

“FRANCIS: MAN OF PEACE, BROTHER OF ALL”

OPENING OF THE 8TH CENTENARY OF THE TRANSIT OF SAINT FRANCIS

Papal Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Porziuncola

10 January 2025

Introduction

Words of welcome: The Custos of the Portiuncula briefly introduces the event, underlining the significance of the place (Here Francis met his Lord), the importance of the Centenary and the invitation to enter into profound spiritual communion with the Saint.

The Assembly is already present.

Presiding over the ritual, Br Francesco Piloni, Provincial Minister of the Friars Minor of Umbria and Sardinia, enters in procession with the six Ministers General. He takes his seat and the six Ministers General take their positions on either side.

Liturgy of Light

P/. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

R/. Amen.

P/. May the God of hope, who fills us with every joy and peace in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

R/. And with your spirit.

Guide: The Bishop of Assisi, H.E. Mons. Domenico Sorrentino, and the Mayor of Assisi, Walter Stoppini, walk in procession towards the Chapel of the Transit holding a candle in their hands. This gesture is full of meaning: the candle represents the light of the Risen Christ, but also the light of peace and forgiveness – a direct reference to the verse in the Cantic of the Creatures on the subject. The mayor of Assisi and Bishop Guido II were in dispute and the whole of the town was concerned. Francis sent his friars to sing the Cantic to the two rulers and so the miracle of reconciliation and harmony occurred. This event led to the addition of the verse, “Blessed are those who forgive for Your love.” It is a visible link between the centenary of the Cantic of the Creatures, which has just ended, and that of the Transit, which commences today.

Lighting of the Candle at the Chapel of the Transit: The Bishop and the Mayor proceed to the *Chapel of the Transit*, where an *Easter Candle* awaits them, the symbol of the Risen Christ and eternal life. From this candle, they will draw light.

Guide The *Icon of the Master of St Francis* is the oldest image of the Saint in the Portiuncula. Originally located in the Chapter of the Transit it is presently on display at the Sanctuary Museum. This wooden panel was the one on which Francis' mortal remains were placed and which bore him to the town of Assisi for their first burial, awaiting the construction of the Basilica which would be dedicated to him. Around 1255 the Master of St Francis was commissioned to transform the panel into a visible prayer and in the course of the centuries it became one of the most important works in the whole range of sacred art. "This was my bed, both living and dying." The inscription on the book in the hands of St Francis directs us to his profound experience of the Cross of Christ and to this panel, used many times in life as his bed and also at the moment of his blessed transit. This relic/reliquary is to be considered as a proper and true place of revelation (*locus theologicus*). The colours, the forms and the talent of the artist become a way of revealing something of the mystery of God. What is represented here of St Francis is the work of the Holy Spirit in him, a flesh transformed which allows the experience of God to emerge and the fulfilment of obedience to His will. St Francis has arrived in the Kingdom, his earthly journey is over and he shows us the goal and the fulfilment of the life in Christ.

"The icon is an image of the man in whom the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit was really present and who has put to death his passions. For this reason, his flesh is depicted quite differently from the ordinary perishable flesh of man. The icon is a sober depiction, based on spiritual experience and absolutely absent of any exaltation of a spiritual reality. If grace enlightens the whole man, so that all his spiritual, psychic and physical organism is enveloped in prayer and lives in divine light, then evidently the icon depicts this man, who has become a living icon, an image of God."

[Leonid Uspenskij painter and art historian]



Master of St Francis
 (active in Umbria in the second half of the thirteenth century)
St Francis between two angels (around 1255)
 Gold and tempera on pine wood panel. Frame:
 gold and glass on poplar wood
 Present location: Portiuncula Museum

The six stages of St Francis' legacy

Guide: Christian life is not just an individual journey, but a calling to live the Gospel together. In this time, we are called to look upon our brothers and sisters with the eyes of Christ. From this moment, we begin our spiritual journey within the Sanctuary, which will be divided into six distinct moments. A delegation will walk for us through the side aisles of the Basilica, retracing the crucial passages of the Testament that Saint Francis left to his friars before his death. These meditations, which we will experience together, will help us reflect on the spiritual legacy that the Poverello of Assisi wished to leave: a living resource for each of us today. The first moment of reflection and prayer, entitled "Mercy," will take place in the right aisle, in front of the evocative Nativity Chapel.

The assembly remains in place. At the appointed time, the President and the six Ministers General will lead the pilgrimage, moving together toward the six designated stations in the side aisles of the Basilica. Their steps, undertaken as a single delegation, inaugurate the spiritual journey on behalf of all the Franciscan Families worldwide. The assembly is called to participate in this gesture, spiritually joining in their footsteps, which mark the beginning of our shared year of grace.

Moment 1: MERCY

From the Testament of St Francis (Test 1-3)

The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, to begin doing penance in this way: when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers, and the Lord himself led me among them, and I showed them mercy. And as I was going away from them, what had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body. And afterward, I stayed a while and then left the world.

From the First Life of Thomas of Celan

[1Cel 17]

Then, as a true lover of perfect humility, the saint went amongst the lepers and lived with them, serving them in everything for the love of God. He washed their putrefied wounds and dried up the infected blood of their ulcerated sores. As he said himself in his Testament: "*When I was in my sins it seemed to me too bitter a thing even to see lepers, but the Lord led me among them and I showed mercy to them*". The sight of lepers, as he said, was at first so intolerable to him that when he was in the world, no sooner did he see their shelters, even at a distance of two miles, he would hold his nose. But look at what happened: in the time he began, by the grace and power of the Most High, to have holy and salutary thoughts, whilst he was still in the world, he met a leper, whom he forced himself to approach and kiss. From that moment he decided to despise himself more and more until by the mercy of the Redeemer he achieved complete victory.

Guide: Let us listen now to the words of Br. Armando Trujillo Cano, Minister General of the Third Order Regulars.

Intervention of Br. Armando Trujillo Cano, TOR

The saint of Assisi, who has inspired us to live the Gospel of Jesus, used the opening words of his Testament to acknowledge God's intervention in his life. It was the Lord who invited him to begin a path of penance - of conversion - with a heart capable of embracing suffering humanity, instead of ignoring or rejecting it. God had already shown him his mercy in the midst of spiritual anguish and physical illness (cf. 1 Cel3, FF 322) and by inviting him to fight a battle nobler than that of the powerful of this world (cf. 3 Soc 6, FF 1401). The Lord also invites us to overcome personal and communal resistance so that we can reach out to those who carry painful wounds in body and spirit, excluded from material, cultural, and spiritual well-being, to share with them God's consolation and the love of a community capable of becoming neighbors (cf. Lk 10:29-37). Today too we can constantly rediscover the sweetness of soul and body when we are merciful, as our Father is merciful (Cf. Lk 6:36).

Guide: To better understand and experience firsthand how this Mercy manifests and works in our lives, we will now draw upon the direct testimony of one of our sisters. Let us listen to the testimony of Dr. Francesca Di Maolo, President of the Seraphic Institute of Assisi.

Testimony of Dr. Francesca Di Maolo, President of the Seraphic Institute of Assisi

Crossing the Seraphic door of the Seraphic Institute for the first time is never easy: diversity frightens us, and the fragility of others lays us bare. It's frightening to see ourselves reflected in those wounds, because it means recognizing them within ourselves as well. It's more reassuring to delude ourselves that "it only happened to them" and feel immune.

But when you find the courage and cross that threshold, you discover that it is not suffering that awaits you. The young people marked with disabilities welcome you with a smile. The relationship with them is immediate and surprisingly simple.

You stop beside one of them: you feel their struggle, but also their joy for everything that fills their life. They don't show you their limitations, but their resources. They participate in life with their talents: they listen to music, they paint ceramics despite their stillness, letting drops of paint fall on a vase turning on the wheel. They stroll through the park pushed in their wheelchair and share every sensory experience with you: the caressing wind, the warming sun, the birdsong, the sunset that paints the sky red.

Suddenly, you're no longer a spectator of another's pain and joy: their feelings now belong to you, like their destiny. You wonder how it could have happened, and you look up: you see people alongside the children of the Serafic, feeding, caressing, supporting, dressing, consoling, and accompanying. They're not just there to work; they are hands at the service of a greater love, revealed precisely in those wounds. Discover the beauty and strength of brotherhood, which isn't an idea, but a living presence in the looks and gestures that surround you.

And it is then that you cannot take your gaze away from the eyes of the other, because you have recognized him: in the wounded face and in the one who helps him. It is in that moment that you are moved. It is in that moment that your conversion begins. You have crossed the threshold and found Him, Jesus, in your wounded brother and in those who have the privilege, every day, of serving an infinite love.

Moment 2: PRAYER

From the Testament of St Francis (Test 4)

And the Lord gave me such faith in the churches, that I simply prayed and said: *We adore you Lord Jesus Christ, here and in all the churches throughout the world and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Guide: Francis, nearing his death, left his brothers one of the gifts capable of transforming the entire human being: prayer. For him, every moment spent with God was nothing less than a constant and passionate search for a new, renewed perspective on God and others. Thus, for Francis, God becomes the whole of his life, and man is the one who needs to be enlightened, fulfilled, and transformed by His presence. This is the prayer of "a soul thirsting for its Christ," of a soul who in prayer recognizes God as Father, the Church as Mother, and all the others, brothers and sisters on the journey toward the glory of heaven. Let us listen to the experience of the Seraphic Father:

From the Second Life of Thomas of Celan

[2Cel 95]

When [...] he prayed in the woods and in solitary places, he filled the forests with groans, watered the earth with tears, beat his breast with his hand; and there, as if taking advantage of a more intimate and private place, he often conversed aloud with his Lord: he gave an account to the Judge, he beseeched the Father, he spoke to the Friend, he joked amiably with the Spouse. And to offer to God in a manifold holocaust every fibre of his heart, he considered under different aspects the One who is supremely One. Often, without moving his lips, he meditated for a long time within himself and, concentrating his external powers within, he lifted his spirit to heaven. In this way he directed all his mind and affection to the one thing he asked of God: he was not so much a man who prays, as he himself was transformed entirely into living prayer.

Guide: Let us listen now to the words of Br Carlos Alberto Trovarelli, Minister General of the Conventual Friars Minor.

Intervention of Fr. Carlos Alberto Trovarelli, OFM Conv

In the opening lines of his Testament, Saint Francis confesses the gift of faith as a free initiative of God and places his spiritual awakening in the "Churches," which are a significant theological

locus of his experience of faith. For him, these churches are not simple buildings, but sacramental signs in which he can pray and worship Christ, the Crucified One who "*with his holy cross has redeemed the world.*"

In these spaces, he discovers the praying Church and the action of the Holy Spirit, whose grace guides his mind, heart, and soul toward the experience of faith. In these spaces, even before full Eucharistic awareness, his heart learns to pray, and from this prayer flows his form of belief: *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

The liturgical acclamation, "*We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world,*" becomes for him a universal profession of faith. By adding, "*also in all your churches throughout the world,*" Saint Francis extends his adoration from the specific location to the entire Church throughout the world.

Wherever a church or a cross stands, he recognizes a humble epiphany of the Mystery and an invitation to adoration. Thus, prayer "in, with, and of" the Church becomes for Francis a hermeneutical principle of faith and a call to renew our life in the Spirit.

Symbolic gesture:

The Cross of San Damiano is placed in the *statio*.

P/. Lord, we thank you for the Holy Church. She welcomes us into a great family and accompanies us throughout our lives, allowing us to share in the gift of redemption through the sacraments. Saint Francis left us a great example of love for the Church and for all its members. As a Franciscan family, we wish to thank you for this gift with the very words of our Seraphic Father Saint Francis:

All/. We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, here and in all the churches throughout the world, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world,
Amen [FF 111]

Moment 3: FRATERNITY

From the Testament of St Francis (Test 14)

And after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the holy Gospel.

Guide: We now enter the third moment: Fraternity. Christian life is not just an individual journey, but a vocation to live the Gospel together. In this time, we are called to look at our brothers and sisters with the eyes of Christ. We have listened to the words of the Testament of Saint Francis,

which resonate like an echo of the Commandment of Love that Jesus left to his disciples, and which is well described in the Gospel of John.

Reading from the Gospel according to John

[Jn 13,1-5.12-16.34-35]

Before the festival of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end. They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garments and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. [...] When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand', he said, 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him.[...] I give you a new commandment: love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you. It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognise you as my disciples.

Guide: Let us listen now to the words of Sr. Daisy Kalamparamban, President of the International Conference of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular.

Intervention by SR Daisy Kalamparamban, CFI-TOR

For Francis, the friars are a gift from the Lord, who reveal to him his own path in life. The ideal friar is described, in the first place, as one in whom ardent love and fervent zeal must dwell. He said that a good Friar Minor would be one who united in himself the life and faith of Bernard, who perfected this together with love of poverty and simplicity; the purity of Leo; the courtesy of Angelo, which he adorned with every kindness and goodness; the attractive appearance and common sense of Masseo, with his beautiful and devout speech; the contemplation of Giles; the virtuous and incessant prayer of Rufino[...]; the patience of Juniper, through the renunciation of his own will and with the ardent desire to imitate Christ by following the way of the cross, etc.

For Francis, the perfect friar would be the living sum of all these aspects of the same vocation. Thus St. Francis invites us to let ourselves be overwhelmed by Christ, to enter into a relationship with him in a multiplicity of interpersonal relationships teaching us that true richness is found in love, and in sharing and gratitude for the gift of fraternal life. His example helps us to look at the world with new eyes, recognizing in every creature the reflection of a greater love, and rediscovering universal brotherhood and living in harmony with all.

Guide: The Gospel reminds us that mutual love is the hallmark of those who follow Christ. Not a generic love, but a love that becomes service, acceptance, and forgiveness. Now, we want to translate this New Commandment into a simple yet powerful gesture. Let us offer one another, with simplicity, the sign of peace, committing ourselves to building together that unity that is joyful and sweet. It is the act of recognizing in the other, beside us, a brother or sister loved by God.

Symbolic Gesture: Exchange of sign of peace among all the faithful.

Moment 4: WORK

From the Testament of St Francis (Test 20)

And I worked with my hands and I want to work; and I firmly want all the other brothers to work at a job that is befitting honesty.

Guide: For Saint Francis, the opportunity and ability to work are important elements in a journey of universal brotherhood. Work provides dignity and sustenance to those who perform it with honesty and professionalism, but it should also be considered a privileged means of contributing to the common good and reaching out to others. Working also prevents us from wasting our days in idle activities that can become a source of distress for our lives and the entire community.

From the Second Letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians (PORTUGUESE) [2Ts 3,6-15]

We instruct you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to shun any brother who conducts himself in a disorderly way and not according to the tradition they received from us. For you know how one must imitate us. For we did not act in a disorderly way among you, nor did we eat food received free from anyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you. Not that we do not have the right. Rather, we wanted to present ourselves as a model for you, so that you might imitate us. In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat. We hear that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others. Such people we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food. But you, brothers, do not be remiss in doing good. If anyone does not obey our word as expressed in this letter, take note of this person not to associate with him, that he may be put to shame. Do not regard him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother.

Guide: Let us listen now to the words of Tibor Kauser, Minister General of the Secular Franciscan Order.

Intervention of Tibor Kauser, OFS

Work is a gift, working is a grace. “*The Lord has granted us the grace of working*” (RB Cap V: FF 88). All those who have it “*should consider work a gift and a participation in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community*” – says our Rule (OFS Rule 16). Only those who have suffered from its absence can truly appreciate it. Therefore, we must do everything that helps every person have a job, because “*men and women are nourished by work: through work they are “anointed with dignity*” (Pastoral Visit of the Holy Father Francis to Genoa, meeting with the world of work, Address of the Holy Father at the Ilva Plant, Saturday, 27 May 2017).

This is not a privilege of the few, but the duty of all: helping men and women to have dignified work, to be able to support their families. Because “*through work, man habitually provides for his own sustenance and that of his family, communicates with others, renders a service to his fellow men, and can practice true charity and actively collaborate in the completion of divine creation*” (GS 67). All of us who work must be aware that by the way we work, we set an example and not only ward off idleness (cf. FF 119), but we are God's collaborators in creation. What a grace it is to work together with God! We work with our hands, our minds, our hearts, while God works on us. In this way, “*by working we become more human, our humanity flourishes, young people become adults only through working*” (Dilexi te, 115). If we do this, and offer our work to God, we participate in Christ's own redemptive work (cf. GS 67). And this is our task and our duty: nothing more, nothing less.

Guide: The Christian vocation translates into concrete work and service, and to experience firsthand the love expressed through dedication, we will now draw on the direct testimony of one of our brothers. Let us listen carefully to the witness of Carlo Bennato Lauro, an IRC teacher.

Testimony of Carlo Bennato Lauro, IRC teacher

Franciscans. Holy Scripture and the writings of St. Francis present work as a grace, in which we are called to collaborate with God's creative action. All work, whether manual or otherwise, possesses this beauty, and if performed with commitment, honesty, and for the common good (Centesimus Annus 31), it becomes increasingly part of our personal identity.

In my profession as a secondary school religion teacher and as a Secular Franciscan, I experience teaching as a gift, giving it back with passion and sacrifice for the benefit of my students. I have been teaching for twenty years, and going around schools, I have encountered many different situations, with both challenging and comforting experiences, but each has enriched my formation in living out teaching as a mission. What matters is not just transmitting the content of the subject matter, but also combining it with seeds of love, hope, and trust.

Today, after several years of experience, I see growing loneliness, disorientation, individualism, and isolation among young people. We need to awaken them from this torpor by offering them closeness and affection, but also firmness, to help them discover their identity. How many young people do I encounter with family problems that increase their discomfort and loneliness, or with overbearing parents who increase their children's anxiety?

Faced with these realities, one can feel lost and helpless, and I admit that I often feel this way, but one cannot give up. Surrender cannot get the better of love, even if it's just to offer a drop of friendship, a listening ear, and trust, and the kids sense this.

I remember an experience in a school where the students refused to take the subject, so I decided to start from the basic principles of listening, respect, and friendship. Everyone has the task of sowing goodness with their own responsible commitment, and as St. Francis reminds us, work as a grace must be lived with "fidelity and devotion" (Rb 5:1), that is, with love and faith. I give thanks to God, the good and provident Father, who has granted me this gift.

Moment 5: PEACE

From the Testament of St Francis (Test 23)

The Lord revealed to me that we should use this greeting: "May the Lord give you peace!"

Guide: Peace is a gift from God, but it also requires our commitment. It's not enough to pray for it: we must seek it and build it up every day. Saint Francis understood this well and made peace part of his mission, bringing it to divided people, praying for cities in conflict, and opening himself to dialogue with everyone, even the Sultan. Peace is born from a reconciled heart guided by the Spirit; it is founded on truth, justice, love, dialogue, reconciliation, and freedom. Francis understood that Jesus gives us his peace, different from that of the world, and that he calls us to be its artisans: men and women who, with simple, everyday gestures, build fraternity, forgiveness, and hope. This is why he entrusts us with his will:

From the Leggenda of the Three Companions [3Comp 58] It was his earnest desire that both he and the friars should abound in those good works by which the Lord is praised. And he said to them: "The peace that you proclaim with your mouths, have it even more abundantly in your hearts. Do not provoke anyone to anger or scandal, but let all be drawn to peace, goodness and harmony by your Meknes."

Guide: Let us now listen to the words of Br. Roberto Genuine, Minister General of the Capuchin Friars Minor.

Intervention of Br Roberto Genuin, OFM Cap

In his *Testament*, Francis recalls the mission he received from the Lord: “The Lord revealed to me that we should use this greeting: ‘May the Lord give you peace.’” It is much more than a wish or a formal greeting; it is a program of life and a commitment to evangelization. At the beginning of his new life, we find Francis, right here at the Porziuncola, attending Mass, hearing the Gospel message of the disciples being sent out to preach, carrying the greeting of peace wherever they went. He immediately asks the priest to explain the word he had heard and exclaims: “*This is what I want, this is what I ask, this is what I long to do with all my heart!*” The greeting and proclamation of peace are a mandate entrusted to the disciples, to the Church—a mandate Francis feels incumbent on himself and passes on to us—and they are also the greeting of the Risen Christ addressed to the disciples at a time when they were “closed in fear,” combining this greeting with the task of reconciliation. This is the key to building peace: the courage of forgiveness, reconciliation, and mercy. Francis is the bearer of a gift that comes from above, from the Lord, and he is aware of being its channel. Let us too learn to be agents and bearers of peace, especially when the evangelical courage is needed when confronted with *apparent futility*.

A map of the world, symbolizing the human family and our common home, is carried by five young people representing the greater Franciscan Family and the five continents of the world. As this map of the world is placed in a place of honor, the flags of the countries currently suffering from war and conflict will also be borne.

Guide: “Love your enemies,” says the Lord, is a demanding commandment, a narrow but authoritative path to peace. We often find ourselves fragile, incapable of truly loving. Yet, as Dorothy Day reminds us, even when our hearts seem empty, even when we believe we have no love to give, we just need to try, persevere, desire: love, from pretending it, becomes reality. Those who choose to love soon learn to truly love.

Today, as our eyes see images of war and pain, we want to lift our gaze and dream of peace. We want to believe that gestures of kindness and reconciliation can rebuild wounded humanity. Let us then unite our hearts and our voices in a single prayer to the Lord, that he may grant us peace, true peace, born of love.

With the words of the Church, together, let us pray:

Symbolic gesture: Reading the prayer for peace.

Moment 6: BLESSING

Guide: May the Lord bless you and keep you! What a joy to hear these words about one's own life; what a gift to be able to address them to another. Do we know how to bless our own story and that of others with sincerity and serenity? The secret of Saint Francis's life was Jesus Christ, poor and crucified. He is the criterion, He is the one who teaches us to purify our hearts and our gaze upon all that exists, because it was created by an act of immense Love. Every living being is unique and unrepeatable. Every existence carries within itself a seed of light to bless and illuminate the entire world.

From the Testament of St Francis (Test 40-1)

And whoever observes these things, may he be filled in heaven with the blessing of the Most High Father, and on earth with the blessing of his beloved Son, with the Most Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and with all the powers of heaven and with all the saints. And I, little Brother Francis, your servant, for the little I can do, confirm for you this most holy blessing within and without.

From the Second Life of Thomas of Celan

[2Cel 216]

Then the saint raised his hands to heaven, glorifying his Christ because he could freely approach him without any hindrance. But to demonstrate that in all things he was a perfect imitator of Christ his God, he loved his brothers and sons, whom he had loved from the beginning to the very end. He called together all the brothers present in the house and, seeking to soothe the grief they felt at his death, exhorted them with paternal affection to the love of God. He dwelt at length on the virtue of patience and the obligation to observe poverty, recommending the Holy Gospel above all other norms. Then, while all the brothers were around him, he stretched out his right hand over them and placed it on the head of each one, beginning with his vicar: "Farewell," he said, "all of you, my children! Live in the fear of the Lord and keep yourselves in it always! And since the hour of trial and tribulation approaches, blessed are those who persevere in what they have undertaken! For I hasten to God and entrust you all to his grace." And he also blessed all the brothers present, wherever they were in the world, and all who would come after them until the end of time.

Guide: Let us listen now to the words of Br Massimo Fusarelli, Minister General of the Friars Minor.

Intervention of Br Massimo Fusarelli, OFM

Dear sisters and brothers,

In his Testament, shortly before taking leave of his brothers, Francis leaves his followers the words of blessing we have just heard.

The Blessing is the spiritual testament that Francis leaves us. Reflecting on his way of blessing, the word most familiar to us is the one addressed to Brother Leo: "May the Lord show you his face and give you peace." Blessing—speaking good to affirm it and make it bear fruit—is a gift from above that asks to become flesh through the practice of good. The primacy of good is at the heart of the Franciscan vision of life. Our world, in God's eyes, is good. This anthropological and creative optimism does not foster a naive attitude toward darkness but rather draws us into life more fully and invites us to bring out the good inherent in every creature. Francis recognizes in blessing the very presence of God, who is the Good, all Good, the Supreme Good. In this centenary year, let us welcome Francis's blessing as an invitation to become a blessing for the world ourselves.

Guide: When we speak of blessing, we mean precisely that constant flow of love and goodness that God pours into our lives and into the world. To better understand and experience firsthand how this blessing manifests and works in our lives, becoming a sign of hope and a source of joy, we will now draw upon the direct testimony of one of our sisters, Sister Maria Benedetta of the Convent of Santa Lucia in Foligno.

Testimony of Sr. Maria Benedetta, OSC, of the Santa Lucia convent in Foligno (Italy)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him in love."

(Eph 1,3-4)

This Word, which the Liturgy of the Hours proposes to us every week, has long challenged me, accompanied me, and dug deep, in the wonder of recognizing myself within that blessing of God. Yes, from the very beginning He has spoken well of me in my life! And He fulfills what He says, because He is faithful to His Word! I have become increasingly aware of this, with wonder and gratitude, recognizing His faithfulness and experiencing it in my life.

On a particular occasion, within a significant relationship that had known years of suffering and separation, reconciliation was taking place. It was a moment the Lord had prepared down to the smallest, I would say infinitesimal, detail. At that moment, those present suggested I ask for a blessing. As soon as I received it, I offered it in return.

In tracing on the forehead that sign of the cross, I felt not only the untying, but the dissolving of all those knots accumulated over the years. From that moment, a new and healing relationship began.

Blessing is a free gift. And it is precisely this gratuitousness that allows me to give it to everyone and, above all, to bless God, because He alone is faithful.

Conclusion and final blessing

The culmination of the journey will be the Porziuncola, which in this context takes on the meaning of an "empty tomb," similar to that of Jesus. This powerful gesture bears witness to the Easter experience experienced by Francis, his full adherence to Christ, and our calling to be heirs of this experience of death and resurrection.

Guide: This opening rite is not just a commemoration, but an immersive experience that invites each participant to make the Testament of Saint Francis their own, bringing the values of poverty, fidelity, fraternity, honest work, peace, and blessing to the world, in the spirit of a man who was and continues to be *"a man of peace, brother to all."* Let us now listen to the closing remarks of His Excellency Monsignor Domenico Sorrentino.

Intervention of H.E. Mons. Domenico Sorrentino, Bishop of the Diocese of Assisi– Nocera Umbra – Gualdo Tadino and Foligno

"Behold, Father, I leave the world and go to Christ" (1Cel 220: FF 815). As soon as Francis died, he thus addressed in a dream, his bishop, Guido II, who was stopping in Benevento on his way back from a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Saint Michael in Gargano. Guido had welcomed him into his home between August and September, before the Saint decided to descend to the Porziuncola for his last breath. These were days of intimacy between the bishop and the Seraphic Father, who the previous year had facilitated his reconciliation with the mayor of Assisi. Guido certainly would not have set out on the pilgrimage without the encouragement of the Saint, a devoted devotee of Saint Michael. During those summer months of 1226, the bishop's residence was the Saint's infirmary and a shared home, the place of a true spiritual family, between Bishop Guido, Francis, and his sons. In that same bishop's residence, twenty years earlier, when he died to the world for Christ, another bishop, Guido, had acted as a father to him. The Saint himself recalls this: *"At the beginning of my new life, when I separated from the world and my earthly father, the Lord placed his word on the lips of the Bishop of Assisi. For this reason [...] I want to love, venerate, and consider as my lords not only the bishops, but also the humble priests."* (CAss 58: FF 1586). Words that echo in the Testament (FF 112-113). Teach us again, Francis, in this special year, love for Jesus, our naked and crucified Lord, and love for the Church, his Bride and our Mother.

Concluding words. The Bishop and the Ministers, stretching out their arms before the Portiuncula say:

The Lord be with you.

The people reply:

And with your spirit.

The Bishop and Ministers bless the people:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

R/. Amen.

May he make his face shine for you and be gracious to you.

R/. Amen.

May he turn his countenance towards you and grant you his peace!

R/. Amen.

And may the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit descend upon you and remain with you forever.

R/. Amen.