



The Pilgrim's Companion:

Sharing the Franciscan Journey

April, 2024

Contemplative Corner



“He loved with an unspeakable affection the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, forasmuch as that She had made the Lord of glory
our Brother,
and that through Her we have obtained mercy” (Leg. Mai. IX,3).

For who can make the Lord our brother, if she not also be our mother?

-Bonaventure



Madonna and Child, Greccio

Nurturing Love: Embracing the Spirit of Motherhood with Francis

Greetings pilgrims,

I hope you are enjoying spring. Here in Wisconsin, muddy ground is giving way to carpets of blue flowers (Scylla), and birds are nesting amongst budding branches—a testament to the nurturing cycle of existence. In the spirit of spring, we reflect on St. Francis, and his experience of nurturing.

In this month's reflection, pilgrimage leader Fr. André Cirino, OFM, invites us to contemplate Lady Pica, Francis' mother, offering insights into Francis' profound connection to motherhood. While Franciscans often emphasize brotherhood and sisterhood, Francis also recognized the significance of maternal care, urging his followers to embrace a nurturing role towards one another,

As we journey this month, let's perhaps take time to consider our own relationships and the influence of maternal figures in our lives. What can we learn from Francis about the essence of mothering and its role in fostering spiritual growth?

Amidst the blossoming of spring, may we seek the light of God's goodness and love, nurturing our souls and those of others as we continue along the pilgrim path.

Peace and all Good!

Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs

Journeying together in the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

Deepening one's life in the Spirit

This month, on April 14, we Franciscans honor Lady Pica, the mother of St. Francis of Assisi. Two bronze statues of the parents of St. Francis (pictured) by Roberto Joppolo stand in the piazza of the Chiesa Nuova, a small church built over the area where tradition says the parental home of St. Francis was located. Pietro, St. Francis' father, and Lady Pica are portrayed holding hands. In the free hand, Pietro is holding the clothes St. Francis returned to him in the bishop's residence; Pica is holding broken chains which symbolize St. Francis being a prisoner in his own home. Any biography of St. Francis will fully explain the events behind the symbols of the clothing and chains.



Lady Pica

While we know little about St. Francis' parents, there are some insights we can uncover about his mother, Lady Pica. It was Pica who would have taught the child Francis his prayers, Pica who would have taught him about Jesus' mother, Mary. We know that St. Francis was fond of the use of the word "mother" because he uses it 24 times in his writings. For him, the word indicates one who is warm, delicate, sensitive, tender, and nurturing. The saint transfers these sentiments to the mother of Jesus to the point of urging us brothers to love one another as a mother loves the child that is born to her.

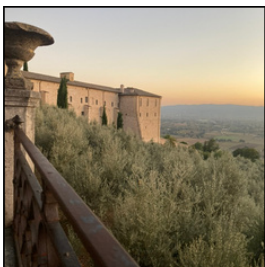
Before his conversion, Francis threw the best parties for his friends in Assisi, lavishly spending Pietro's wealth. So, when Francis began to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, he returned all his clothing, literally, to Pietro. But his father was anxious about further drainage of his resources. So, when Pietro had to go to France on business, he locked his son in a dungeon in the basement of their home. While difficult to comprehend, fathers in Assisi legally had a right to deal with "recalcitrant" children in this manner. After he left for France, Lady Pica let him go free. Pica said "Yes" to her son Francis and freed him, thereby giving him spiritual birth - much like Mary's "Yes" to the archangel Gabriel freed God of invisibility, literally giving birth to her Son Jesus.

Lady Pica then fades from historical sources. Imaginatively, the poet-laureate of the Franciscan family, Murray Bodo, O.F.M., reflects on her life at the beginning of her son's conversion in the following poem (reprinted with permission)

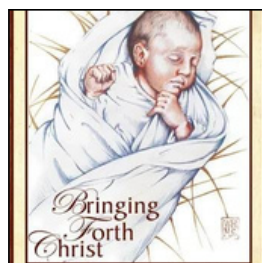
Francis, dear one
 the empty rooms cry out for you
 and under the chimney's hood
 the hearth fire burns untended
 I sit in an upright chair
 It is months now - your father
 fusses with palfreys and war horses
 while I shun linens and wool dresses
 trimmed and lined with fur
 And no one sees
 I sit by the window
 I hear rumors
 I stay inside
 I sit in an upright chair
 There is no song here
 except for the birds I hear
 through the window's oiled parchment
 The days are long
 Your father roars
 at the dogs and servants
 and we seldom sit by the fire
 The night frightens our sleep
 Francesco, my son
 what have I done?
 Tell me how it is with you
 knock at the silent door
 I wait in an upright chair
 They say you're now a leper -
 Dear one, what has become of you?
 Your father and I lie abed
 stare at the ceiling's wooden beams
 Your dog whines mornings
 He watches the door
 He does not eat
 I pat his matted coat
 I give you to God, my son
 I wait for death
 The bells toll under the house
 The wind laughs in the eaves
 I sit in an upright chair

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Do you have a story or picture to share?

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