



THE FRANCISCAN CENTENARY

by Bret Thoman OFS

In January 2022, the Conference of the Franciscan Family sent out a letter to Franciscans everywhere announcing an important initiative: preparations for the next Franciscan Centenary. https://ciofs.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Centenario_ENG_def_pdf.pdf.

A centenary is a 100-year commemoration of a significant event. In the same way we celebrate birthdays or wedding or profession anniversaries, our order commemorates significant events in the life of Francis. These are moments to reflect. We take time to consider what these events mean to us, how they shaped or formed us, and how they affect our identity. We look back at what happened in time in order to consider where we are now, and where we wish to go from here.

Unlike our own life events, in which we recall such events in years, the order marks events in the life of St. Francis in terms of centuries. These are centenaries.

Anyone who has been on pilgrimage to Assisi may have noticed past centenaries. For example, in the cemetery chapel of Bastiola, not far from Assisi, there is a plaque dated 1912. It was placed there to commemorate the seventh centenary of St. Clare's arrival; at the then monastery of San Paolo after leaving her family on Palm Sunday, 1212.

More recently, over the past two decades, there have been a number of eighth-centenary events. In 2006, there was the "spoliation" of Francis; that is, when he stripped before his father and the bishop (1206). In 2009, there was the oral approval of the rule by Pope Innocent X and the creation of the order (1209). In 2012, there was Clare's conversion (1212). In 2017, there was the chapter of mats (1217), while in 2021, we recalled the letter written by Francis that marks the beginning of the Third Order (1221).

But these were all minor commemorations compared to the centenary events that will take place over the next few years. From 1223 through 1226, a series of major milestones in the life of St. Francis will be celebrated.

This year, 2023, we commemorate the eighth centenary of the approval of the Later Rule of St. Francis and the Christmas at Greccio (1223). Next year, in 2024, we will recall the Reception of the Stigmata on Mt. Laverna (1224). Then in 2025, we will commemorate the composition of the Canticle of the Creatures (1225). Finally, what is being referred to as the Easter of Francis – that is, his death and passing to eternal life (1226/2026) will be celebrated. These events will coincide with the Jubilee in the Catholic Church in 2025.

In future articles, I will be exploring these important events in the life of St. Francis by describing where they took place.

