

Our Lady of the Angels – August 2, 2020

Reflection by S. Glenna – given to the small community of Wheaton Franciscans gathered on the porch of OLA Motherhouse; reading reference: GEN 28:10-15

Good Morning Good People! May the Lord give you peace!

Taking my inspiration from this morning's reading from the Book of Genesis, let me tell you a little story....

Francis departed from Assisi and proceeded down into the valley. Soon he came upon a certain place – a small abandoned chapel of the Benedictine order, dedicated to Our Lady, St. Mary of the Angels.

Taking one of the stones at the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. Then he had a dream.

He saw our Blessed Mother, Holy Mary, surrounded in glory by all the angels and saints. And beside her, her beloved Son, Jesus the Christ. Francis, we know, endeavored to live his life following in the footprints of his beloved, Jesus the Christ.

And so, Christ spoke to Francis and said,

“The place where you are laying is holy, sacred ground, and I will give it to you and to all your followers.

Your followers will be like the dust of the earth, and through them your message of peace will spread to the west and the east, to the north and the south.

In you, Francis, and in all your followers, all the families of the earth will find blessing. I will be with them, I will protect them wherever they go. And they will return to this holy place. It shall be called ‘the Portiuncula’ – the Little Portion. It will be your place of homecoming.

Because of your faithfulness to my word Francis, this place will be where all Franciscans, followers in your name, shall come to feel your presence, and bless your holy name.”

And Francis awoke from his sleep and proclaimed,

“Truly the Lord is in this place! How awesome this place is!
It shall be as Christ declared, our place of homecoming.”

And so it is, to this day, for hundreds - thousands - millions of pilgrims, who for nearly 8 centuries return to that same, small chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels.

For Francis and the early brothers, the Portiuncula was literally their home base. At that time surrounding the chapel was forest and a small clearing where they erected small huts

and tents for their housing. From there they came and went as Francis sent them out to serve the poor and preach the Gospel.

And always they would return to that place, with stories of their ventures, to pray with one another and find inspiration in the Gospels.

So precious was this place to Francis that the brothers brought him here when he was close to death. Francis asked that he be placed on the naked ground, just outside the small chapel. And on his deathbed Francis said to his brothers, as he says to all of us, "The Lord showed me what was mine to do. May Christ in his mercy, show you what is yours."

Today, the little chapel is preserved within the walls of an immense church building, the Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels. and the place where Francis died is preserved in a small side chapel.

It requires imagination to recall what this holy place would have looked like in Francis' time. But those who have had the blessing to have visited this place, like several of us gathered here today, would probably agree with me that that imagination is not too difficult, because Francis' spirit is felt there so deeply, so palpably. When visiting that place, you are struck with a great sense of awe, and wonder, and peace.

So what should any of this matter in THIS moment, and in THIS place?

After all, Francis lived and died a very long time ago. 794 years ago to be exact. And Assisi is a very long way away. 4,782 miles away to be exact.

Well, I need only ask you to look at the inscription above the door where we now sit. [Our Lady of the Angels Convent.]

We, like Francis and his brothers, find ourselves drawn to THIS holy, place, THIS building. We gather here each Sunday, and have found for ourselves OUR Portiuncula. Our little portion. OUR, Our Lady of the Angels.

This is our home, and so we come – we gather, we meet, we find fellowship, solace and joy, comfort and healing in one another's presence. We share our stories, we find inspiration in the Gospels, and nourishment at this Eucharistic table.

It's rather fitting that we can gather outdoors like Francis and those early brothers. Yet we would much rather be inside with the rest of our sisters and brothers celebrating as one community. But are we not all ONE in the Body of Christ? As Christ promises, he is with us until the end of the age.

These are indeed strange, unprecedented, stressful times. Let us cling to our faith in Christ to show us what is ours to do and to continue to call us home.