

The Feast of Our Lady of the Angels of the Portiuncula: August 2nd

August 2nd is a special day to all Franciscans as it recalls the small Assisi-area chapel that became the foundational home of the Franciscan family – the *Portiúncula*.

Queen of the Angels

In 1206, when Francis was struggling to determine what it was he was to do with his life, he prayed in the little church of San Damiano just outside the walls of Assisi. There he heard the Word of God saying to him, “Francis, rebuild my church which you see is falling into ruin.” Taking that command very literally, Francis set about rebuilding the little church – stone by stone. He did the same with other abandoned churches in the area. One of them was an abandoned Benedictine chapel in the valley outside Assisi called the *portiúncula* or “little portion,” referring to the small plot of land associated with the chapel.

In 1209, after returning from a visit to Pope Innocent III, during which Francis received permission to form a “religious order,” Francis and the first brothers took up residence at the *portiúncula*. The formal name of the chapel was “Our Lady Queen of the Angels.”

The Portiuncula Today

The chapel has been repaired, partially rebuilt, and enhanced over the years. You can still visit the chapel, but now the little chapel of *Portiúncula* is housed within a huge basilica (Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli).

When you visit, there are two aspects of the Franciscan legacy that are always stressed: the beginning of the Franciscans and the end of St. Francis’ earthly life. In the beginning the *Portiúncula* was the place from which the friars were sent on mission to the world.

It was also to the *Portiúncula* that Francis asked to be taken when he knew that his death was near.

Thomas of Celano also records those events. “...*For he wanted to give back his soul to God in that place where, as noted above, he first came to know perfectly the way of truth.... After he had rested a few days in that place he so*

longed for, knowing the time of his death was close at hand, he called to him two brothers, his special sons, and told them to sing The Praises of the Lord with a loud voice and joyful spirit, rejoicing at his approaching death, or rather at the life that was so near.”

The Portiuncula is the Franciscan Tradition

St. Bonaventure, a Minister General of the Franciscan Order and the author of the *Major Life of St. Francis* (LgMaj 2:8) wrote:

“When he finally completed this church [San Damiano], he came to a place called the Portiuncula where there stood a church of the most Blessed Virgin Mother of God, built in ancient times but now deserted and no one was taking care of it. When the man of God saw it so abandoned, he began to stay there regularly in order to repair it, moved by the warm devotion he had toward the Lady of the world. Sensing that angels often visited there, according to the name of that church, which from ancient times was called Saint Mary of the Angels, he stayed there out of his reverence for the angels and his special love for the mother of Christ.

The Portiuncula Indulgence

In 1216, in a vision, it was reported that St. Francis obtained from Jesus himself the Indulgence of the Pardon of Assisi. According to tradition this Indulgence was verbally approved by Pope Honorius III. This tradition’s historical authenticity is still a subject of dispute.

All Above Excerpts from the website of The Sacred Heart Church, Tampa, Florida.

<https://sacredheartfla.org/about-us/being-franciscan/franciscan-feast-days/the-feast-of-our-lady-of-the-angels-portiuncula/>