ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW



You are our haven and our hope.

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
The Praises of God

ST. FRANCIS AMONG US

A Pilgrimage Across America

1226-2026

800 YEARS OF LOVE, FAITH AND SERVICE

The presence of the relics of St. Francis of Assisi in the United States, as part of St. Francis Among Us: A Pilgrimage Across America: 800 Years of Love, Faith, and Service, invites us to reflect on his extraordinary life and enduring legacy. His was a love that drew him closer to Christ, to the poor, to the wounded, and to all creation.

Eight centuries later, Francis reminds us that holiness is not a solitary practice, but a way of living, loving, and serving others in our own time.

We hope that the following reflections will help you on your journey.

FRANCISCAN FRIARS CHARITIES





I.

Where the Wounds Are Now

FRANCISCAN FRIARS CHARITIES

The wounds of Christ did not disappear when Francis came down from Mount La Verna. They are still here. They appear differently in every generation: in the person who is hungry, the family that has lost a home, the migrant who has been displaced, communities devastated by disaster, and people who are sick, forgotten, frightened or alone. Francis learned to recognize Christ in precisely these places.

His conversion was not simply that he began to believe something different about God. He began to see people differently. The person with leprosy whom he once avoided became someone he could approach, touch and embrace. The suffering of another person became his concern. Eight hundred years later, that remains at the heart of Franciscan life.



1. WHERE THE WOUNDS ARE NOW

Fr. Michael Perry, OFM, Provincial Minister of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe, has reminded the friars that "the poor are not abstract entities." They have names. They belong to families. They work and struggle and hope for something better.

It is easy to speak about poverty, migration, hunger or disaster as issues, but Francis teaches us to see humans. And once we see them, the Franciscan response is to move closer. Perry has described the Franciscan vocation as "stepping outside the boundaries". It means going to the outskirts, where people need the friars. Francis himself crossed the boundary separating him from the person with leprosy.

Pope Francis described the same movement as learning to "touch the suffering flesh of others. "One way the friars of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe put that conviction into action today is through Franciscan Friars Charities, the charitable arm of the friars.

Franciscan Friars Charities supports organizations and ministries already close to people who are suffering, helping resources reach places where they can make a tangible difference.

The particular needs change. Franciscan charity must remain attentive to the wounds opening in the world now. Where are people hungry? Who has been displaced? Where has disaster left a community struggling? Who is being forgotten? Where is human dignity being wounded? These are not only social questions for Franciscans.

They are spiritual ones.

FRANCISCAN FRIARS Charities

1. WHERE THE WOUNDS ARE NOW

Perhaps the invitation of the stigmata was never simply to look at Francis's wounds. It was to learn where to look. Christian faith makes the extraordinary claim that Christ remains present among us, particularly in those who hunger, suffer and are pushed aside.

Franciscan Friars Charities gives that belief hands and feet. A gift becomes food. A contribution becomes shelter. Compassion becomes tangible.

Love cannot remain merely an idea. It has to become flesh.

For the friars today, **Franciscan Friars Charities** is one way of making the same movement Francis made: seeing where Christ is wounded in our world and moving toward him.

Please, open your heart and make a generous gift to Franciscan Friars Charities.

Together, we can turn compassion into action and make God's love something people can actually see, feel, and experience.

That's what Franciscan love looks like!

SCAN TO MAKE A GIFT

The wounds change;
the invitation does not.





II.

A Wounded God



Christianity makes a startling claim about suffering. It does not claim that suffering is good. It claims that God has entered it. At the center of Christianity is not an explanation of human suffering but a wounded body. Christ on the cross. Hands pierced. Feet pierced. Side opened. God does not watch human pain from a safe distance. God comes close.

This seems to be what Francis understood with unusual intensity.

His conversion began with a crucifix and an encounter with a person with leprosy. Near the end of his life, the wounds of the crucified Christ appeared upon his own body.

God does not watch human pain from a safe distance. God comes close.

Between those moments was a lifetime of learning solidarity.

Francis moved closer. Closer to poverty. Closer to people who were sick. Closer to his brothers. Closer to creation.
Closer to Christ.

This is an incarnational spirituality because it insists that God is encountered in the real world.

Not only in ideas about love. In love. Not only in theories about poverty. In the person who is poor. Not only in prayers about suffering. At the bedside. At the border. At the funeral. At the table.

The incarnation tells us that God took flesh. The cross tells us how far God was willing to go in that flesh. And the resurrection tells us that wounds are not the end of the story.

All of us are wounded. Some wounds can be seen. Many cannot. We carry losses, fears, failures, betrayals and grief.

Christian faith does not require us to pretend those wounds do not exist.

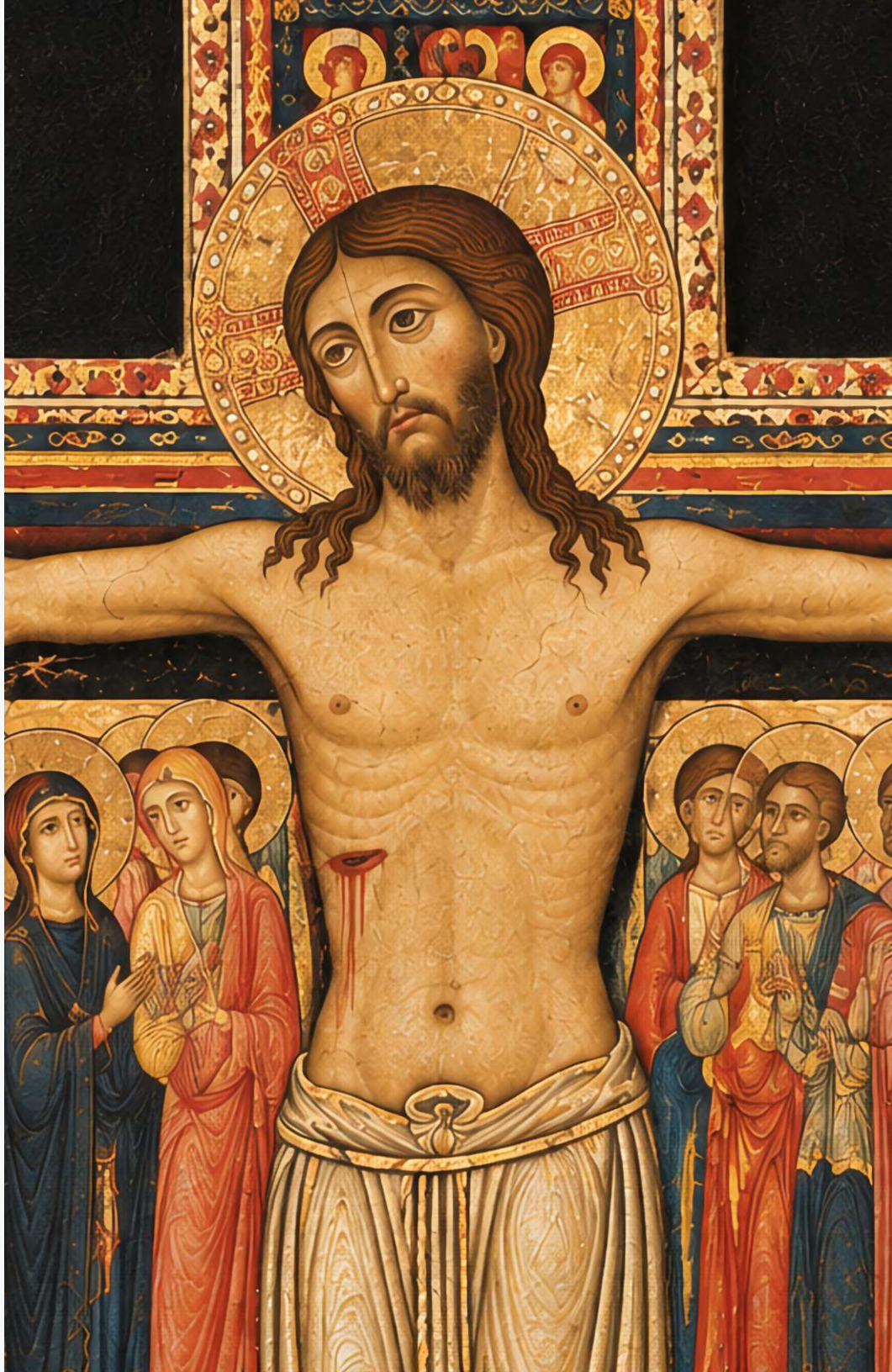
The risen Christ himself still bears wounds. Resurrection does not erase what happened. Love transforms it.

In 2026 during the 800th anniversary of Francis passing, Pope Leo XIV returned to Francis's encounter with the Crucifix of San Damiano. In his prayer for the centenary, he says Francis "recognized true peace" there in the wounded Christ and asks that we discover there the reconciliation that can break down walls.

II. A WOUNDED GOD

The wounds are not where the Christian story stops. They become places of encounter. Places where God draws close to us. Places where we can draw close to one another.

Francis points us toward a God who is not afraid of our wounds. And then he asks us to become people who are not afraid of one another's. The wounds of Christ are still before us. The question is whether we will draw near.



III.

From Many, One

THE PROVINCE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Franciscans have been beginning again for 800 years. The fraternity Francis began in the thirteenth century has crossed oceans, languages, cultures and generations. Along the way, Franciscan communities developed their own histories and traditions.

In the United States, friars eventually lived and served through several distinct provinces. They built parishes and schools, preached missions, served immigrants and Native communities, cared for people who were poor and learned what it meant to be Franciscan in particular places.

Then, in 2023, the individual U.S. Franciscan provinces became one new province: the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe. On paper, that can sound like an administrative change.

But fraternity is never merely administrative. It is about relationship.



Friars who inherited different histories are now being asked to build one future together. There is something profoundly Franciscan about that. Francis repeatedly returned to the Gospel and asked what it required now. That same question faces the friars today. What does the Gospel require now? What does poverty mean now? Who is being pushed to the margins? Where is reconciliation needed? Where does the Church need rebuilding?

The histories that formed the new province matter enormously. Becoming one does not require forgetting them.

A family becomes richer when it knows the stories of those who came before. But history is an inheritance, not a museum. We receive it so that we can do something with it.

Eight hundred years after Francis, the friars are not simply asking how to preserve what they have received. They are asking how to hand it on. What kind of fraternity does the world need today? What kind of presence among the poor? What kind of witness to peace? The friars have inherited eight centuries of Franciscan life. The work now is to begin the next 800.

History is an inheritance, not a museum.





IV.

St. Francis of Assisi

800 YEARS LATER

Eight hundred years ago, on the evening of October 3, 1226, Francis of Assisi died in a small chapel in the valley below his hometown. He was only 44 years old.

It would have been almost impossible then to imagine what would follow. Eight centuries later, Francis is Christianity's most recognizable and beloved saint.

His followers live and work around the world.

In 2026, the Church celebrated the 800th anniversary of his death.

But before he was Saint Francis, he was simply Francesco: the son of a prosperous cloth merchant in Assisi.



IV. ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Born around 1181 or 1182, Francis grew up amid war, growing commerce and a Church wrestling with wealth, power and reform. Young Francis enjoyed celebrations, fine clothes and friends. He dreamed of becoming a knight.

Then life interrupted the dream. Francis went to war, was captured and became seriously ill. Gradually, his old ambitions lost their hold on him.

His conversion did not happen all at once. There was an encounter with a person suffering from leprosy, a disease that Francis admitted he once found repulsive. But one day, instead of turning away, Francis approached and embraced him. A major veil had been lifted.

Francis had a similarly impactful encounter at a small church called San Damiano.

Praying before an image of the crucified Christ, Francis heard a call: rebuild my Church. Slowly, Francis began to understand his life differently. He gave up wealth and status and took up a life of penance. Soon others began to join him as what became called the friars minor-lesser brothers, trying to live the Gospel simply, especially among those who were poor and pushed aside.

Francis traveled and preached. He sought peace across the lines of war. He loved creation and called the sun his brother, the moon his sister and the earth his mother.

Near the end of his life, after years of contemplating the suffering of Christ, he received the stigmata, the wounds of Christ, in his own body.

IV. ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

By 1226, illness had worn him down. Francis returned to the Portiuncula, the tiny church in the valley below Assisi that he loved so much. He died there lying on the bare earth. Two years later, he was declared a saint.

But perhaps the most remarkable thing about Francis is not what happened after his death. It is the way he learned to live before it. Again and again, Francis moved closer; to God, to people who suffered, to creation, to his brothers, to the wounds of Christ.

His conversion changed what he was able to see, and whom he was willing to love. Eight hundred years later, Francis still teaches us to look at what is in front of us and to find God there.





V.

The Stigmata

WHEN LOVE LEAVES A MARK

Near the end of his life, Francis went up Mount La Verna to pray. By then, the cross had occupied his attention for more than twenty years. His conversion had begun beneath the cross at San Damiano, and he had spent his life trying to understand the cross not simply as a path to salvation, but as a manifestation of Gods radical solidarity with human suffering.

He lived among the poor. He cared for people with leprosy. He gave away possessions and status. He prayed over the suffering of Christ again and again. He looked at the wounds. And eventually, something mysterious happened.

In 1224, Francis was praying in La Verna when he experienced a vision of a six-winged seraph bearing the image of the crucified Christ. Afterward, the wounds of Jesus appeared in Francis's own body: in his hands, feet and side. These wounds became known as the stigmata.

Christians have wondered about them ever since.

What happened?

What did Francis experience?

How do we understand something so strange?

Perhaps we begin not with the wounds, but with love.

We know that what we give our attention to changes us. When you love someone who is suffering, some part of that suffering enters you. A parent carries the pain of a child. A friend leaves a hospital bedside changed. Grief shared with another can leave its mark on us, too.

Love makes another person's wounds matter to us.

Pope Francis once described the Christian vocation in startlingly physical language: Jesus asks us to "touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others." Francis spent his life doing exactly that.

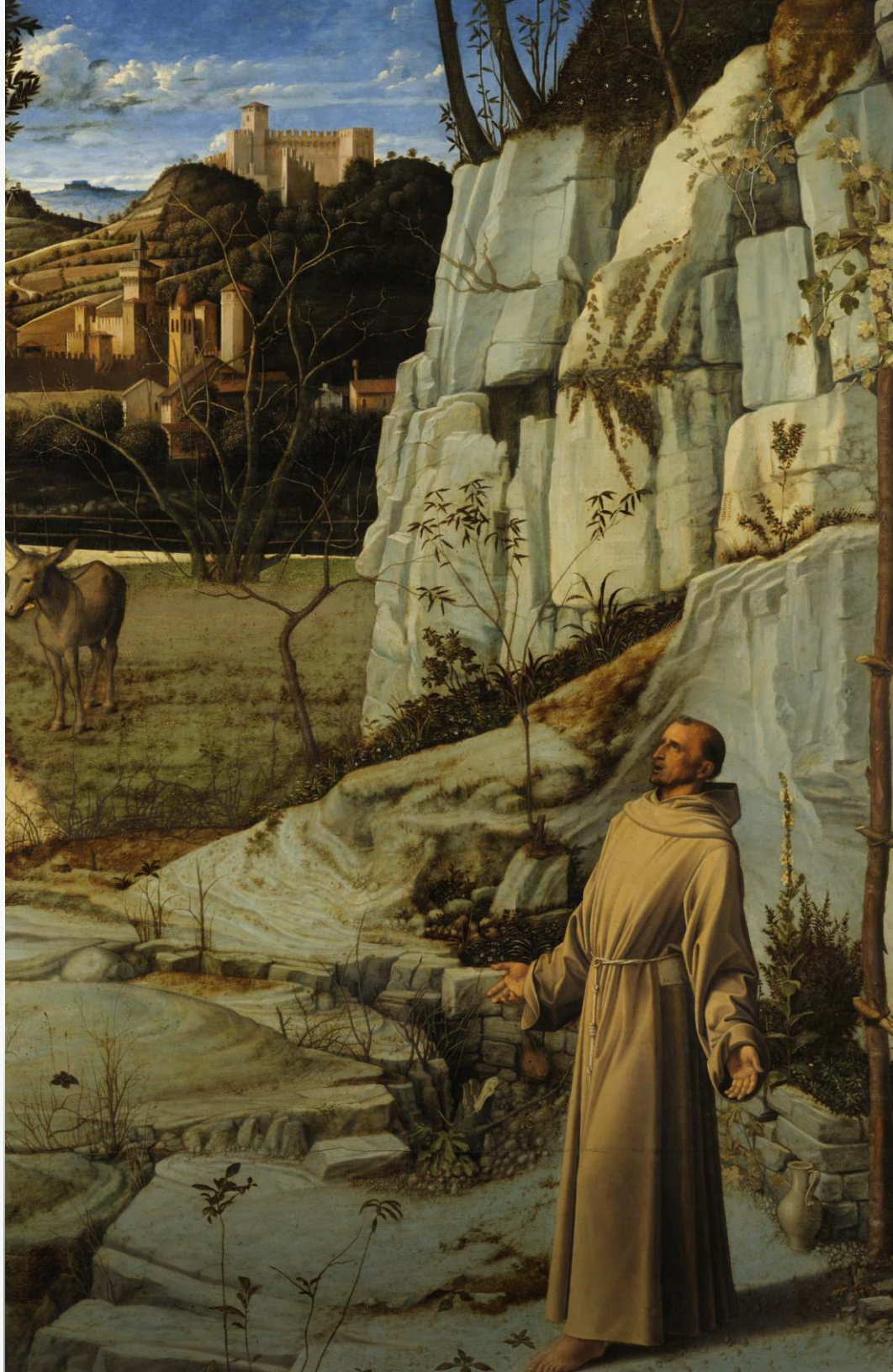
He looked at the wounds of Christ and the wounds of the people around him.

He brought his body, choices, comfort and possessions, his entire life into solidarity with them. And eventually, the wounds he contemplated appeared upon him.

The stigmata affirm how seriously Christianity takes the body. God took a body. Christ suffered in a body. Francis loved Christ with his body. And the love left a mark.

We are not all called to bear the wounds of Christ as Francis did. But anyone who has loved deeply knows something about carrying the wounds of another. If we truly look at suffering and allow ourselves to love the people who carry it, we will not remain untouched.

Love leaves a mark.





VI.

Relics

THE THINGS LOVE
CANNOT THROW AWAY



Reliquary of the Blood of Saint Francis

Relics can seem strange. A fragment of bone. A piece of cloth soaked in blood. An object someone touched hundreds of years ago. Why would Christians preserve these things? Why travel to see them? Why pray in front of them?

Perhaps the answer begins with something ordinary. Someone you love dies. Suddenly, ordinary things are no longer ordinary. A sweater in the closet. A handwritten note. A coffee mug. A watch. A pen. Before that person died, you might not have given these things a second thought.

Now you cannot bring yourself to throw them away.

Why?

Because love has made them matter.

The sweater is not the person. The pen is not the person. But they touched it. They held it. Some physical trace of a life we loved remains. The Christian instinct toward relics comes from something similar.

Christianity makes an extraordinary claim: God entered the physical world. The Word became flesh. Jesus had hands and feet. He ate. He drank. He wept. People touched him, and he touched them. His body became tired and hungry. His body could bleed.

Christianity therefore does not ask us to escape the physical world to find God. Matter can carry grace. That is why Catholic life is so physical. Water runs over the head in baptism. Oil touches skin. Bread is broken. Wine is poured. Hands are laid upon us.

And from Christianity's earliest generations, believers held on to the remains and belongings of holy people. Not because a bone is God. But because somebody we love was here.

Saint Francis walked this earth. His feet became dirty. His body became tired. He held people. He prayed. He suffered. He died. A relic collapses the distance. Eight hundred years suddenly feels less abstract. Here is something tangible. Here is a reminder that holiness did not happen in an imaginary world. It happened here, in flesh and blood, in bodies not so different from ours.

Love does not want to forget.

Love does not want to forget.

VII.

The Relics on the Road

AN ENCOUNTER ACROSS 800 YEARS

There is something wonderfully Franciscan about relics going on the road. Francis himself rarely stayed still. He walked from town to town. He entered places where people were poor or sick. He preached in churches and public squares. He crossed social, religious and geographic boundaries because he believed the Gospel had to be lived among people.

Eight hundred years later, something physically connected to his life became itinerate again. That makes this relic pilgrimage more than a historical exhibition. Of course, there is history here.

These objects connect us to a man who lived eight centuries ago and to the extraordinary events surrounding the stigmata.





VII. THE RELICS ON THE ROAD

But relics are not museum pieces. They are invitations to encounter. People will come carrying their own lives. Someone will come grieving. Someone will be sick. Someone will be worried about a child. Someone will be lonely. Someone may have stopped praying years ago and not entirely understand why they walked through the door. Someone else may simply be curious. Francis would probably understand all of them.

His own journey toward God was not neat. It involved war, imprisonment, sickness, disappointment, poverty, friendship and prayer. He discovered God not by escaping the messiness of being human but by entering it more completely.

So, the importance of bringing these relics from place to place is not simply that people get to see something associated with Francis. Francis again becomes an occasion for encounter.

For a few moments, eight centuries collapse. We stand near something tangible that connects us with a person who spent his life trying to get close to Christ.

And Francis points beyond himself. Toward the crucified Christ. Toward the poor. Toward creation. Toward one another. A relic tour succeeds not merely when many people come to see the relics. It succeeds when we leave seeing differently.



VIII.

The Next 800 Years

Eight hundred years is difficult to imagine. When Francis died in 1226, he could not have known what would become of the small fraternity gathered around him. He could not have imagined friars crossing oceans, a Franciscan Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe stretching across the United States, or his relics traveling through our world eight centuries later.

And perhaps that is the point. Francis did not know what the next 800 years would look like. He knew what was in front of him; A ruined church. A person with leprosy. A brother. A poor person. A war. A wounded Christ. And he responded with love.

As the Church marked 800 years since Francis's death, Pope Leo XIV has returned to Francis's simple greeting: "May the Lord give you peace." Our world needs that peace. Not an abstract peace. Not a polite peace that avoids difficult things. Franciscan peace gets close. It crosses boundaries. It approaches people others fear. It repairs relationships. It recognizes creation as family. It sees the wounds and does not turn away.

Love becomes flesh. Love draws near. And love keeps beginning.

Pope Leo has described this as a single movement of reconciliation: peace with God, peace among people and peace with creation belong together. He has asked Christians, in the spirit of Francis, to help "build bridges where the world raises up boundaries" and become "unarmed and disarming witnesses" of the peace of Christ.

That is as good a vision for the next 800 years as any.

We do not know what Franciscan ministry will look like centuries from now. We do not even know what the next twenty years will ask of the friars.

But we know something about love. Love becomes flesh. Love draws near. And love keeps beginning again.

Father Provincial Michael Perry once said that "the purpose of history is not just to remember what has been done." Rather, it is "an invitation to look ahead."

That may be exactly what this anniversary asks of us.
The relics will return home.
The anniversary will end.
The banners will come down.
But the invitation remains:

Love God,
Love humanity
and all of creation.





IX.

Explore the Franciscan Life

DISCOVER A BROTHERHOOD OF PURPOSE AND MEANING

From the earliest days of the public ministry of St. Francis of Assisi, men and women were drawn to his example and way of life. Inspired by his radical commitment to follow Jesus Christ, they wanted to share in his life of prayer, simplicity, fraternity, and service to the poor.

What began over 800 years ago with Francis and a handful of companions grew into a worldwide Franciscan family. Today, the Order of Friars Minor continues to offer an extraordinary way of life for men seeking something more: a deeper relationship with God, a brotherhood that gives life purpose, and a spiritual adventure filled with meaning and service. For men in the United States, the Franciscan Friars of Our Lady of Guadalupe Province offer a welcoming place to explore that calling.

Are you looking for adventure in your life? *How about joining a fraternity unlike any other?*

With more than 800 years of history, we're not your average fraternity! We are men from different backgrounds and walks of life, united by faith, fraternity, and the shared pursuit of a higher purpose.

Ours is a radical way of life rooted in service and love, following in the footsteps of St. Francis. Together, we bring our unique gifts and talents to a common mission: serving the poor and marginalized and bringing joy, hope, and God's love to people of every background. Whether providing food, shelter, companionship, or spiritual care, or teaching at one of our schools or universities, we seek to make God's goodness, love, and peace present in our world.

The foundation of our life is prayer, fraternity, and care for the poor.

Just as Francis embraced those who bore the wounds of his world, friars today seek out those who bear the wounds of ours: the poor, forgotten, and marginalized. We strive to be signs of hope, a light to those in darkness, and living instruments of the Lord's peace.

Could Franciscan Life Be Right for You?

If you are considering a vocation as a Franciscan friar, there are some basic qualifications and practices that can help you prepare for this journey.

Applicants should:

- Be a practicing Catholic—or, if a convert, have been Catholic for at least two years.
- Be a single man between the ages of 21 and 45.
- Participate regularly in the Eucharist and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation as needed.
- Be actively involved in some way with a local parish, whether as a lector, usher, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, or through another Catholic parish ministry.
- Spend time serving people who are poor or in need through a charity, soup kitchen, food pantry, or similar outreach ministry.

These qualifications reflect the importance of faith, community, and service in Franciscan life. If you feel drawn to this way of life, we invite you to begin exploring where God may be leading you.

The Journey Begins with a Conversation

Discernment is not something you have to do alone. A vocation director will accompany you, answer your questions, and help you discover whether God may be calling you to become a Franciscan friar.

On the final panel of this brochure, you will find the website, email address, and phone number for our vocation office, along with the contact information for your regional vocation director. You can also scan the QR code to connect directly with our vocation team.

Take the next step. Pray, ask questions, and remain open to where the Lord may be leading you.

Website: friars.us

Email: vocation@friars.us

Phone: 1-800-677-7788, ext. 345

If you feel called to a life of meaning, service, and love, come explore the Franciscan way.

IMAGE CREDITS

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and *serve* those most in need.

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