

“Go and check it out” ...and that is how my Franciscan vocation and journey began. In the year 1999, while visiting my paternal aunt and family next to my village, my aunt invited me to stay for dinner and asked me if I knew anything about the Franciscan Parish (50 miles away from my village) and vocation camp that was organized for the young men interested in religious life. I replied to her, I have no idea and have not heard anything about it. My aunt told me, then go and check it out... and long story short, I have been with the Franciscans since then. Franciscan journey has been with ups and downs but Franciscan vocation remains very lifegiving and core to me till today.

Franciscans as a family have been celebrating centenaries of Franciscans events since 2023 and this year we are at the climax, celebrating 800th anniversary of the Transitus of our Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi. Pope Leo XIV, to our surprise, proclaimed these great events ending with the Franciscan Jubilee Year. Truly, eight centuries after Francis passed from this world, the seed he planted continues to germinate in the Church and in the hearts of countless men and women who are inspired by his Gospel way of life. The Order has already given us enormous resources to read, reflect and renew our Franciscan vocation as we go through the year celebrating the Easter of St. Francis. Many might have already signed up for a trip or pilgrimage to Assisi to be part of some of the events celebrating this milestone in Franciscan history, to avail plenary indulgence and so on. We are all encouraged to make the best use of what’s being organized by the Order or the local fraternities to nourish and strengthen our own vocation. For me, all the events planned are not a spiritual shortcut to receive grace and blessing but an encounter with God and St. Francis of Assisi whose life, death and new life we celebrate. Hence, let us not just rush to do things without spiritual and interior preparation. Remember, what does it profit going through all these celebrations of events and history if it does not come from our heart and leads us to live a life that St. Francis calls us to. This Jubilee is not merely a commemoration of the past, but a grace-filled invitation to renew our Franciscan vocation today, to rediscover Francis as a man of mercy, a lover of Christ Crucified, a son of the Church, a brother without power, and a fearless witness of peace. I started with a short description of how my Franciscan vocation began. All the credit goes to my aunt who first sowed the seed of Franciscan life or interest in me through the unplanned dinner. I do not know how much she knows about St. Francis of Assisi and Franciscans but I believe it was the work of the Holy Spirit that simply came through her with a simple word of encouragement; go and check it out, an invitation for me to follow the example of St. Francis by living a life of holiness and being witness to the Gospel of our Lord. She not only initiated but supported that seed in every way possible and continues to this day. I am greatly indebted to her for her vision for my life. In this year of Franciscan Jubilee, I personally feel it's important for me to celebrate my beginnings, initial moments, people, formators, different stages of formation and inspirations that have played a great role to shape my Franciscan vocation.

As we celebrate the Franciscan Jubilee Year, let us continue to learn from St. Francis’ life, encounter him in our brothers/sisters and truly celebrate our calling to be a Franciscan. Let us be grateful for those who first sowed the seed of Franciscan vocation in us. We give thanks to God for our Franciscan vocation. And, as we treasure and live our Franciscan vocation, we also continue to reflect on our vocation by asking a question; has the Franciscan seed germinated and born to a new life bearing abundant fruits or not? Therefore, I would think, we all need to go and check it out...time and time again for ourselves who is St. Francis of Assisi and what he was all about.

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