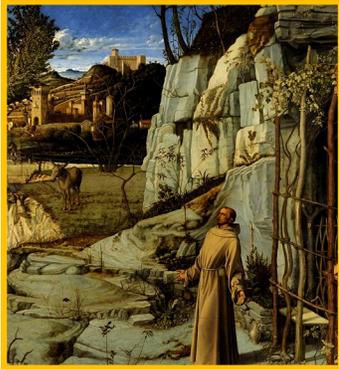


THE PILGRIM'S COMPANION: SHARING THE FRANCISCAN JOURNEY

FEBRUARY, 2021

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 1 Corinthians 3:16



St. Francis in the Desert, Bellini

“For what a person is before God, that he is and no more.”

-St. Francis



[Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs](#)



For more information on **Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs**, please call us at 414.427.0570 or visit our [website](#)

Greetings pilgrims,

Wishing you peace and good throughout this season of Lent. This time of almsgiving, prayer and fasting offers us the chance to clear our minds and lives of distraction, and return us to what is essential. In the quiet *desert* of Lent, we give ourselves space to review our actions and our hearts, renew our ability to listen for God in all things and, with grace, to enter more fully into relationship with our Creator.

Lenten practices recall us to the time when Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert. We may recall, too, the many out of the way places Francis found to pray. From his first days of conversion, when St. Francis walked to the little ruined chapel down the slope from Assisi and prayed before the San Damiano cross, all the way to La Verna, where he received the stigmata, and beyond, Francis sought time and place to sit in prayer and penance, a place to sit empty before God. He turned his gaze to the cross. And in his emptiness and whole-hearted love, he was invited into the mystery of God, the Trinity.

This month, Charlie Brown, General Manager of *the Casa, Franciscan Renewal Center*, and a Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs leader, shares his reflections on the experience of pilgrimage. He reflects deeply on love of God and the Trinity. As I read his reflection, I found myself pausing, and pausing again, to consider a phrase or sit with a thought. When you have a quiet moment, perhaps sit with his words, and notice any phrase that touches you, or invites you into conversation, connection and rest in God.

St. Francis declared, “For what a person is before God, that he is and no more.” Lent provides the time for us to go to silence and let God speak, to let go of control and be open to trust, to welcome God in our midst, in our heart.

May you have a blessed Lenten journey,

-Mary Beth

Mary Beth Wisniewski
Franciscan Pilgrimage Program, AFCU Outreach

When Charlie is not writing reflections for the newsletter, he is at *the Casa* Franciscan Renewal Retreat Center, in Scottsdale, AZ. Charlie and executive director, Fr. Joe Schwab, OFM, guide and direct the retreat center.

“*The Casa* offers opportunities for spiritual growth, healing and transformation that moves lives into the service of others. *The Casa* was founded by, and is today, an active religious community of the Order of Friars Minor, part of the worldwide Franciscan family, following the footsteps of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi.

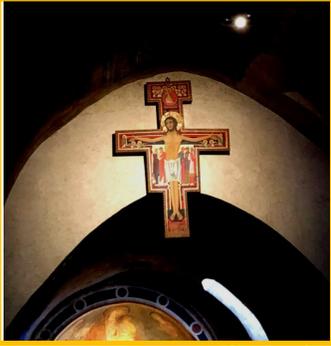
Activities at the Casa include daily and Sunday Mass at Our Lady of the Angels Church, private retreats, conference space for non-profit groups, individual therapy/counseling, support groups, adult education, family faith formation, as well as volunteer ministries that assist the poor and vulnerable, empower individuals to improve their circumstances, care for the environment, and build community fellowship.” When you are in Scottsdale, stop on by! Click on the *All Are Welcome* photo to learn more.



Charlie Brown and Fr. Joe Schwab on the pilgrim journey. Trastevere. Rome, Italy

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Charlie Brown, General Manager at the Casa and a pilgrimage leader shares his experience of pilgrimage and the understanding that has grown and deepened along the way.



At San Damiano
Photo: Lisa Antolini, pilgrim

San Damiano

Place of Clare

And Francis

Place of beauty

And peace

Peace which

Emanates from every wall

And altar

And fresco

Peace from the San Damiano

crucifix

Francis' vision

Of everything connected

In God

To gather all

In all

In the deep peace

Gained by Clare's prayer

and contemplation

Gift of peace

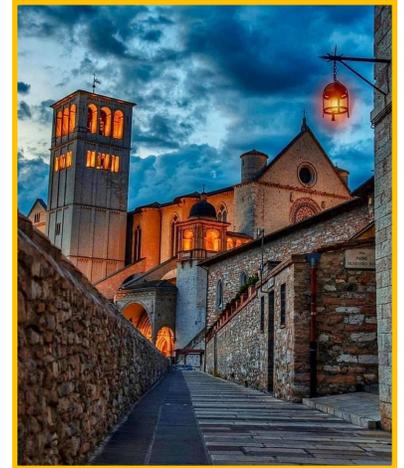
Stay with me

Always

Patrick Jurd, pilgrim

We are created to know God not by the power of our minds but by the heart, and such that God could find a home in our heart. Gospel teaching provides a framework for integrating logos with our daily life and in that, involving our hearts in such a way that our actions represent, however closely, our attempt to love God in return. As we journey on pilgrimage to Assisi and Rome, we unpack our relationship with God and most certainly Francis and Clare. This integration of scripture, place, experience, and ritual fuses a beautiful harmony of contemplation and action. It also opens new connections and possibilities.

The human experience of God is about a journey and better yet a pilgrimage. Some will say this pilgrimage began prior to our birth. One thing is certain from my viewpoint, God by way of the Trinity does not belong to God alone. God dwells in inaccessible light and comes to us in the face of Christ and actions of the Spirit. This is not an abstract God, but one seeking union and communion with one another. The Trinity when contemplated leads me into a mystical encounter with Christ, and that grace shares the life of God thru Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pilgrimage encounters in Assisi, Rome and beyond Assisi compliment the mysticism of the Trinity and relationship unpacking this in real time.



Probed by God
Photo by Charlie Brown

An experience of God, where we feel unity is indeed life changing.

We come to know God in love. Sometimes this comes in the form of surrender of our will. In my experience, surrender to my will opens room for God to pour in grace that infuses our being and changes our will and need to one of cooperation and integration of divinity and humanity within us. As Christ as our example and other saints like Francis we learn how they took pleasure in praising God, and learned well, that they/we are made for God and our hearts are restless until we find peace in God. Francis helps us conform our humanity, unity, and witness to our divinity by his inspiring life. Being probed when in Assisi by God and Francis awakens our inner true self again transmuting a connection so necessary for our peace.

Love, being in love or a loving presence, reflect energy that bonds what is good about the human. In my experience with love, on many levels, the reality seems to be that of no conditions. When I walk to communion, aware of the presence of God and ready to receive Him, I have no conditions for God. I feel and believe I am in a state of grace so powerful that the union is supernatural and unconscious. At that moment, I feel as close to my essence of divinity as any other. These moments reflect memories of La Verna and dozens of other holy grounds on pilgrimage. Integration of mind, body, spirit. Integration of left-brain and right-brain. Integration of humanity and divinity. While on pilgrimage these experiences happen many times in a day and in our dreams. Sometimes so overpowering they may exhaust or energize us or both! Pilgrimage opens our senses as a mystery unfolds and seems to gather and grow.