

Reflection by Sr. Melanie Paradis  
August 2, 2019  
Feast of Our Lady of the Angels

Today on this feast of Our Lady of the Angels, Franciscans around the world celebrate this tiny chapel of St. Mary of the Angels located on this small piece of land, the Portiuncula.

St. Mary of the Angels, located on the little portion "Portiuncula" was one of the three chapels Francis rebuilt in his early great enthusiasm to follow Jesus's words to him to "go rebuild my church for you see it has fallen into ruin." This particular chapel became the founding place or "headquarters" of the first Franciscans.

Today we are celebrating within our St. Mary of the Angels chapel. This chapel, like the original small Portiuncula chapel in Assisi, is housed within the larger building of the motherhouse of the Wheaton Franciscans, Our Lady of the Angels.

As I was considering today's readings, Francis' life, and our presence here on these grounds in this space, I found 3 connections I would like to share.

#### 1) Our grounds and buildings and our angels

In the first reading from Genesis, Jacob had a dream and there were angels all around and he said, "how awesome this place is! This is nothing else but the house of God, the gateway to heaven!"  
Do we feel this way when we come onto this property? When we enter this chapel, this building? Do we pay attention to the angels all around in this holy place?

Francis understood the value of "sacred space" and the energy it holds. He told his brothers regarding the Portiuncula :

" Consider this dwelling of God to be worthy of all honor, and with all your heart, with the voice of joy and praise, give glory to the Lord in this place."  
(Words of the dying Francis, Celano I)

Our buildings and grounds are sacred space. There are angels present, if you take the time to notice. Some of these angels have passed on and their energy remains with us. Some of these angels are present in the beautiful grounds and creation surrounding us. Some of these angels walk on two feet, they move about the buildings and grounds taking loving care of this space and of us. Do we recognize them here among us?

#### 2) Our liturgies and faith sharing

In the second reading from Colossians, we are told how to live: "Put on then, . . . , heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. . . And over all these put on love."

Does this sound familiar? Does this speak of our way of life? Does this show us how to live in relationship with all?

The Franciscan way of life is all embracing and truly relational. It allows each of us to discover how best to live our life in service of God and the people of God. The Franciscan way of life is the Gospel way of life. Francis came to understand this when

”One day while Francis was assisting devoutly at Mass, the passage of the Gospel was read in which Christ, about to send his disciples abroad to preach described the manner of Gospel life . . . Straightaway Francis was overcome with unspeakable joy and cried out ‘This is what I want, this is what my whole heart yearns for!’

(St. Bonaventure, Life of St. Francis). Can you imagine Francis jumping up and down with excitement?

Where do we share our “jumping up and down” joy? Our deep peace? Our unconditional love? Through our prayer, our liturgies, our faith community, our spirituality center of Tau Center, our Ministry Fund and so much more. . .

### 3) Our celebrations (Reception into Vowed and Covenanted life, Jubilee, Chapter, Funerals)

In the Gospel, Jesus reassures us, “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” I remember as a child coming to the realization one night as I was falling asleep that I was never truly alone, God was always with me. I might not “feel” the presence of God, but I had faith in that knowledge of God’s presence. What else can we depend on to last forever? To be with us always? Who else can we depend on to be there for us, forever?

As he was dying, Francis knew that his brothers needed more than his physical presence, and that sometimes they needed a place, a rock, a center to hold on to. He offered the sacred space of the Portiuncula because they already knew of Christ’s presence there and would be reassured.

This is the place where Francis

- Founded the Order of Friars Minor

- Received Clare into consecrated religious life

- Held yearly Chapters

- And, finally died (Francis’s death (celebrated at Transitus)

One of Francis’s last requests as he lay dying on the dirt floor of the Portiuncula: See to it, my sons, that you never abandon this place. If you are driven out from one side, go back in at the other.

(Words of the dying Francis, Celano I) Maybe he was talking about the Portiuncula, but maybe he was talking about so much more. . .and never abandon . . .

We know that nothing lasts forever. We experience transition, evolution and change. At the same time we recognize the pattern of life, life-death-new life, and we celebrate the many rites of passage that mark our living.

As Wheaton Franciscans we celebrate Reception into Vowed and Covenanted life, Jubilee, Chapter, As part of the people of God, we celebrate Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals. We participate as fully as possible in the seasons and totality of life.

This may be a very nice comparison or analysis, but what does this mean for us gathered here today, we who work and worship and live in this space on these grounds?

Well, I could say that it is up to each one of us to decide  
and I could also suggest the following:

Do we recognize, acknowledge and show gratitude to the “angels” around us? Those who take care of us? Those who make sure these buildings and grounds are safe and beautiful?

Do we, vowed and covenanted, live out the charism of the Wheaton Franciscans to above all put on love, to let love be the queen, the rule, the guide? Do you associates live out the values of compassion, collaboration, respect, integrity, and professionalism of Our Lady of the Angels associates?

Do we participate with joy in the many celebrations of life held here at Our Lady of the Angels? Do we contribute to the peaceful, life giving energy that so many feel when they come on to our property?

You can add your own questions and reflections, just remember We are all part of the Our Lady of the Angels family.

And, lest we forget,

Today we celebrate, you, our associates at Our Lady of the Angels. You who share in our work, the mission, vision and values of the Wheaton Franciscans.

Thank you for being our angels on Earth, on these grounds, in these buildings.

I offer this closing prayer:

Our Lady of the Angels

Watch over us as we serve others each day.

Guide us, protect us, give us the courage we need to do what is ours to do.

Help us to be the hands of God in this world, sharing God’s love through our work.

May we remember that we are all one in spirit and love. Amen.

Happy Feast Day!