Charity (*caritas*) is “right and ordered love.”(1) It is the soul’s “weight”—deepest point of centering—and the “origin of all spiritual attraction” drawing the innermost self (*mens*/*anima*) toward the good and ultimately back to its origin as its end, that is, the Highest Good, Love Itself—God.(2) Its objects are God, our neighbor, our spirit and our body. Therefore, the virtue of *caritas* is understood to “maintain order with regard to the different objects of love, in our desire for them and their effect on us.”(3) All of the virtues “derive their rectitude originally and radically from charity, which is their source, their form and their end.”(4)

Mercy (*misericordia*) is the name that is traditionally given to caring good deeds in response to the needs of the other, one’s neighbor—*service*. According to Bonaventure, mercy resides in the affections and produces some good effects, that is, results in good deeds.(5)

Compassion, coming from the Latin *com-pati*, literally means “to bear, to endure, or to suffer with” another. It names a love, that is willing to express itself in voluntary suffering for the good of others.”(6) In the Franciscan tradition, compassion is perhaps best understood as “a participation in the suffering of another, not in a narrow sense understood in terms of pain for the sake of pain, but rather, in the broadest sense of suffering as the human condition.”(7) It is the challenge of embracing in love “the other” in their “humanity and fragility” in its manifold forms and expressions.
Discretion (discretio)

Discretion is the virtue of reason that distinguishes between good and evil; it is the learned ability to make proper judgments in light of circumstances; and it is the mental activity that seeks to understand the need to enact moral judgments once they are made. It is the result of a process of discernment (discerenere). Both terms have a long history in the Christian tradition and play an important role in the spiritual life in particular.

Brother (frater/fratres — pietas)

The story of the “hungry brother” is told in the context of the relationship Francis shared with “his brothers” (fratres), and one “brother” (frater) in particular.

As we know from his Testament, Francis considered the “brothers whom the Lord had given to him” a gift. He would also come to understand that he was called to live the Gospel as a “lesser brother” — fratres minores.

Bonaventure, the “theologian of Francis’s experience,” chose to explain the central and integral role of relationship in Francis’s human-spiritual experience in terms of the virtue of pietas, “right relationship.” His thought is succinctly expressed when he explained that:

From a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with an even more abundant [pietas], Francis would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of “brother” or “sister,” because he knew they shared with him the same beginning.

Condescension (“stepping down with”), from the Latin condescendere, meaning literally to step down in relation to the need of another, provides a succinct description not only of what Francis was challenged to discern but also how one’s response might best reveal one’s aspiration to live as a “lesser brother(sister)”; a choice reflected in the aspiration to be humble, generous, and loving of the other for the sake of the other (caritas).

—Austerity (austeritas) — Self-Discipline — is the virtue through which a person learns to manage in a right and well-ordered way the needs of the human body and its desires to see, know, taste, touch and experience the good. It involves the “inner discipline” through which a person strives to “adjust” or “regulate” the “inner spirit,” that is, one’s thoughts and actions, especially one’s affections, as required by “moral integrity and right living.”

Endnotes
1. See Bonaventure, Breviloquium, Part V, VIII. 2-5 (Monti, 201).
4. Breviloquium, Part V, IV.6 (Monti, 186).
10. The Earlier Rule, I.1 and The Later Rule, I.1 (FA:ED, I, 63 and 100).
12. The translation of pietas as “right relationship,” although not precise, is suggested by Bonaventure’s discussion of the term in Major Legend, VIII.1 and Collations on the Seven Gifts, III. It attempts to render more adequately Bonaventure’s theology of pietas.