

From Fr. Melvin:

Blessed greetings!

In this three part column, I will share an experience on my Sabbatical Retreat that took place in Assisi, Italy. Covering five days, this experience not only included a conference speaker, daily Mass, sacrament of Reconciliation, Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, but also sights of notable significance in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. Here, I will share the Basilica of Santa Maria Degli Angeli. From my photos, you see its façade, the Sanctuary, and nearby chapel the Porziuncola. Here is where the beloved St. Francis walked, formed his order the Franciscans, and received the mystical word from Jesus, our Lord. In fact, Francis died here in 1226 thereby rendering a solemn walk-thru uplifted in prayer, and in peaceful reflection of his many contributions to the Church and the Franciscan religious order.

From the photo taken at the front of the basilica, one notices the beaming gold of St. Mary atop the church. Her halo of 12 stars is a typical feature in her pose of open arms and fittingly looking down upon a world of people. Outlining its frontal sculptures are Archangels or angels and other images reflecting the heavenly abode. Further behind one notices the beautiful dome that rests above the Porziuncola; a Renaissance bell-tower (not shown) is off to the right of the dome.

The **Porziuncola** is fittingly Francis' call to order with the Franciscans who congregated in this small space. It was built well before this basilica and where special graces were bestowed upon Francis and so was called to restore it. Later, it would take its permanent space inside this grand basilica. From my text, Art and History - Assisi, the Porziuncola was the third church Francis restored which came as a "result of hearing the voice of the Crucifix of San Damiano" (pg.108). Our group took up Mass in here, and I must say it was a spiritual feeling of peace while thinking of what a Franciscan was called to do and follow along the footsteps of such a chosen man who heard the voice of the Lord! Inside are the time-honored paintings including the Miracle of the Roses where Francis is accompanied by two angels as he goes to this little chapel, and the Apparition of Christ and the Madonna where many angels appear with Francis kneeling before the altar (108). According to Franciscan testimony, it was here that an indulgence, the *Pardon of Assisi* took place, a bestowed grace from Jesus approved by Pope Honorius III (1216-1227). In fact, Francis said: "See to it, my brothers that you never leave this place; if you are thrust out on one side, enter again by the other; for truly this place is holy and the dwelling of Christ and the Virgin His Mother" (106). To think that we priests knelt here where he did himself giving thanks to the Lord; truly, something very mystical was at work here and Francis left his memory here.

In the third photo, I share my angled view of the Sanctuary, its beautiful mosaic windows, the pulpit, and the many steps toward the altar. Interestingly, surrounding either side of this vast basilica are chapels under various names such as *the Stigmata*, *Madonna of the Rosary*, *the Nativity*, *St. John the Baptist*, *St. Anne*, and *St. Pius V*. I took more photos of the interior, but these were chosen so you have some memory of what Francis left behind: a legacy of humility and charity.

St. Francis of Assisi, pray for us!

