



The Mercy of God in the Pardon of Assisi

The Jubilee Year of Mercy coincides with the 800th anniversary of the Pardon of Assisi. Ordinary people throughout Europe were being promised an indulgence by the Pope if they went on a crusade against the Muslims to reclaim the Holy Land. Having experienced the ravages of war himself in his early life, St. Francis found a creative way to allow God's mercy to be accessible without going to war. He petitioned Pope Honorius III whether persons who visited the Chapel of the Portiuncula could receive such an indulgence just by entering the doors. His solution centuries later still offers people the same mercy just by passing through the doors of a Franciscan Chapel.

Why the Portiuncula? The Benedictines gave this chapel and land to St. Francis and the brothers. They requested it would become the Head and Mother of the Order if the order grew in number. St. Francis, for his part, was happy just to receive this gift since it was the poorest of all churches with the very name, Portiuncula, meaning "little portion." In the happy days he and the brothers spent there, several important events took place to make it all the more precious a place for Francis. A Chapter of Mats was held there during which the brothers were missioned to go out into the world two by two. St. Clare was received into the Franciscan order there. This is where St. Francis heard the Gospel and exclaimed: "This is what I wish, this is what I seek, and this is what I long to do with all my heart!" St. Francis renounced the leadership of the order at a Chapter held there. And finally St. Francis died at the Portiuncula surrounded by those who loved him and whom he loved.

No wonder St. Francis chose the Portiuncula as the place where God would "indulge" visitors with an abundance of mercy as they sought pardon and forgiveness!

FOR REFLECTION

Recall the holy places in your life where God has "indulged" you with mercy.

What grace does God call forth from this memory?