

Slide 1 Title Page

Slide 2 Assisi

As you approach the city it seems almost magical. At sunset the entire town appears to have rose-colored hue on all the stone buildings. It is dreamlike, peaceful and seems to invite a visitor to praise God for the beauty of the land.

As we look at this beautiful picture of Assisi, it is important for us to understand what it was like in the time of Francis. The city was often threatened with war.

A new merchant class was rising, and this class was acquiring wealth and power and threatened the long-established power of the nobility.

Looking at this picture we can see up on the hill overlooking the city, the Rocca Maggiore. The Rocca was a fortress used to protect the city against invaders. But it was a possession of the nobility.

Slide 3 View from Rocca

Within Assisi there was a fight for control of the Rocca and it was partially destroyed. The city was crowded in the time of Francis and while some people were getting richer, others were getting poorer.

Slide 4 Side Street

Assisi was a city of contrasts. In the book *Sun and Moon over Assisi* Straub writes this about the medieval times in Assisi.

“Life was hard...more brutal, more exciting, more dangerous, more mysterious, more glorious, more ritualistic than anything we can imagine. Each day presented new battles requiring fresh heroism.”ⁱ This was life in the city in 1181/1182 when Francis was born.

Slide 5 Peter Bernardone and the Lady Pica

Francis's father was named Peter, the son of the merchant Bernardone and was absorbed in making money. On the other hand, his mother, Pica, was a gentle woman; and like another Elizabeth, she gave birth to her son in the absence of his father who had gone to France on business. She wished the child to be called John and on the very day of his Baptism a pilgrim stopped at the door to beg. Having received alms from the maid, the stranger said to her: "I beg

you to show me the child born today, for I greatly wish to see him." The maid answered that this was impossible, but the pilgrim insisted he would stay until he could see the child. The maid was annoyed and went back into the house. When Lady Pica heard what had happened, she told the maid to show the child to the stranger. When this was done, the pilgrim took the baby into his arms and with great joy, as Simeon once had taken the infant Jesus, said, "Today two children have been born in this city; this one will be among the best of humanity, and the other among the worst."

When Peter returned from France, he insisted that his son be called Francis after the country he had just visited

Slide 6 Early Years Slide San Rufino

Construction on the Cathedral began in 1140 and was not yet completed at the time of Francis' birth. It houses a small oratory that has relics of San Rufino who was the patron of Assisi. Rufino was martyred in 238. It was in this Church that Francis was presumably baptized.

Slide 7

Off to the side you can see a small door that marks the site of the Offreduccio house. Clare too was baptized in the baptismal font now housed at San Rufino.

Slide 8 Santa Maria sopra Minerva

It is possible that they were both baptized at Santa Maria Sopra Minerva located in the Piazza Comune or the main square in Assisi, but the baptismal font is now here at San Rufino. When we look at both Francis and Clare we can see how they embodied and in-fleshed their baptismal call to holiness.

Slide 9 San Giorgio

When Francis was eight years old he went to his parish school San Giorgio, now the Basilica of Santa Chiara. It was here that Francis got his very basic education. The first priority was to teach the boys the essentials of faith, to get an introduction to the Bible and begin to learn Latin. How well he did is unclear, but we know that he used a secretary for his own writings and one

way to identify writings in his own hand is because early biographers wrote that Francis use falsum latinum. Terrible Latin!!!

One can picture him as a young boy, fooling around, light hearted, waiting for time off. This Church of San Giorgio was also the place where his body was taken after his death and he was buried here until the completion of the great Basilica of St. Francis located at the other end of the city.

Slide 10 Lord of the Revels: Francis was chosen as leader of his band of friends

Francis grew to be quite the young man of Assisi. He dreamed of romance and becoming a soldier. He was chosen to be the leader! His friends often experienced his sense of freedom. They knew he would pay for any expenses and so they did whatever he wished so that they might fill their bellies with fine food and wine for Francis prepared wonderful banquets followed by drunken singing in the streets.

Slide 11 Francis is off to Perugia and to the Battle of Collestrada in 1202

At 14 years of age, Francis followed his father's footsteps and became a member of the merchants' guild, which marked his formal entrance in the civic life of Assisi.

Within 2 years he was deeply involved in the revolt against the nobility. The conflict turned violent and culminated in 1198 with destruction of the Rocca Maggiore fortress that overlooked the city.

In 1202 when Francis was 20, Assisi went to war with the city of Perugia. The battle was brutal and there were many casualties. Francis participated in the opening battle at Ponte San Giovanni where he endured the humiliation of being taken prisoner. Assisi was conquered.

Slide 12 Perugia: Imprisoned for one year

Because of his class, Francis was imprisoned was among the nobles.

Life in prison was hard and during his imprisonment, Francis suffered a series of illnesses and grew weak. While the harsh, filthy conditions in the underground dungeon took their toll on his body, Francis's spirit remained strong. Eventually, his delicate health crumbled, and he became very ill with either malaria or some type of fever. He was in a battle for his own life.

His father paid the required ransom to release seriously ill prisoners and liberated his son.

Francis returned home to Assisi, a sick and defeated man.

Prison and illness brought Francis face to face with his own limits and forced him to take a deeper look at himself and the meaning of life.

Slide 13 He began to see things differently

When Francis returned from Perugia he resumed his life of business and pleasure. Soon after he fell ill and was spending long weeks in bed. He found himself beginning to think differently.

When he was able to venture out of doors he realized that the things that he really enjoyed before did not give him the same pleasure. He still wanted to be famous and wanted to be a knight, so he joined the Papal army to fight in the Crusades. Along the way he encountered a knight who was poorly clothed, and Francis exchanged his expensive armor with the armor of the poor knight. Later, in Spoleto he had a dream. In the dream God asked Francis where he was going. He answered to fight in Apulia. "Tell me" the voice in his dream said: "Who is it better to serve, the master or the servant." Francis replied, "the master" and the voice said, "then why are you following the servant?" Francis asked Lord "what would you have me do?" "Return to Assisi. There it will be revealed to you what you are to do." The next morning Francis returned to Assisi. Remember that he was a bit of a show off and remarkably he was not embarrassed by returning to Assisi before he had even had a chance to fight in the Crusades. But he was a changed man.

Slide 14 He wondered at the Change within

Change is always hard, Francis was remaking himself, moving from a spoiled and self-indulgent man to someone whose entire life was about to become an act of imitating the Christ. This drastic conversion of Francis is well known to us. We are all called to conversion daily, called to refocus. That is what Francis was doing.

Francis now knew that his life was about to change drastically but he didn't know where God was leading him. Instead he began to rely on God to show him the way. He wanted to hear God's voice again and so he prayed fervently seeking direction.

Slide 15 Francis slide

He began spending long periods of time in prayer and his solitude grew deeper and deeper, adjusting his focus, his priorities. Seeking guidance.

Slide 16 The Caves: Conversion

Francis found something in his cave, something so profound and startling that his whole life was changed. Within him stirred an awareness of another presence. The presence came slowly at first with anxious days in between wondering if it would ever return. Then one day, it stayed and never left again.

Somewhere in the questioning...What am I to do? Francis arrived at the cavern within himself.

Francis lay exhausted on the earthen floor. Opening his eyes slowly, aware that he was no longer alone, he raised himself and stumbled to the entrance of the cave. He heard the Angelus from far off San Pietro. His heart leapt...he was changed...and he was frightened.

Francis returned to this cave often. The empty darkness became the vessel of God's flowing love. Suddenly it was no longer cold and dark...but warm, for Francis was in the hands of his God.

Slide 17 San Lazzaro/ La Maddelena

When we spend time with God, time looking at the very fiber of our hearts, we too begin to see things differently. We tend to respond to things rather than react. Francis himself was very clear about the great distaste and fear he had for lepers before his conversion. They were not a pretty sight to behold and there was a terrible stench that came from their decaying skin. Lepers were forced to live outside of the city walls and wear a bell or a clapper around their neck so that people would know that they were coming. Francis would run very quickly in the opposite direction when he heard that bell. However, during his time of conversion, he came upon a leper and his first reaction was to run. But immediately he changed his mind, He was on horseback, he dismounted, approached the leper, gave him some coins and embraced him. Some sources say he kissed him. At that moment he felt completely changed. In his words "that which was bitter became sweet. After that he began to visit the lepers and care for them and even live with them from time to time. He experienced a new sense of freedom by embracing that which he most feared.

Slide 18 The Bishop's Palace

When those who knew him, saw him, they noted the change and called him mad and demented. Francis turned a deaf ear and turned this persecution into a prayer of thanks to God.

When the news reached his father, he immediately joined those in the crowd, but he did not defend Francis. He dragged him shamelessly home and shut him in a dark place hoping to break his spirit. Francis only became more and more ready to carry out his purpose.

Francis's father left home on business. His mother spoke kindly to Francis and when she saw he could not be persuaded from his purpose, moved by compassion, she let him go free. When his father returned he was enraged. He went out to find Francis but not to bring him back but rather to drive him from Assisi.

He brought Francis before Bishop Guido II so that, renouncing all his possessions into his hands, he might give up everything he had. Francis not only did not refuse but he was joyful in what was demanded of him. He did not speak. Rather, he began undressing, taking off his clothes and casting them aside. He gave them back to his father stood before naked and said, "From now on I can say without reserve Our Father who art in heaven..."

Bishop Guido sensed Francis's sincerity. He arose, embraced him and covered him with his mantle.

Bishop Guido later became his helper, a cherished friend and confidant. He who once wore fine garments, now went about clad in complete poverty.

Slide 19 San Damiano

Even with this new sense of freedom, Francis still no real direction. One day in the spring of 1206 Francis was walking along and stopped to pray at the Church of San Damiano before a wooden Crucifix.

Slide 20 San Damiano inside

It was in this place that Francis of Assisi heard God giving him direction. Francis, Go rebuild my house, which is falling to ruins"

When he heard that mandate, he looked around, saw a building that was falling apart and thought that God was asking him to literally rebuild the church! It was only after more prayer and discernment that he realized God's desire for Francis had greater implications. The Church was

falling to ruin. Scandal, unrest, heresy abounded. Francis of Assisi became a bridge, became a shining example of how Catholics were/are called to live the Gospel.

Slide 21 And the Lord gave me Brothers: Bernardo's place

Bernardo da Quintavalle's house stood within the Bishop's citadel. Bernardo was the first companion of Saint Francis, the first to hear the dream. He was friend as well as follower. Francis came to Bernardo's house to stay one night. He prayed throughout the night, "My God and my All.

Bernardo did not sleep. He stayed awake and listened to Francis. Francis talked with great joy. And so, it was that Bernardo, too, was determined to serve God. He had been wealthy and educated but chose to live a life of poverty. Bernardo had deep admiration for Francis and his dream.

After hearing Francis preach and witnessing Francis's spirit of prayer, Bernardo gave up his earthly possessions, distributed the money to the poor and followed Francis.

Slide 22 The Original Text opened by Francis and his Followers

As the force of Francis's teaching and the sincerity of his life became known, others were moved by his example to live the life of penance. As with Bernardo, they renounced everything they had and followed. Francis was filled with encouragement and when he realized he was being joined by his first followers, he said, "We shall have to ask God's advice about this."

In the morning they went to the Church of Saint Nicholas where they spent time in prayer. Then Francis opened the Gospels three times in honor of the Trinity, asking God to approve the plan.

The book opened first to these words from the Gospel of Matthew:

If you have a mind to be perfect, go home, sell all that belongs to you and give it to the poor...

The second time from the Gospel of Luke:

Take nothing with you on your journey...

And finally, from the Gospel of Matthew:

If anyone has a mind to come my way, let him renounce himself and take up the cross and follow me...

Francis said: “This is our life and rule and everyone who comes to join our company must be prepared to do this. And so, if you have a mind to be perfect, go home and do as you have heard.”

Slide 23 Rule of the Friars Minor

As the numbers of followers grew steadily, Francis realized that some rule of life was necessary and that this rule of life would need the approval of the Church. After several years and attempts at writing a Rule, the Rule of the Friars Minor was approved by Pope Honorius III on November 29, 1223.

This Rule begins: The Rule and Life of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without property and in chastity.

Slide 24 Francis Meets the Sultan

In the year 1217, Francis, despite his own personal failures at missionary work, devised a plan to send the friars out to various mission places. He dispatched friars in pairs to foreign lands instructing them to walk humbly and prayerfully. Some of these friars endured great hardships.

By 1219, during the Fifth Crusade, Francis was determined to set out on mission. Many of the brothers wanted to accompany him but eleven were chosen to join him in June of 1219. They set sail from Ancona on a long and grueling trip and finally reached the city of Damietta in Northern Egypt. The city was under siege by the crusaders.

Horrified by the scandalous and excessively cruel behavior of the crusaders, Francis was filled with sorrow. Francis the idealist believed the crusades were a sacred venture; but up close, he saw how the crusades violated the ideals of the Gospel.

It was time for Francis to act and to do what he came to do, preach to Sultan Malek el Kamil. Accompanied by Brother Illuminato, Francis fearlessly marched toward the enemy line where he was seized by the soldiers. Francis shouted the sultan's name and the soldiers believed he might be an emissary sent to seek a peace treaty. They beat and bound him before escorting him to the sultan.

Exactly what transpired during the meeting is not clear. The Sultan asked Francis for a letter of accreditation, assuming his visit related to the crusades. Francis told the sultan he was sent by God to announce the Good News and that his visit had nothing to do with the crusades.

He spoke to him of Christ the Savior and the Blessed Trinity. His fervor and boldness impressed the sultan and he left unharmed.

Slide 25 La Verna

On the way to Morocco, he and Brother Leo arrived at Montefeltro in Romagna and stopped at the nearby castle of San Leo. A great feast was going on in honor of a new knight.

Taking advantage of the situation, Francis began to address the guests and Count Orlando was so impressed that he decided to seek guidance from Francis. He was so pleased that the Count said, "Brother Francis, I have a mountain in Tuscany which is very solitary and wild and perfectly suited for someone who wants to do penance in a remote place or who may seek a solitary life. It is called Mount LaVerna. If that mountain would please you and your companions, I would gladly give it to you for the salvation of my soul."

When Francis heard this generous offer, he expressed great joy and praising and giving thanks first to God and then to Count Orlando, Francis replied to him, "Sir, when you have returned to your home, I will send some of my companions to you so that you may show them the mountain. If it appears well suited to prayer and penance, I here and now accept your most charitable offer."

Slide 26 The Stigmata

Two years before Francis died, he was alone on the top of Mount La Verna. There he began a forty day fast in honor of the Archangel Michael. He was in deep contemplation and his soul longed for heaven.

One morning near the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, Francis was praying on the mountainside. He saw what appeared to be a seraph with six bright wings gleaming like fire. As this figure approached and came near Francis, it appeared to be crucified. The sight of it amazed Francis and his soul experience joy mingled with pain. When the vision vanished, after a mysterious and intimate conversation, it left Francis aglow with seraphic love in his soul.

Because of this new and astounding miracle, Francis came down from the mountain with the stigmata, bearing in his body the image of the Crucified, fashioned by the hand of the living God.

Slide 27 Return to Assisi

In October or early November, after receiving the Stigmata, Francis desired to return to Assisi. As soon as he arrived back in Assisi, he decided that he wanted to resume his apostolic work and began to tour Umbria and the surrounding area. His physical condition grew worse and Br. Elias and the Papal court encouraged him to visit the Papal physician in the Rieti valley. Francis reluctantly agreed in the summer of 1225.

Slide 28 San Damiano

He decided first to stop at San Damiano to say good bye to Clare, believing that he would not see her again. Upon arriving at San Damiano his condition worsened, and he was forced to stay there for about seven weeks. While staying there he was tormented. Mice crawled over him and he became discouraged calling on God to help him. It was here that Francis wrote the Canticle of the Sun. The Canticle was the first piece of poetry ever written in Italian. Until now poetry was written in Latin.

Slide 29 Portiuncula

In 1226, as Francis lay dying he asked to be taken to his favorite spot on earth... *The Portiuncula*. Francis called this place the Holy of Holies.

Slide 30 Holy of Holies

He was placed in a small cell beside the little chapel

Slide 31 Chapel of the Transitus

Today it is called the Chapel of the Transitus... *the passing*
It was here that Francis of Assisi died on October 3, 1226

Slide 32 St George's

After his death his body was taken to the Church of San Giorgio where he was buried. St Francis was canonized 2 years later.
However, because he was so popular there was fear that his body would be stolen.

Slide 33 Basilica of St. Francis

The friars began construction on the Basilica of St Francis and on May 25, 1230 the body of Francis was placed in it's final resting place.

Slide 34 Tomb

He was an unassuming man, who tried with every fiber of his being to see the presence of God in every created thing, to live the Gospel in a way that would invite others to do the same.

Slide 35 I have done what is mine to do...

ⁱ Gerard Straub. Sun and Moon Over Assisi. St. Anthony Messenger Press. P.47