

Our Lady of Indiana Regional Fraternity

December, 2023

"Listen, Discern, and Go Forth"

Volume 11, Issue 5

Celebrating the Incarnation: Greccio 1223—2023



Our Regional Prayer

Holy Virgin Mary, there is no one like you born in the world among women: Daughter and Handmaid of the most high, sovereign King, the heavenly Father, Mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ, Spouse of the Holy Spirit.

Pray for us with St. Michael the archangel and with all the powers of the heavens and with all the saints together with your most holy beloved Son, Lord and Teacher.



Climbing the steps to the hermitage at Greccio is not for the faint-hearted.

From the parking lot to the piazza in front of the entrance is a total of 97 steps to a beautiful setting overlooking the Valley of Rieti.

St. Francis's journey to the cave of Greccio took place three years before his death when he was already suffering from various ailments. Though the steps are well cared for now and strongly built, one can only imagine what that climb upward would have been for Francis and his companions. The upward climb would have been dotted with tall cypresses and shivering poplar trees on either side flanked by mountains. Their foot coverings would have left much to be desired.

Fr. Lawrence Zurek, OFM, Conv tells the story this way:

"The road grows narrower, steeper and more winding. On the top of the mountain to the left are the remains of an old castle, and halfway up the mountain to the right is the tiny monastery built up around St Francis' cave where he build the first creche.

St. Francis had already been to the Holy Land and now, as the feast of Christ's birth drew near in this year of 1223, he conceived the idea of making the story of Christmas more vivid in the minds of the shepherds and farmers who live there.

The holy man of Assisi have instructions

for what he wanted and the people joined in enthusiastically. Even Lord Giovanni Vellita, who lived in the castle, joined in. Francis had this cave, and in it there was a rock ledge that he proposed to use for an altar. The peasants brought him an ox and a donkey, and someone brought a little wooden statue of the Child Jesus. Those who have seen the grotto of the Nativity in Bethlehem are struck by the fact that Francis' cave at Greccio resembles it almost exactly".

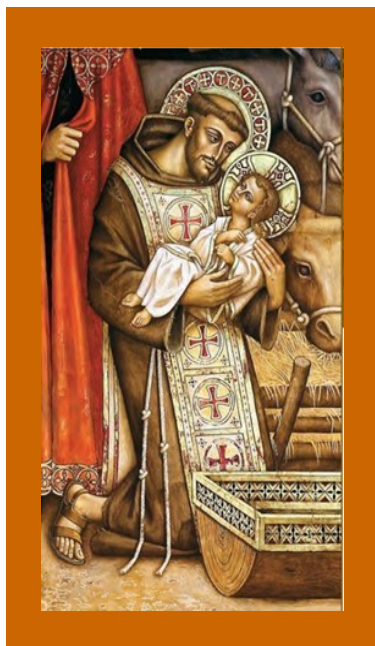


Further on, Fr. Lawrence cites the beautiful description of that holy evening as written by Thomas of Celano:

"The human element of the Incarnation and the charity of the Passion were so vivid in his memory that he rarely thought of anything else. In this respect one must recall and praise with reverence what he did at Greccio on the day of Our Lord's nativity, years before he died.

"The time of joy and exultation had come. The friars from different localities had come together and the men and women of the place brought, each according to his means, candles and torches to illuminate that night . . . Lastly the saint arrived, saw all the preparations and was happy. The crib was put in place, the hay brought in and the ox and donkey led forward. Simplicity was honored, poverty exalted, humility praised, and Greccio became a new Bethlehem.

"For the people and the animals, it seemed



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to be full daylight on that delightful night . . . The woods rang with voices and the rocks echoed the hymns of joy.

The solemn rite of the Mass was celebrated over the crib, and the priest enjoyed an unusual consolation the saint, vested as the deacon of the Mass chanted the Gospel. He then preached to the people and said very tender things about the birth of the poor King and of little Bethlehem. At the end of the solemn vigil, everyone returned to his home full of joy."



Recently, [The Conference of the Franciscan Family](#) sent a letter to all Franciscans announcing the blessing of a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions from December 8, 2023, to February 2, 2024, in honor of eighth centenary of "Christmas at Greccio". Some of you have asked where the Franciscan chapels/churches are located where you can fulfill the requirements for this intention.

Indianapolis area: chapel of Marian University, chapel of Franciscan Health in southeast Indy, Sacred Heart Parish

Fort Wayne area: chapel of University of St Francis, St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Angola

Mishawaka area: Adoration Chapel and Main Chapel of St. Francis Convent

Lafayette area: chapel of St. Elizabeth Hospital or the Adoration Chapel (if you have an entrance FOB)

North-Western counties: Holy Name Parish in Cedar Lake, chapel of Franciscan Health in Dyer or chapel of Franciscan Health in Crown Point

Terre Haute: St. Joseph University Parish

This privilege given with the blessings of Pope Francis and the Apostoli Penitentiary and shows the special relationship established between Saint Francis and the Church when he asked for the Portiuncula Indulgence.



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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I entrust to you the mission of recognizing the right paths you must follow in order to correspond boldly and faithfully to the charism you have received. As you prepare to recall the fundamental stages in the history of this vast Franciscan Family [through the celebration of the Centenarios] I invoke the intercession of the Virgin Mary and Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi and I willingly send my Blessings, asking that you please continue to pray for me.



Rome, from St. John Lateran, November 9, 2023.

Anniversary of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica Cathedral of Rome.

Francisco

800th Anniversary Creche at the Vatican: 1223 –2023

The Nativity scene at the Vatican in front of St. Peter's comes from events having taken place in the Diocese of Rieti on the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' first Nativity scene there. In 1203, St. Francis requested that his creche have a live donkey and a live ox, but only figures of these animals will be present at the Vatican.



The creche is simply adorned with representations crafted by the Neapolitan sculptor Antonio Cantone, of Mary, Joseph, the Infant Jesus, and Giovanni Velita, his wife, and the three friars who put a hay-filled manger in a local, stony grotto so that the citizens of Greccio and the surrounding countryside could come to pray. It's roughness and simplicity will surely teach a very visible lesson about the poverty into which Jesus, without putting aside his divinity, was born, became incarnate, one of us.

Behind the statuary, there is a copy of the fresco which now graces the cave at Greccio painted by Giotto in the late 1200's. One can see Francis kneeling in adoration before the baby Jesus while the friars celebrate Mass, Mary is feeding the newborn Savior, while Joseph, the ox and the donkey are looking on in silence and stunned awe at what is taking place before their eyes.

Interestingly, the base on which the creche is erected is in the shape of an octagon to represent the 800th Anniversary of the first creche.

An 80 foot Christmas tree from the area around Turin, decorated with live edelweiss flowers to signify falling snow, also stands in St. Peter's Square near the creche. The edelweiss blossoms come from a nearby nursery since picking them is illegal in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy.

In 1223, St. Francis chose the area around the mountainous area of Greccio because it reminded him of things he had seen and experienced while in the rocky landscape of the Holy Land.

Francis said, "I would like to remember that Child who was born in Bethlehem, and somehow glimpse with the eyes of my body the hardships he experienced due to the lack of the things necessary for a newborn; how he was laid in a manger and how he lay on the hay between the ox and the donkey", his biographer, Thomas of Celano wrote.

The figures in the Vatican scene are hand-painted, fired clay figures, and they are draped in clothing which would have been worn during the Middle Ages. A small river is included to direct viewers to Jesus as the Font of Life and

Francis's deep respect for all of creation.

Around the colonnade of St. Peter's during this Christmas season there are 120 other creches from twenty two other countries around the world to show the diversity of the creche tradition around the entire planet. Each country and each culture has taken ownership of this sacred event and depicted it as they experienced it. Further settings can be found in the Paul VI Hall of the Vatican for viewing by visitors.

During this time of deepening and renewal our relationship with Jesus present with us in the Holy Eucharist, the words of St. Francis explaining why the reenactment of the Creche was so important should touch our Franciscan hearts:

"...Behold, each day he humbles Himself as when he came from the royal throne into the Virgin's womb; each day He himself comes down to us, appearing humbly; each day He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of the priest. As he revealed himself to the holy apostles in true flesh, so He reveals himself to us now in sacred bread." (Adm 1:16-19)

This stupendous connection was not lost on those creating the creche at St. Peter's Basilica. The following picture shows

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white robed priest with the Sacred Host standing in a direct line with the Manger (to receive the image of Jesus on Christmas day).

In his "Letter to the Entire Order", Francis wrote: "Let everyone be struck with fear, let the whole world tremble, and let the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest! O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity! O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! The lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles himself that for our salvation he hides himself under an ordinary piece of bread! Brothers, look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by him! Hold nothing back of yourselves for your-

selves, that he who gives himself totally to you may receive you totally!" (LtrOrd 26-29)

O Come, let us adore Him!

Here in Our Lady of Indiana Regional Fraternity we have been gifted with our August Unity Day and the graced reflections on the "Rule of 1223" from Fr. Steven Mc Michael, OFM, Conv, and now during Advent of 2023, we've been gifted with an afternoon of prayer and fraternity at the University of St. Francis. In our local fraternities, we are all continuing to read, study, and pray about the gift that St. Francis gave to us 800 years ago. And at the end of the month, a wonderful gathering of friars, sisters, brothers, and friends will assemble at Mt. St. Francis in New Albany for a weekend of prayer and reflection on the gift of Greccio to the Franciscan family.

As we near the final days of Ad-

vent in preparation for Christmas, let us increase our study of the lessons taught us by St. Francis that we might in some small way remember what he did, namely: "For the man saw a little child lying lifeless in the manger and he saw the holy man of God approach the child and waken him from a deep sleep. Nor is this vision unfitting, since in the heart of many the child Jesus has been given over to oblivion (FA:ED, Vol. 1, p. 256)."



On Saturday morning, December 16, 2023, the Drama Club from St. Matthew Cathedral School in South Bend, presented their rendition of Thomas of Celano's account of the re-enactment of Christmas by St. Francis at Greccio. They, not only presented a superb and reverent performance, but they had obviously studied the text themselves. Parents, siblings and friends joined Immaculate Conception Fraternity for a morning none will forget.



Kudos to John Fyrqvist, Moderator, Sr. Joan, OFS, and Sr. Gianna Marie for sharing these awesome young people.



800th Year Anniversary Celebration of Greccio





Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Sunday afternoon's celebration of Greccio on December 3, 2023, at the University of St. Francis was such a wonderful occasion of reflection, not only on the reenactment of Greccio by our award-willing cast of brothers and sisters but also being together celebrating Mass for the 800th anniversary of Greccio and the warm and loving fraternal sharing afterwards. Thanks to Sr. Anita and to everyone who contributed in any way -- cast, greeters (especially Vicky standing out in the rain and cold), organizers, those who brought refreshments, picture takers, all who brought themselves and shared so lovingly with their Franciscan brothers and sisters from Valparaiso, Lafayette, Huntington, Avilla, Fort Wayne, Mishawaka, Indianapolis, and Fr. Jose Arroyo from Columbia City, etc. etc.. A day to remember for sure!

Love, prayer, and blessings to all!
From Our Lady of Indiana Regional Council



Though most of us have surely forgotten all those hours in high school memorizing Latin declensions, etc., here is the decree from Rome (the Apostolic Penitentiary) authorizing the Plenary Indulgence that can be gained by those visiting Franciscan places of worship from December 8, 2023 until February 2, 2024. The usual conditions, of Sacramental Confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff; it is necessary to devoutly participate in the jubilee rites, or at least to pause before the creche prepared there, spending an appropriate span of time in pious meditation, concluding with the Our Father, the Profession of Faith and invocations to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph as well as St. Francis of Assisi.

Prot. N. 03142/2023-413/23/1

D E C R E T U M

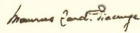
PAENITENTIARIA APOSTOLICA, ad augendam fidelium religionem animarumque salutem, vi facultatum sibi specialissimo modo a Sanctissimo in Christo Patre et Domino Nostro, Domino Francisco Divina Providentia Papa tributarum, attentis precibus nuper allatis a Reverendis Patribus Ministris Generalibus ex Conferentia Franciscanae Familiae in octingentesimo inventi anniversario Praesepis, quod anno MCCCXXIII Sanctus Franciscus Assisiensis in Greccio fecit primus, de caelestibus Ecclesiae thesauris benigne concedit plenariam Indulgentiam suetis sub conditionibus (sacramentali Confessione, eucharistica Communionem et orationem ad mentem Summi Pontificis) a christifidelibus vere poenitentibus atque caritate compulsis, a sollemnitate Immaculatae Conceptionis Beatae Mariae Virginis, die VIII Decembris MCMXXIII usque ad diem festum Praesentationis Domini, II Februarii MCMXXIV lucrandam, quam etiam animabus fidelium in Purgatorio detentis per modum suffragii applicare possint, si quolibet templum Franciscanae Familiae totum per orbem terrarum spectans, tummatim vel singulatim in forma peregrinationis inviserint et iubilantibus ritibus devote interfuerint, vel saltem coram Praesepi ibi parato per congruum temporis spatium piis vacaverint considerationibus, concludendum Oratione Dominica, Symbolo Fidei invocationibus Sanctae Familiae Iesu, Mariae, Iosephi et Sancti Francisci Assisiensis.

Senes, infirmi omnesque qui gravi causa domo exire nequeunt, pariter plenariam consequi poterunt Indulgentiam, concepta detestatione cuiusque peccati et intentione praestandi, ubi primum licuerit, tres consuetas condiciones, si iubilantibus celebrationibus se spiritaliter adiunxerint, precibus doloribusque suis vel incommodis propriae vitae misericordiam Deo oblatis.

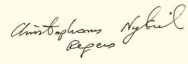
Quo igitur accessus, ad divinam veniam per Ecclesiae claves consequendam, facilius pro pastoralis caritate evadat, haec Paenitentiarum exte rogat ut Patres ex Franciscana Familia, prompto et generoso animo, celebrationi Paenitentiae sese praebeant.

Paenitentia pro hac vice tantum valituro. Non obstantibus in contrarium facientibus quibuscumque.

Datum Romae, ex aedibus Paenitentiarum Apostolicarum, die XIV mensis Novembris, anno Dominae Incarnationis MCMXXIII.



Giovanni Caracciolo



Christophorus Nykhal
Episcopus

See page 2 for the location of Franciscan chapels, and oratories where you can gain indulgence within Our Lady of Indiana Regional Fraternity

Prayer before the Manger

Oh Good Jesus, contemplating this Nativity Scene, I ask you for the grace of forgiveness of my sins. You are the dawn from on high made flesh to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. You made your home among us and loved us to the point of giving your life for us. You did not come to condemn the world but to save it. Give me the grace of sincere repentance and the humility to recognize my frailty. Give me faith in your mercy and renew in me the joy of your salvation.

Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church, teach us the joy of the humble and of those who believe in the promises of the Lord. Help us to proclaim the greatness of the God who accompanies and saves suffering humanity. You are the dawn of a new creation. You are Virgin made Church, you are Mother of grace and mercy. Listen to our plea



with the tenderness of your immaculate heart.

Saint Joseph, just and faithful servant of the Lord. You are a holy and generous custodian. Do not take your care away from us, lost pilgrims in search of the true homeland. Protect the Church from the snares of the evil one and teach us to trust in the One who gave His only Son to rescue us from sin, evil and death.

Saint Francis of Assisi, you who loved the poor and humble Christ so much that you wanted to relive in Greccio, with faith and devotion, the night of his birth in Bethlehem, intercede for us so that we can contemplate with a clean heart the beauty of the incarnation of the Son of God and the kindness of his gaze that calls us to a new life. Amen.



"The holy man of God wears a deacon's vestments, for he was indeed a deacon, and he sings the holy gospel with a sonorous voice. And his voice, a sweet voice, a vehement voice, a clear voice, a sonorous voice, invites all to the highest rewards. Then he preaches mellifluously to the people standing about, telling them about the birth of the poor king and the little city of Bethlehem. Often, too, when he wished to mention Jesus Christ, burning with love he called him "the child of Bethlehem," and speaking the word "Bethlehem" or "Jesus," he licked his lips with his tongue, seeming to taste the sweetness of these words.



"The gifts of the Almighty are multiplied here and a marvelous vision is seen by a certain virtuous man. For he saw a little child lying lifeless in the manger, and he saw the holy man of God approach and arouse the child as if from a deep sleep. Nor was this an unfitting vision, for in the hearts of many the child Jesus really had been forgotten, but now, by his grace and through his servant Francis, he had been brought back to life and impressed here by loving recollection. Finally the celebration ended and each returned joyfully home (First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano FA:ED, Vol. 1, p. 255)."