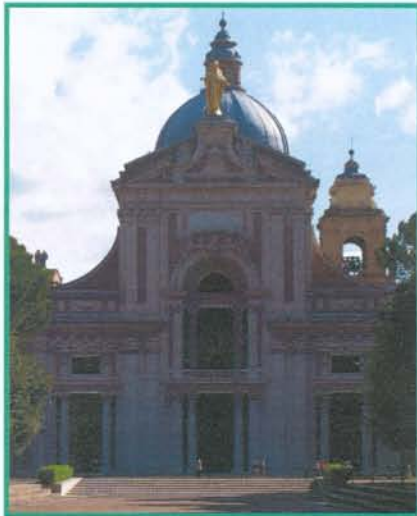


The Spirit of Secular Franciscan Life

Newsletter for Secular Franciscans - Assumption BVM Province

April 2007 - No. 9

Spirituality and the Places of Our Lives



Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels, Assisi

In the previous Newsletter we considered how special places in our lives have a power that evokes meaning, direction and spirit. To enter that mystery we explored a special place in Francis's life, the wayside chapel of **San Damiano**, and Francis's experience in prayer before the Crucifix inside that chapel. Then we looked at places in our own lives that

could be a setting for meeting God and hearing Christ speak to us as He did to Francis, asking us, by name, to renew the Church and society.

In this Newsletter I want to focus on another place, **St. Mary of the Angels**, known to all as the **Porziuncola** (Italian spelling), or **the Little Portion**.

First, I ask you to look at both of the pictures on this page. The picture on the right is the original chapel of Our Lady of the Angels. It rests inside the large Basilica (pictured above). Let your gaze evoke the image of a heart beating within your person, giving life and energy to your journey and vocation as a Secular Franciscan. This center reflects your soul, where you find beauty, truth, peace and forgiveness. It is as if the very core of your being is exposed for all to see, a space within that has no boundaries or restrictions so that the spirit may soar. So, image for yourself a beating heart as you look at the tiny Porziuncola Chapel inside the immense Basilica. This is Francis's heart; this is Francis's center and the center of the entire Franciscan story.

Why?

Here Francis began his religious life, understanding his life direction through the hearing of the Gospel.

Here his vocation unfolded.

Here it ended when he died on October 3, 1226.

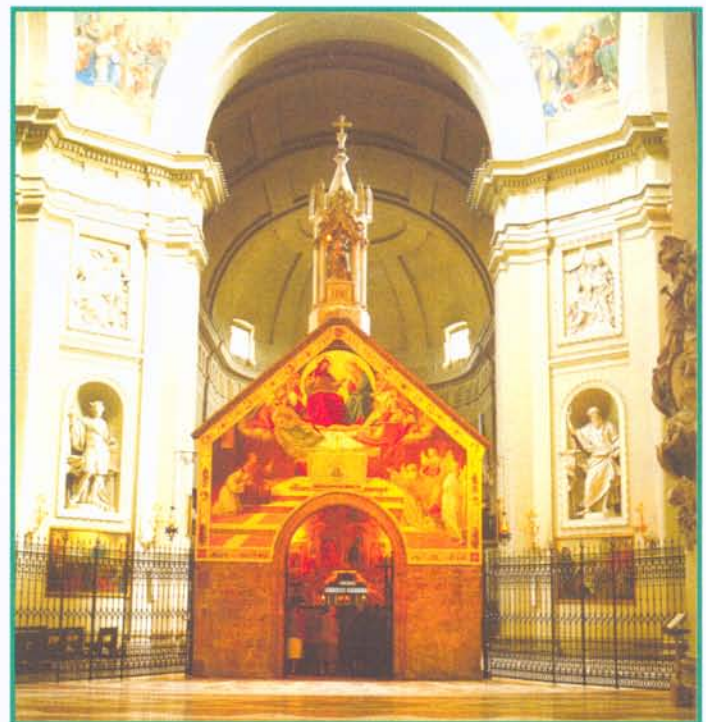
Here a definite lifestyle grew and developed, and a formation into Franciscan life took place.



Sketch of early life at the Porziuncola.

Here the first brotherhood flourished around a small chapel in the woods with rush huts nearby.

Here chapters (regular meetings held perhaps twice a year) took place and critical decisions were made. To this day General Chapters gather friars from all over the world.



The Porziuncola inside the Basilica: The Heart of the Franciscan story.

From **here** the brothers were sent out on mission to preach (Italy, Europe, the World) with a message of peace, reconciliation and penance.

Here they returned to share their faith, their experiences, and to be nourished.

Here Francis received the promise of the pardon, IL PERDONO, from Jesus Christ through Mary. We know this as the Porziuncola Indulgence. When asked why he wanted this, he answered: "I want to send everyone to Paradise."

Here on Palm Sunday night, 1212, Clare was received into the community and her hair shorn.

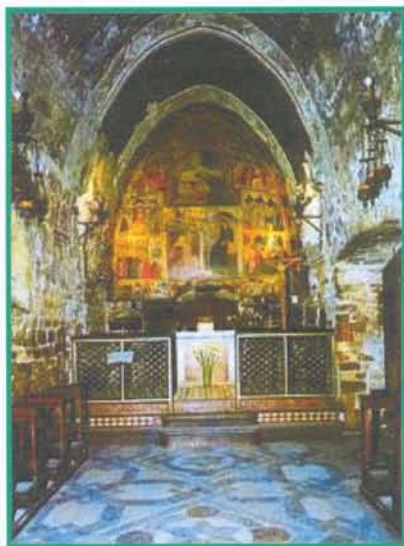
Here Francis and Clare shared a meal and it seemed a fire was consuming the entire area.

Here Francis repaired a little church with his own hands, these being the very stones he laid, worn smooth now by millions of passing pilgrims.

Here Francis discovered Jesus; here he discovered poverty, humility; here he discovered Mary, and his heart, and the heart of his brotherhood, would be forever rooted in the ways of the Gospel.

For these reasons, the Porziuncola is the heart and center of Francis, the core of the Franciscan movement; it is the womb from which it grew.

*Bonaventure tells us:
This place the holy man loved
more than other places in the world;
for here he began humbly,
here he progressed virtuously,
here he ended happily. (Major Legend II, 8)*



Interior of the Porziuncola Chapel today.

Today the original Porziuncola Chapel rests in the center of the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels, built hundreds of years after the death of St. Francis. Upon entering the Basilica one is drawn to the little chapel. When within the chapel itself, it is like entering the heart of the Gospel.

One's heart senses the invitation to come in and dwell awhile. While there one can feel the

stones, pick up the spiritual energy present, and once more understand the importance of having a heart, a center.

When Francis understood his vocation at the Porziuncola as he listened to the Gospel in February, 1208, he cried out: "This is what I wish; this is what I seek; this is what I long to do with all my heart." (1Cel 22)

Secular Franciscan life had its beginnings in this tiny chapel.

As you reflect on the message of this Newsletter it is important to ask:

What is the heart space in my home and in my person?

What is the heart space into which others (for example the poor and outcasts) are invited and welcomed?

What place, or space, speaks of "heart" to me?

Who, or what, is at the center of my Secular Franciscan vocation?

Is there an actual, special place to which I can go, or enter, that releases heart energy and spirit in my commitment to the Gospel as a Secular Franciscan?

What place does my Secular Franciscan Fraternity have as heart space for me?

Perhaps our reflections on the Porziuncola can be a stimulus in helping to consider these questions.

SAN DAMIANO CRUCIFIXES

In the last Newsletter I offered to purchase San Damiano Crosses if any were interested. Twelve or thirteen seculars ordered one or more and by now have received the Crucifix. I brought back, from Assisi, an additional 24. If you are interested in purchasing one (\$10.00) please let me know.

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ASSISI PILGRIMAGE DVD

Some individuals indicated an interest in a Pilgrimage to Assisi, but are unable because of age or financial restraints. I'm enclosing a flyer that promotes a DVD called ASSISI PILGRIMAGE. It takes you on a pilgrimage to all the holy places of Francis and Clare. Note also the book that is advertised.

**A Blessed Easter
to You! Christ is
Risen, Alleluia!**

Fr. Roch