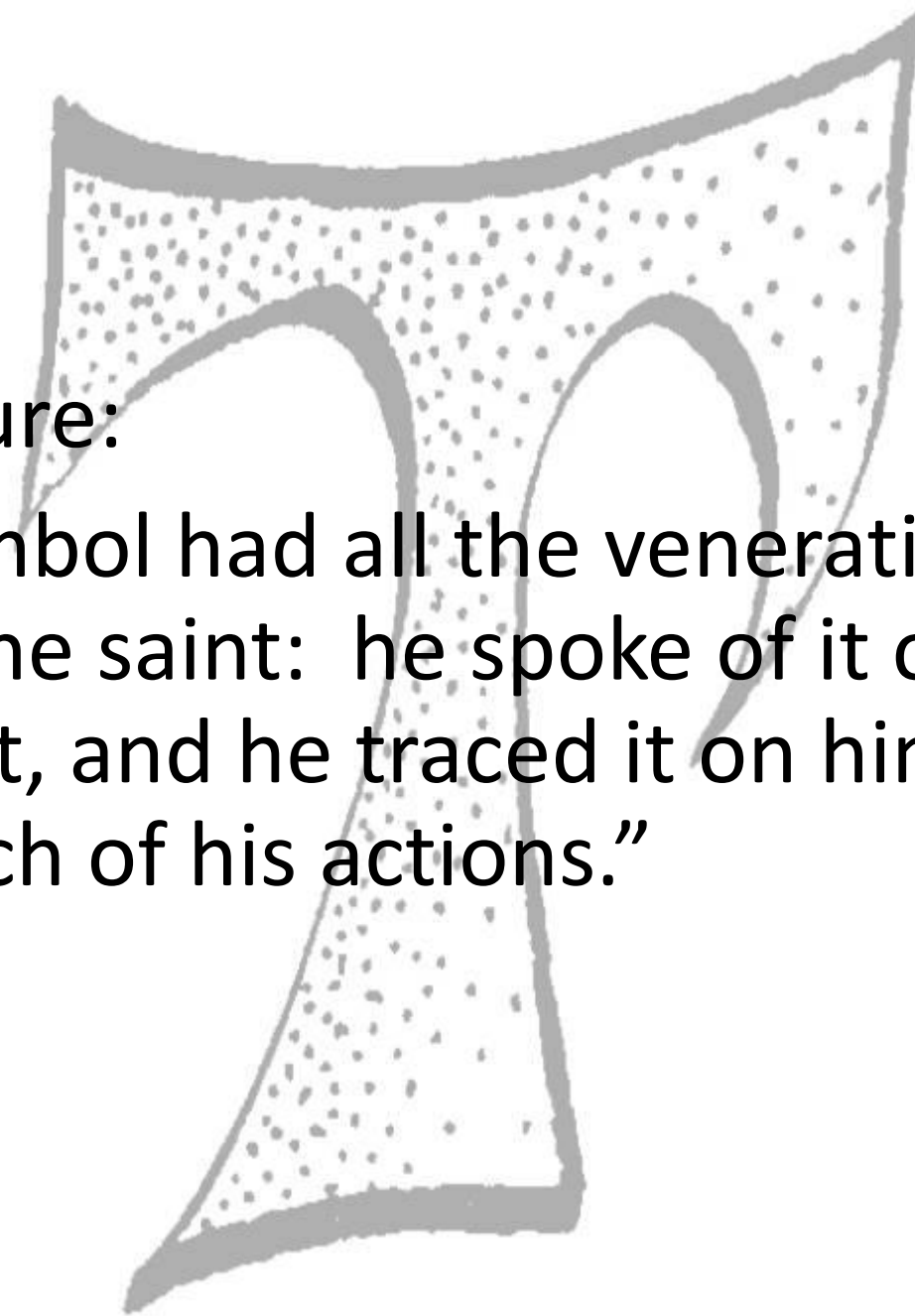


Early Use by St. Francis

- “The TAU has exactly the same form as the cross on which our Lord was crucified on Calvary...”
- “...only those will be marked with this sign and who have mortified their flesh and conformed their life to that of the Crucified Savior will obtain mercy.”
- TAU became Francis' own coat of arms
- Francis often used as his personal signature

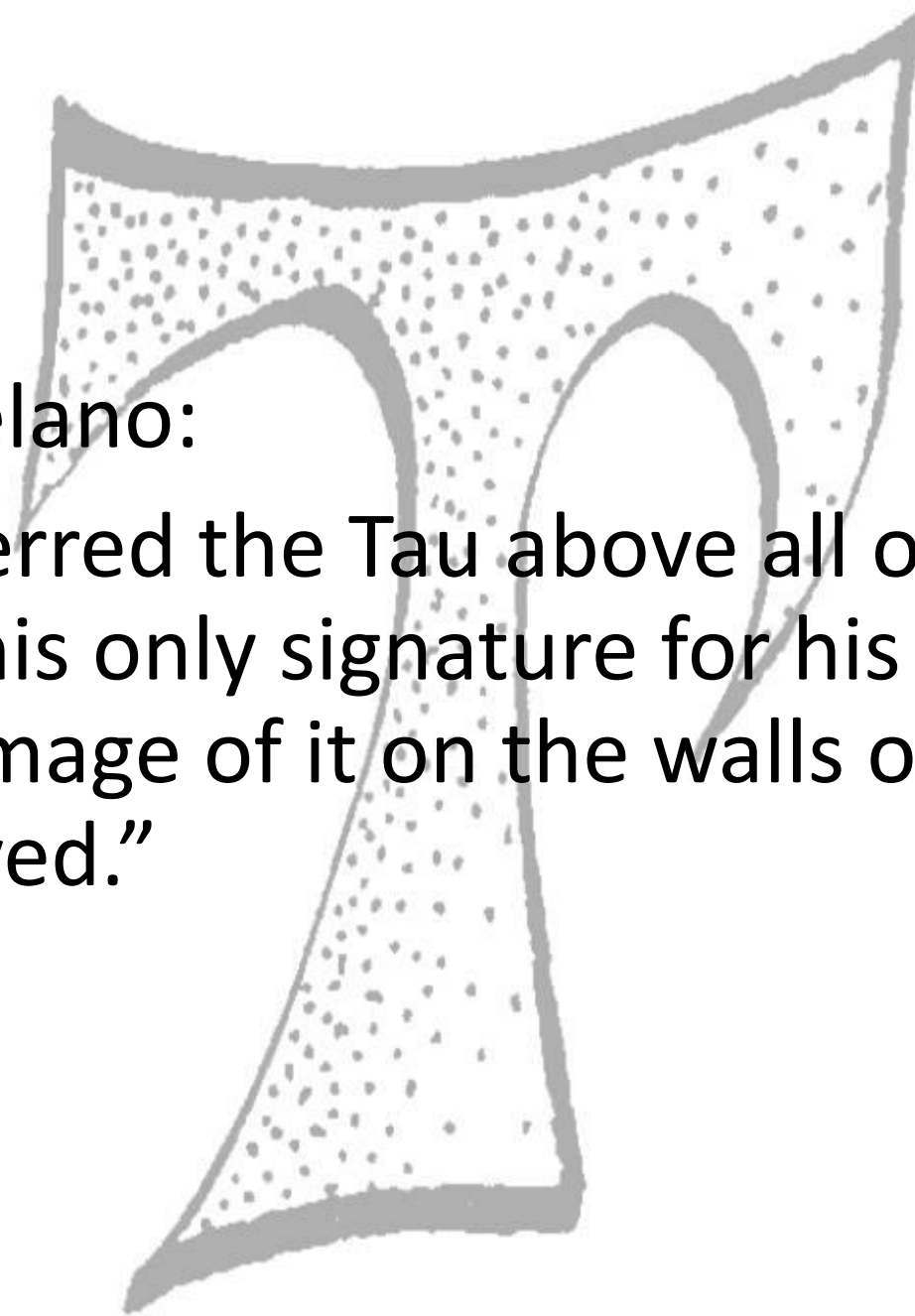
Later Use

- St. Bonaventure:
- “This TAU symbol had all the veneration and all the devotion of the saint: he spoke of it often in order to recommend it, and he traced it on himself before beginning each of his actions.”



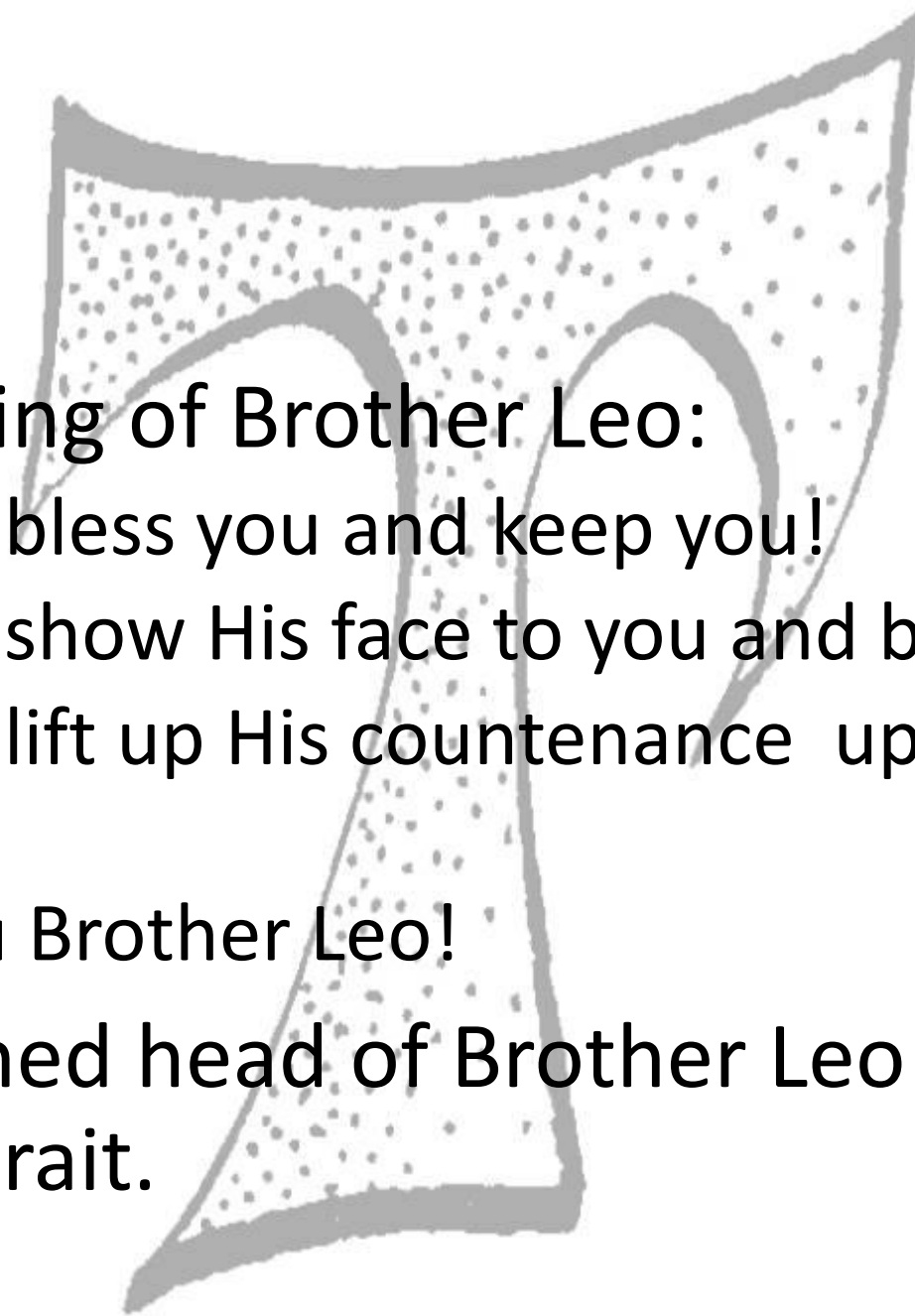
Later Use

- Thomas of Celano:
- “Francis preferred the Tau above all other symbols: he utilized it as his only signature for his letters, and he painted the image of it on the walls of all the places in which he stayed.”



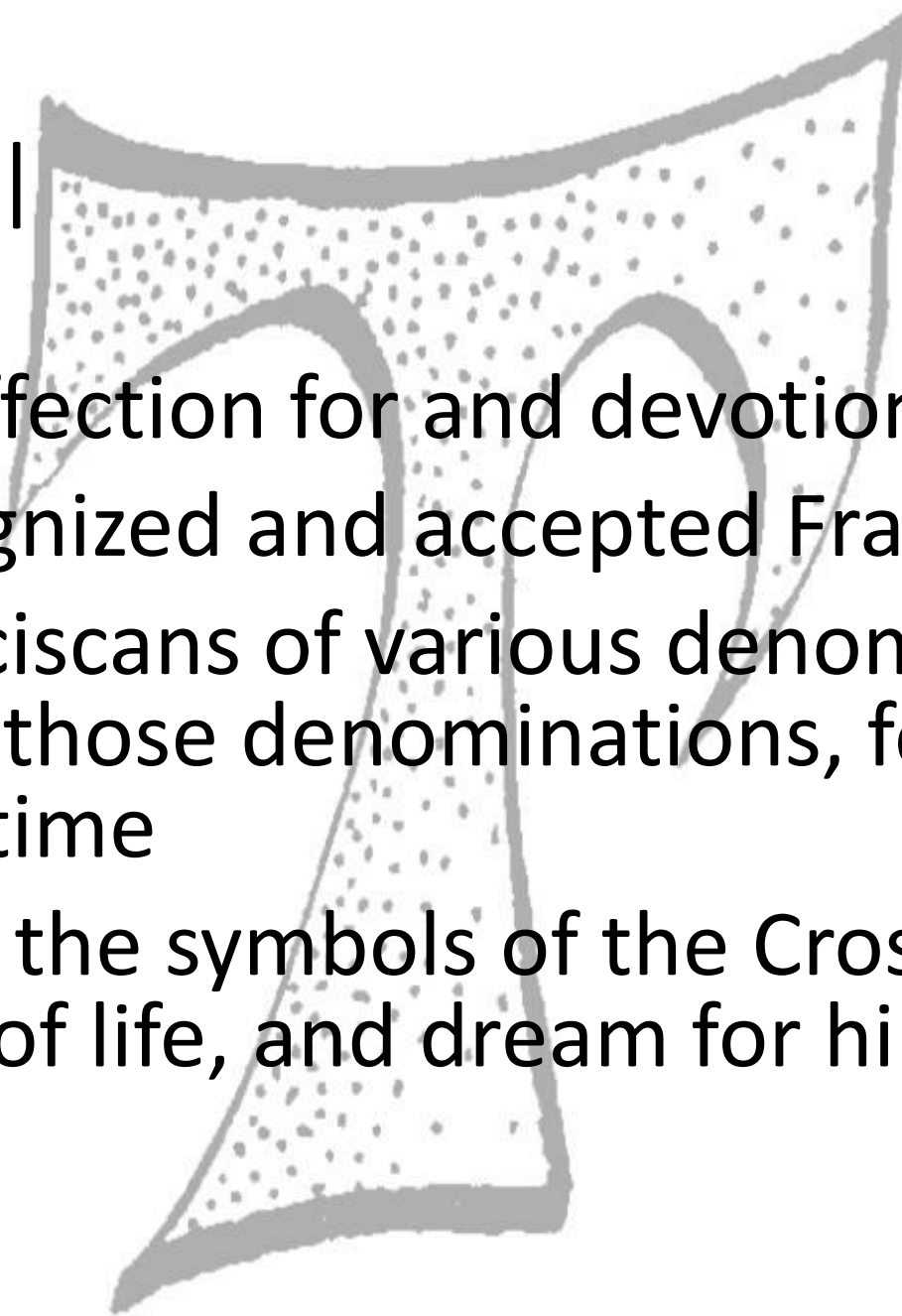
Later Use

- Francis' blessing of Brother Leo:
May the Lord bless you and keep you!
May the Lord show His face to you and be merciful to you!
May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace!
God bless you Brother Leo!
- Francis sketched head of Brother Leo and drew TAU over this portrait.



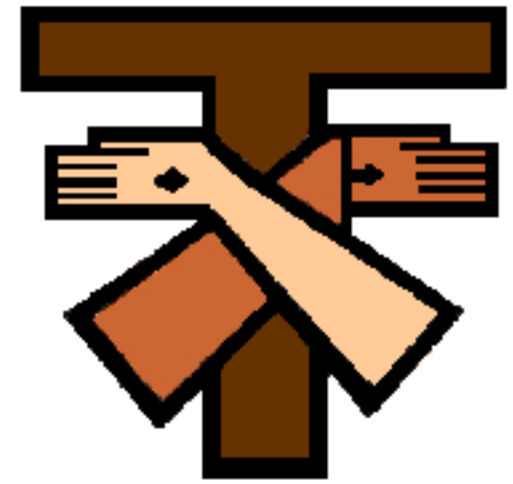
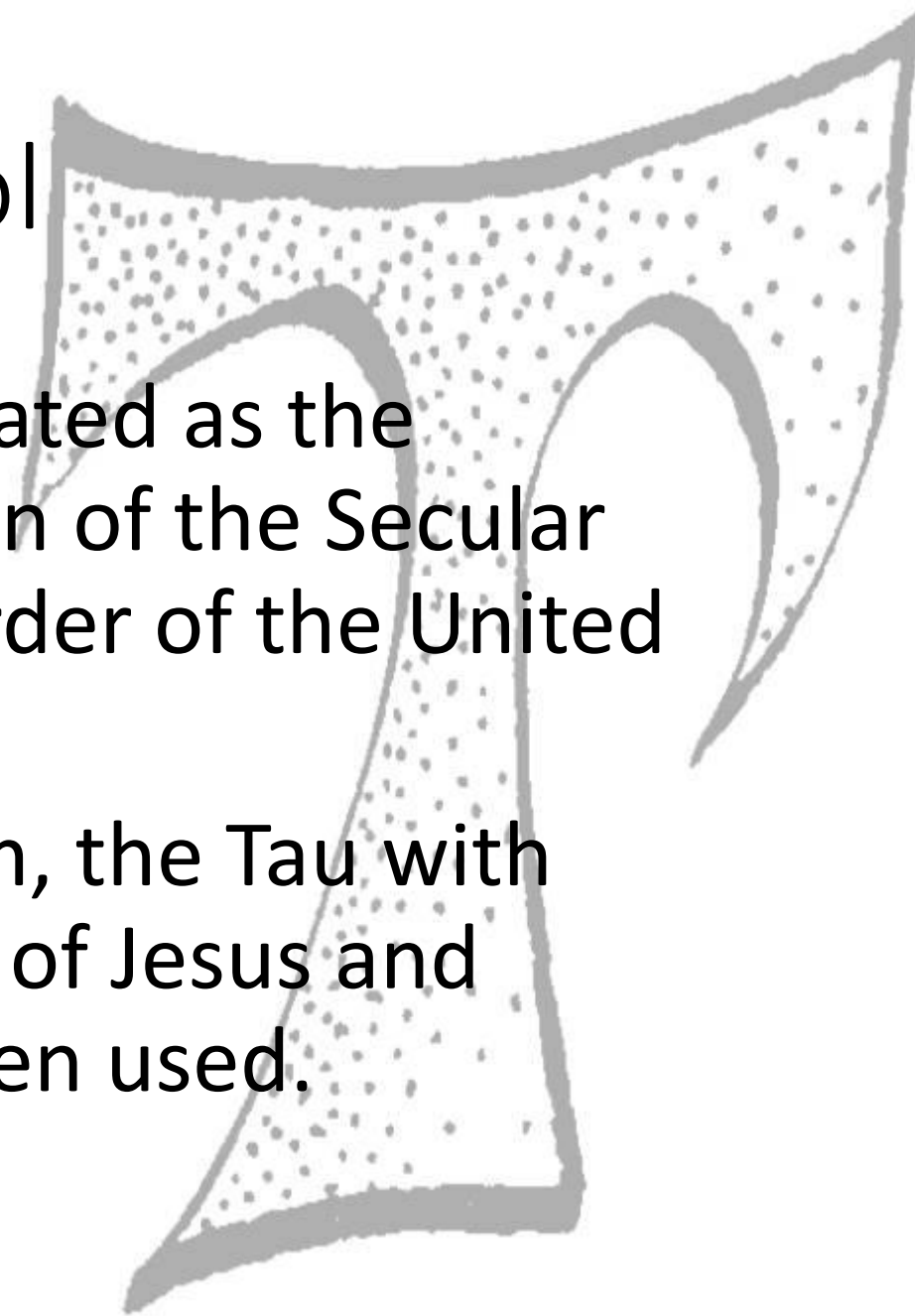
As a Symbol

- Francis had affection for and devotion to the TAU
- Is a well-recognized and accepted Franciscan Symbol
- Used by Franciscans of various denominations, of all orders within those denominations, for centuries, until present time
- Tau carries all the symbols of the Cross of Christ, Francis' ideal of life, and dream for himself and his followers.



As a Symbol

- TAU is designated as the distinctive sign of the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States.
- A special form, the Tau with crossed arms of Jesus and Francis, is often used.



Source

- Introduction to the Franciscan Family
- For Up To Now Formational Topics
- For Initial Formation
- Prepared by the National Formation Commission of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order - U.S.A. - 2011

