

St Francis and places of prayer and celebration

It seems appropriate that a man with a developing love of poverty should find himself in a ruin of a church. He understood his call was to rebuild the church, which given the state of the building was a reasonable assumption to make. Francis was to recognise that rebuilding the Church was the whole Church not just a church building.

Francis' rebuilding of San Damiano, Assisi, was early in his conversion and led to him effectively stealing from his father and selling materials to fund the restoration. Francis appeared before the Bishop of Assisi and Francis was to repay the money, renounce his inheritance and strip off his clothes. The bishop intervened and covered Francis with his cloak. Francis was to sever all contact with his father. This was a turning point for Francis and in his conversion..

Francis continued with the restoration work and eventually San Damiano would become the sanctuary for Clare who with her followers were to follow the life of poverty. San Damiano was owned by the Benedictine's and agreed with Francis that the church could be used by Clare and the Poor Clare's as this Franciscan Order would be called.

The site San Damiano has Christian roots going back to around the 5th century. There was medieval restoration around the 10th -12 century with it being used as a monastery for St Clare and her sisters from 1211-1257.



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Francis was involved in some refurbishment at St Peter's, and was later to move with his followers to Saint Maria degli Angel, (Mary of the Angels) which also required some renovation.

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This chapel is called the Church of the Portiuncula (meaning "Little portion of land") The Porziuncola had been in the hands of the Benedictines for centuries and was offered to Francis in 1208.

'Francis made the Porziuncola the headquarters of his Order while refusing to accept ownership of it from the Benedictines. Francis settled on presenting the Benedictines a yearly rent of a basket of fish, thereby feeling comfortable about using the chapel and the huts the friars built around it.' (Franciscan Penance Library)

While Francis was in the Holy Land, the brothers started to build a monastery next to the Porziuncola. Francis climbed up the new building and started to dismantle it, 'He began wildly throwing the stones to the ground' For Francis this was an affront to the mother church of the Lady Poverty.

What Francis would think of the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi constructed between 1569-1669? It is the 7th largest Christian Church, 176 meters long and 76 meters high, compared with the older chapel which was only a fraction of the size of the Basilica.

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The original Porziuncola is now located under the dome of the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi. A church within a church.

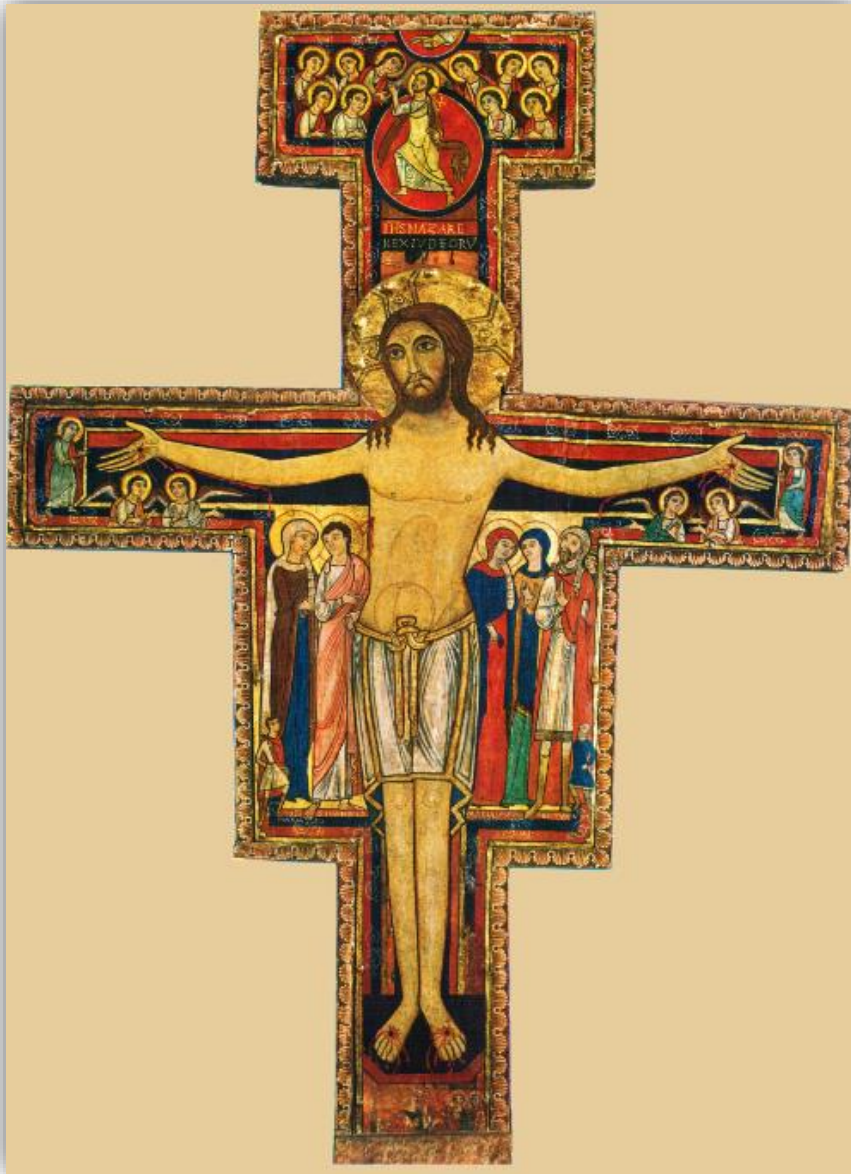
It is a far cry from the 13th century simple chapel which was the place of daily prayers and Mass for Francis and the brothers.

What has happened in Assisi happened across Europe, large cathedrals were built. England has many magnificent church buildings, it's as if it is in our make-up to build to the 'Glory of God'. Solomon had a similar idea 1000's of years earlier as did a certain King Herod; they built / re-built the Temple in Jerusalem.

We will have our own views on this architectural heritage and its

importance and contribution to the spiritual life of people. We may be moved by the buildings and stand in awe or on the other hand give them a nod of recognition and leave it at that.

For Francis the original Porziuncola was important as a place to gather for prayer and to celebrate the sacraments. There are accounts of his views on the importance of cleanliness of the fabric of the building, he would if needed sweep the church himself. Where possible he would attend Mass daily, while Francis was not a priest, priests did become brothers which made daily Mass part of daily life of the community.



The Cross of San Damiano played a significant part in Francis' spiritual development.

Find your favourite space for this time of prayerful reflection

light a candle and look upon the San Damiano cross.

Slow down, breathe calmly, be comfortable and relax.

Set aside 10 minutes or more

Sense the presence of God in this stillness.

Prayer does not always require words

Recall Jesus' words about using many words.

'And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.' (Matt.6:7)



Our opening prayer

Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart
and give me true faith,
certain hope, and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge,
Lord, that I may carry out
Your holy and true command.

Amen

(The Anglican Society of St Francis)

 **YouTube** **Glory and Praise to Our God** by John Michael Talbot

https://youtu.be/-iRqiS6fcqw?si=a_qZm-JCkcbypqPX&t=8

Verses from Luke and Matthew

Two very different accounts of Jesus at the Temple.

. . . when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, (Simeon) took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, also light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." (Luke 2:27-32)

Then Jesus went into the temple [a]of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.' " (Matthew 21:12-13)

Pause

If you attend church spend some time reflecting on your experiences and expectations of being in church.

What do you find most attractive about churches?

What is the least attractive about churches?

What do you hope to find when you attend church?

Finally think of a time when being in church moved you

Let us pray in confidence using the words of Saviour gave us:

This prayer formed the basis of daily prayer for the early brothers, who could not read or write. They would say the 'Paternoster', the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil. Amen



Forgiveness and Peace by the Poor Clare Sisters Arundel -

https://youtu.be/fRptXWOEWC4?si=0xBKg_p33WPCjXUm

The closing words attributed to St Francis

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Fr Derek Akker

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(Derek is a retired Anglican Parish Priest and a member of the congregations of All Saints & St James. Prior to his ordination he was accredited as a Methodist Preacher in 1968 and served within the Methodist Church until returning to the Anglican Church in the mid 1980's)

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Image - San Damiano cross - Unknown author - Public domain