

**Franciscan Missionary Union**  
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Dear Friend of the missions!

I hope and pray that you are having some time to rest and regain energy during the summer. There are some important feasts to remember this month: August 6 is the Transfiguration of the Lord; August 8 is the feast of St. Dominic; August 11 is the feast of St. Clare. The Solemnity of the Assumption is August 15. There is a wonderful tradition of blessing flowers on that day. The octave of the Assumption (Aug 22) is the feast of the Queenship of Mary. Perhaps, on August 23, the feast of St. Rose of Lima, you could pray especially for our mission in Peru. Please continue to pray for peace and the victims of war and violence. All the friars are very grateful for your generosity and prayers. Even though it is a Sunday this year, August 2 is a special day for the Franciscans: the Feast of Our Lady of the Angels (patron of the Portiuncola), a day to pray for pardon and the deceased. You make a big difference in the lives of many people. We always remember you and your intentions. God bless you!

**Chapel of Our Lady of the Angels**  
*The Portiuncola*

Fr. Russell Becker, OFM

This year the Franciscans are remembering the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the approval of the First Rule of St. Francis by Pope Innocent III. To celebrate this event, Franciscans from all over the world converged on the Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels in Assisi for a "Chapter of Mats." In the basilica is the little chapel (St Francis called it the *Portiuncola*, the Little Portion) dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels where St. Francis gathered his early followers. It was the first 'mother house' for his group of followers that were coming to him, and is still to this day a central part of the life of the Order. The *Little Portion* was to be the reminder of the minority which his followers were supposed to embrace and embody.

**History.** The legend of the place is that it was built by hermits in the time of Pope Liberius (+ 366). The same legend says that it passed over to St. Benedict in 516. It was named after Our Lady of the Angels according to a tradition that in those woods where the little chapel was, people claimed they could hear angels singing. Francis discovered it in 1208. It was there on February 24 (the feast of St. Matthias, the apostle) that Francis heard the gospel (Matthew 10,5-15) that helped him to understand what God wanted for him (preach the Gospel, take nothing on the journey, the gift you have received give as a gift). Francis loved the little chapel even though small, run down, and very isolated. It became a place of quiet and it was near the hospices for people with leprosy (the *little ones* through whom Christ truly came to Francis.)

The Benedictines wanted to give it to Francis to be used as the home for his movement. He refused to accept ownership because he wanted to practice poverty not only individually but corporately. He agreed to a rental agreement with the monks. Even to this day, a basket of fish is sent to the monks as annual rent. Francis restored this chapel as he did San Damiano. His small band of followers began to live around the chapel, the reminder of what they were supposed to be as friars. It was from there that he journeyed to Rome to have his rule approved by the Pope in 1209.

On the night of Palm Sunday (March 20) in 1212, Francis accepted St. Clare's commitment to live the Gospel in radical poverty. She was clothed in the habit of penance and placed under the protection of the Benedictine nuns. Later, as things settled, Francis established her with the women who were joining her at San Damiano, the first place rebuilt by St. Francis, where the Lord spoke to him from the cross.

In the early times, the friars returned every year to the *Portiuncola* usually around Pentecost to hold a Chapter of Mats. This was basically a meeting of all the friars. Because of the large number, they had to camp out on mats in the area. At these Chapters, the friars planned their future missions, told of the way the Lord worked through them on mission, resolved difficulties and received renewed inspiration from St. Francis and one another.

As Francis became weaker and anticipated his death, he asked to be brought back to the *Portiuncola* to die. On October 3, 1226, he asked to be placed naked on the floor of the chapel so that he would leave this world with nothing to come to the his heavenly Father as a truly poor person. As he was dying, he also blessed his followers and asked them to care for this special place.

**Place of Pardon.** On a night in 1216, St. Francis woke from sleep and felt a call to the chapel. While he was there praying he had a vision of Jesus and his mother Mary. They asked him what he would desire. He spoke to them saying: *O God, though I am a great sinner, I ask you to grant a full pardon of all sins to all who have repented and confessed their sins and visit this place.* Francis heard the Lord's reply: *You ask much, but you are worthy of greater things, and greater things you shall have.* The Lord granted this gift of pardon and Pope Honorius III approved it.

On August 2, 1216, Francis announced the indulgence to the people: *I desire to send you all to Paradise by announcing to you the pardon which has been granted to me by Pope Honorius! Know then that all those present and all those who shall come after in the future to this church to pray, will receive the remission of their sins. I would have liked to have this pardon granted for a week, but I have only succeeded in getting it for one day.* This is a wonderful insight into

St. Francis and his ability to be selfless as Christ was. He had the opportunity to ask for anything and he thought of the people who needed help most, those who had been weighed down by their sins and had a hard time feeling they access to God's compassion and forgiveness. The pardon still exists and has been extended to anyone who prays in any church on the feast of the *Portiuncola*.

**The Experience of Pardon.** Pardon did not always seem easy to obtain to the people of Francis' time. It seems that as we grow cold to the message of the Gospel, one of the first things that happens is that we not only think that God's pardon must be earned, but that God's pardon is not abundant. At the same time as we believe the love and forgiveness of God is hard to obtain, we also begin to love and forgive in the same way. It makes the world cold indeed!

Francis came to know the true God, the God of mercy, compassion and infinite love. He understood the meaning of the Cross and Resurrection. Love, mercy, pardon and forgiveness abound. Many thought you had to pay dearly for God's forgiveness. Francis knew that you did not even have to ask, though he also knew that prayer for pardon helps us to trust in God's love and forgiveness and actually put it into practice. Through his preaching and loving and forgiving, the world was becoming warmed again with the fire of God's love. More and more people began to understand the Gospel again through the preaching of Francis and his followers, and were able to put the Gospel into practice.

Dedicated to the Mother of God, Our Lady of the Angels, the *Little Portion* is a constant reminder of the humbleness of God, God's eternal love, and the true vocation of the followers of St. Francis. This is a place where Francis wanted all people to feel safe and renewed through the intercession of the Mother of the Lord.

*We turn to you for protection,  
Holy Mother of God.  
Listen to our prayers  
and help us in our needs.  
Save us from every danger,  
Glorious and Blessed Virgin.*

Even in this age, we do not need to fear for God is still the one who loves and forgives. Best we all though learn from Francis and keep the needs of our brothers and sisters before us, and not be tempted to worry about ourselves. Through the intercession of St. Francis and our Lady of the Angels, may God grant you pardon and peace! And then, remember those words St. Francis heard in the *Portiuncola* on that cold February day: *the gift you have received, give as a gift!*

#### **Questions for Reflection:**

- 1. How can minority be a part of all our lives?**
- 2. Do you trust in God's pardon? Do you practice pardoning?**
- 3. How can we bring the warmth of God's love to the coldness of our time?**

**Please pray for our missionaries on their birthdays:**

**Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil): August 8**  
**Fr. David Hyman, O.F.M.. (Home Missions): August 22**

**May God give them many years of health, peace and energy!**

**Also remember our missionaries and former missionaries who are ill:**

**Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Home Missions)**  
**Br. Rosario Vieira, O.F.M. (Brazil)**  
**Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)**  
**Fr. Ignatius McGeady, O.F.M. (Brazil)**  
**Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)**  
**Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)**  
**Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)**

**May God grant them health and peace!**