

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF FRANCESCO



Francesco's life was truly incredible

We will try to retrace his extraordinary life moment by moment ... in a journey in Assisi that allows us to grasp the uniqueness of his earthly experience.

FOLLOW !!!

We will start from the **ORATORY of SAN FRANCESCO PICCOLINO**, the place where, according to tradition, the saint was born to Pietro Bernardone dei Moriconi and Pica Bourlemont in 1182. Above the entrance it says "*This oratory was the stable of an ox and of a donkey in which St. Francis was born, mirror of the world*", as if to seek a similarity with the birth of Jesus.



Second stop is the **CATHEDRAL OF SAN RUFINO**, where his mother had him baptized with the name of Giovanni (the baptismal font is visible inside the church) before the father decided to change it to Francesco, in honor of France who had made the his fortune as a wealthy cloth merchant.



Near the Oratory of San Francesco Piccolino there is the **NEW CHURCH**, built in place of an older medieval church indicated by tradition as the paternal house of the Saint, where it is possible to pray in what should have been Francesco's room and visit the "prison" where Bernardone locked his son (for several days, before his mother freed him) to punish him for the decision to live in poverty rather than following in his merchant's footsteps.



Not far away is the **BASILICA DI SANTA CHIARA**, one of the essential places of the pilgrimage to Assisi. Here, in fact, not only did Francesco go to school up to fourteen years of age and was buried there by death (1226) until 1230 (when the body was moved to the Basilica dedicated to him), but the original crucifix that was there is also kept there in the church of San Damiano and who spoke to him while praying in 1205. In the basilica it is possible to pray on the tomb of Santa Chiara.



We mentioned **SAN DAMIANO** and it is precisely in this church, surrounded by nature about a quarter of an hour's walk from Assisi, that Francis received the "visit" of Jesus Christ. It was there in fact that in 1205, while praying, he heard the Crucifix speak and said to him: "*Francesco, go and repair my house which, as you can see, is all in ruins*". The young man understood that those words did not refer only to the dilapidated church in which he found himself, and that he later repaired with his own hands, but to the Church as a whole. From that moment on what many, starting from his father, seemed strange or madness became more frequent... .. up to the final break when, in a scene made famous also by the numerous cinematographic transpositions of his life, Francesco took off dressed and returned them to his father, while the bishop of Assisi, Guido II, covered him with his cloak, saying: «So far I have called you, my father on earth; from now on I can safely say: Our Father who art in heaven, because I have placed all my treasures in him and I have placed all my trust and hope ».



In the church of San Damiano, where Francesco, debilitated by the disease, had himself brought in 1225 and composed (dictating it to a companion because he was almost blind) the **Canticle of the Creatures**, lived from 1212 Santa Chiara, who founded the cloistered monastic order of the Clarisse. In the Convent next to the church there is the Dormitory where Chiara died on 11 August 1253, surrounded by the comfort of Fra Angelo, Fra Leone and Fra Ginepro, already faithful companions of Francesco, and the "Grotta sotto la casa", where the Santo hid for over a month from his father, who did not want to accept his conversion.

After San Damiano, the places of prayer and preaching begin, such as **IL BOSCO DI SAN FRANCESCO** (the entrance is to the right of the upper Basilica), the place where he went to pray and meditate with his companions; and **L'EREMO DELLE CARCERI** (about 5 kilometers from Assisi), which was named after Francesco and his followers "imprisoned" them, that is, they withdrew into the silence and solitude of the natural caves that are in the area to pray. Each had its own and, even today, they can be visited to try to find some of the spirituality of the time.

In the area there is also a small holm oak, run down to the point of having to be held up with stirrups and ropes: it is the tree of the blessing of St. Francis to the birds, which, according to tradition, saw him preach and bless them.



Leaving the Hermitage, the itinerary continues towards the **SANCTUARY OF RIVOTORTO** (on the road that leads from Assisi to Foligno). Here are the restored remains of the Sacro Tugurio, the first home of the Franciscan community (between 1208 and 1211) where the Saint wrote the Rule (the norms that the friars were to follow) and where he left with his companions to go to Pope Innocent III to ask for his approval (which the Pope granted only informally; Honorius III made it official in 1223).



After the years spent in the sacred hovel, the Franciscan community moved to the **PORZIUNCOLA**, a small church around which the **BASILICA DI SANTA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI** was built. It was in the Porziuncola that on February 24, 1208, listening to the Gospel of Matthew, Francis felt that he should have taken the Word of God around the world and thus began his preaching. The church is small, only four by seven meters, but the emotion of being able to pray where Francis also stopped to pray is indescribable.



From August 2, 1216, the Porziuncola was consecrated and "**Forgiveness of Assisi**" was proclaimed there. Inside the basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli there is also the **Transit Chapel**, the place where Francesco died on 3 October 1226. On leaving the sacristy, however, it is possible to visit **the Rose Garden** made famous by an episode from the life of the Saint. One night, to overcome the doubt and temptations, Francesco rolled naked in the thorny rose garden which, however, in contact with his body, lost all the thorns transforming his flowers into the Rosa Canina Assisiensis, a thornless variety that, still today, continues to bloom only at the Porziuncola. Finally, beyond the Rose Garden, there is the Chapel of roses, built on a cell in which Francesco rested.

The pilgrimage to the places of the Saint can only end in the **BASILICA DI SAN FRANCESCO** which, since 1230, has hosted his mortal remains. Officially inaugurated in 1253 by Pope Innocent IV, it is composed of **the Upper Basilica** and **the Lower Basilica**, connected by a staircase located in the left transept and enriched by the frescoes of Cimabue and Giotto. The first to be built was the Lower Basilica, which houses the crypt where the body of San Francesco is kept and at whose four corners are the bodies of the friars Angelo, Leone (the confessor of the saint), Masseo da Marignano and Rufino.



On the lawn in front of the entrance to the Upper Basilica there is "written" **a large Tau**, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet which, for Saint Francis, remembered the Cross and the redemption from sin.

