

**St. Katherine Drexel Regional Fraternity
Regional Spiritual Assistant
St. Francis of Assisi Friary
1901 Prior Road
Wilmington, Delaware 19809**

tel: (302) 798-1454 fax: (302) 798-3360 website: skdsfo email: pppgusa@gmail.com

August 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in St. Francis,

The Lord give you his peace!

The Feast of Our Lady of the Angels is celebrated each year on August 2nd by the entire Franciscan Order. The religious family of St. Francis of Assisi joyfully commemorates the little chapel below the town of Assisi that St. Francis rebuilt out of love and respect for the Eucharist and Our Lady in Whose honor the church is dedicated to God. The chapel was given to the friars by the Benedictines of Monte Subasio. Francis, not desiring to possess anything, offered a basket of fish yearly to the monks for the use of the chapel. It is the birthplace of the Franciscan Order. Santa Maria degli Angeli (St. Mary of the Angels, also known as the Portiuncula, “the Little Portion”) is dear to and revered by all Franciscans. It is the “homestead” of the Brotherhood of the Friars Minor where they finally had a place to pray, gather, live their consecrated life, and from where, in the beginning, they were sent out as messengers of their Gospel life. It is an expression of Francis’ particular love and devotion for Mary the Mother of Jesus, Virgin made Church because Virgin-Mother of God. It is the refuge that welcomed St. Clare on Palm Sunday night in March 1212 when she left her family home, was joyfully greeted by Francis and the friars, and began a new family of consecrated Franciscan women. At the Portiuncula St. Clare began her life and ministry as foundress, mother, sister, of thousands of consecrated women down through the centuries. Here she was the confidant of Francis and the brothers as well. These are only a few of the reasons our Seraphic Father loved this place. Franciscans also revere the Portiuncula because it is also the place where our Seraphic Father passed from time to eternity the night between October 3rd and 4th in 1226.

The Poverello himself, lover of extreme poverty, made what seems an exception to the Rule when he told the friars: *See to it, my sons, that you never abandon this place. If you are driven out from one side, go back in at the other. For this place is truly holy and is the dwelling place of God. Here, when we were but few, the Most High gave us increase; here He enlightened the hearts of His poor ones by the light of His wisdom; here He set wills afire with the fire of His love. Here he who prays with a devout heart will obtain what he prays for and he who offends will be punished more severely. Wherefore, my sons, consider this dwelling place of God to be worthy of all honor, and with all your heart, with the voice of joy and praise, give glory to God in this place.*” (II Celano 19)

Truly *Catholic, Apostolic* and *Holy*, Francis always was *One* with the Church. He sought out the blessing of the Pope for all his endeavors. According to the narrative, Francis heard Mary calling him to the Portiuncula. When he arrived there, he saw Mary and Jesus. St. Francis’ burning desire to save souls was granted an indulgence by heaven itself, as long as he received the approval for such an indulgence from the Holy Father. He asked the Holy Father to grant plenary indulgences to those visiting the chapel to honor Jesus and Our Heavenly Mother. His Holiness asked Francis how many years he desired for the indulgence. Francis response to the Pope was that he desired not “years” but “souls”. The plenary indulgence of the Pardon of Assisi was granted from noon on August 1st and

lasting the entire day of the feast, August 2nd. Going back to the friars, Francis was heard to say: *I want to send you all to heaven!*

The promise of *what you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and what you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (Matthew 16: 19) that Jesus gave to Peter after his Confession of Jesus as the *Messiah and Son of the living God* (Matthew 16: 16), encountered no hesitation of total belief in the heart of Francis. For St. Francis of Assisi as for all his spiritual children the Pope is the successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ. Thus, the Holy Father is to be revered, loved, and obeyed.

The story of the “Pardon of Assisi”, as the indulgence of the Portiuncula is called, only corroborates the more universal celebration of Mary that affects the whole of the Catholic Christian world. It speaks of a reality we must always be aware of and believe in, the Assumption of the Blessed Mother body and soul into heaven. Assumed to heaven in the fullness of her personhood (body and soul) She, Mediatrix of all Graces, intercedes for Her children in any way that facilitates their journey to the fullness of life.

The Assumption of Our Blessed Mother is celebrated and solemnized by Catholics each year by participating in the Eucharist. This celebration helps to reflect upon an essential and consoling truth about time and eternity. During August when we celebrate this crowning moment for Mary, most people are planning how to cram in the last few available weeks or days of summer vacation before getting back to the routine of daily life and work after Labor Day. The activities revolving around summer vacation and relaxation often condition us to forget that we are a “wholeness”, body and soul. There cannot be on earth, one without the other and be *fully alive* (St. Irenaeus) Every human being in their entirety, spirit, soul, and body, is created by our Heavenly Father, redeemed by the Incarnate Son, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and called to participate one day in the fullness of redemption.

In view of Her Divine Motherhood, Mary was conceived without sin. She was a co-redeeming presence in the name of all humanity at the foot of the Cross. And, when her life’s journey was completed, our Blessed Mother was assumed body and soul into heaven. The new *heaven and new earth* (Revelation 21, 1) is the “gift” God gave Mary ahead of time for being Who and How She is. In that saving grace of Mary, we are reminded that we too are called to share eternal life with God in the totality of our being. St. Augustine reminds us that the greatness of Mary is in Her faith in all God asked and revealed. Believing the impossible, She is Mother of the faithful. Though eminently greater than us, yet infinitely lesser than God, She is a unique sign of all that is promised to those who, as She, say “yes” to the Lord’s invitations and challenges. *Nothing is impossible with God* (Luke 1: 37). Trust! *Oh Christian, Remember your dignity!* (St. Leo the Great Christmas Sermon concerning the Incarnation). The thought of Mary’s Assumption keeps the truth of our ultimate eternal life a reality to anticipate with joy, and a life to celebrate with gratitude

The body, as well as the soul, restored in grace, is called to share the fullness of life eternal with all the holy ones. The body (human nature) is an essential element of holiness. Many do not recognize its spiritual value. They see the body solely as an object of indiscriminate pleasure. Today’s means of communication make an immense amount of material available that often misrepresents and/or degrades the human body. In various ways it presents the body as an object of hedonistic pleasure rather than presenting the entire person worthy of the respect it deserves. Every human being is a Temple of God’s Presence. Our bodies are all signs of the means our Creator took upon Himself to become intimately one with His creature. We lose sight of the fact that the body and soul cannot be separated in this life without destroying the person’s ability to continue on life’s journey in time with all the spiritual and material help that God affords us. Thus, it will not be separated in eternity.

St. Francis, was quite aware of his own humanity and its fragility and vulnerability. Yet, with all his flaws, he still could joyfully praise the God Who created all that is. Francis sang the praises of God present in all God's attributes seen in all creation. There are two beautiful and powerful reminders of mercy and life in the Canticle of the Creatures. St. Francis praised especially those capable of willingly forgiving others with a disarmed heart (mercy), and those surrendering with serene trust their total being to "Sister Death" (life) in anticipation of the joyful encounter with the Author of life. A heart that forgives, and a soul ready to let go and take flight into God, is a person truly free!

Even the disfigured bodies of the lepers, whom Francis of Assisi feared terribly, became a source of strength for him. He was able to overcome his fear and repugnance of these suffering souls. He embraced the afflicted brother or sister. He saw beyond the infirmity and recognized a member of the family of God, his sister or brother. Their body suffered outwardly, but through loving acceptance of Francis and others, their soul could find serenity and even inner joy. When they were accepted as sister, brother, companion on the journey of life, the lives of the "walking dead" began to change. They regained their joyful awareness of being children of God, while still severely challenged in health and by many of the society they were part of. Francis and the friars helped these ostracized of their world to realize they were no less loved by God. A wholeness and integrity for one whom only a miracle could heal, was embraced as an equal, though *they still bore the marks of the passion on their bodies* (Galatians 6: 17). Challenges may have differed, as they do today for each one of us, but the responsibility to accept God's way instead of "my way" is always the determining factor that makes life worth living and every moment fruitful. Love was able to bring about the transformation of the whole person.

The whole body, the whole person, redeemed and saved is an essential reminder offered us in the celebration of the Assumption of Mary. Our Franciscan Family has always promoted and encouraged this wonderful privilege of our Blessed Mother. Among our sainted members was the great Saint Anthony of Padua who was a champion of the Assumption of Mary. A true Franciscan, he realized the effectiveness of the Incarnation of the Savior as an essential reminder for all of us in our spiritual and daily life. Who more than our Blessed Mother experienced the truth of this statement?

We Catholics honor Mary in her Assumption. We praise and thank God for raising Mary to share beforehand in the gifts of the Resurrection of her Son. Her Assumption is a reminder of the promise God made to all His children in Jesus through the Spirit. God Who creates, never annihilates anything created. Nothing is useless, especially when it fulfills its purpose. It might be transformed, but never destroyed, unless to raise it up to a greater state. Our Blessed Mother's Assumption, ultimate privilege of the Marian trilogy – Immaculate Conception, Divine Motherhood, Assumption – is the crowning moment that awaits all of God's children. We are called to listen to the prompting of the Spirit of God and live in the Word that challenges us to grow. The challenges in life can be the means that lead to our restoration to the original grace conferred on humanity in Eden. We reap the fruits of our collaboration or not with the One Who knows what is necessary and of what we are capable. In so doing, like Mary, the whole person shares in the *new heaven and new earth* (Revelation 21: 1).

Do we properly care both physically and spiritually for our bodies as the Temples they are of the Holy Spirit? Do we have a healthy respect for ourselves and who we are and what we are about? Do we respectfully treat one another as members of the one family of God's children, who have promised to be sisters and brothers of the other in the Secular Franciscan Order, spiritual children of St. Francis of Assisi? Do we regulate our time wisely in such a way that even our pious practices enhance and do not detract from our God-given family, social, religious, and the like, responsibilities? Do we realize that everything has its place in God's plan? Do we see the world as the theater of redemption? Do we realize that the world, as bad as things can seem, is not evil in itself, because it was created by

God? Do we acknowledge that any evil we see is often the effect of how human beings misuse and abuse the wonderful gift with which they have been entrusted? Have we accepted the challenge to work toward the restoration of the wholeness of creation, and our own personal wholeness?

We must look to see, and hear to listen. We focus with our whole being to be able to understand how to live the Gospel life effectively. The integrity of creation and the integrity of creation's reply to what the Creator has entrusted to all is essential to God's love. Franciscans accept responsibility and accountability for creation and their use of this wonderful gift. This envelopes the world in general, relationships among nations and peoples, and even our own personal worlds (our bodies created in the image and likeness of God, endowed with God's love, life, and the awesome gift of free will).

The Blessed Virgin Mary's most glorious and crowning moment is the epitome of a life's journey in, with, through, and to God. Mary's Assumption tells us we are called to share in the gift of the Resurrection of Jesus. Our whole person - body and soul - is destined for eternity. Mary's acceptance of the Father's Will made Her the First Disciple and the Mother of the Christ, Mother of the Christian at the foot of the Cross, and thus Mother of the Church in Her journey on earth and in the fullness of life in eternity. Her acceptance of the Father's challenge to be Mother of the Messiah introduced Her to all the other privileges we celebrate in Mary and, ultimately, Her Resurrection, ahead of time, as Queen of Heaven and all Creation. The *Word was made Flesh* (John 1: 14) in Her and through Her.

The Eucharist is made 'Flesh' through the words of the priest, as well as in each one who receives Him. In Mary's Assumption we see the dignity and glory to which we, Her children, are called. The Eucharist is *our pledge of future glory* (Sacrosanctum Concilium), as it was for the Seraphic one of Assisi. The Mass we celebrate and offer with the priest will be a *sun that irradiates blessings* (Padre Pio of Pietrelcina) and joys on us and on all whom we encounter. May it be as one of our Capuchin Saints, Saint Lawrence of Brindisi, said: *The Mass is my heaven on earth*. That it could be so for us all! That our bodies could become more deeply, as was the body of our Blessed Mother, Tabernacles that "house" the Lord when we receive Him in Holy Communion, and Monstrances that manifest Him to all whom we encounter when the goodness and holiness of Jesus irradiate in our lives to all! Our bodies and lives are so privileged that Jesus has chosen us as His way of profoundly touching the lives of others. We, in turn, offer them with us and with God's help and in His Will, to achieve the "perfection" to which we are all called.

With every best wish for you for the remainder of the summer, I ask a remembrance in your prayers that I may fulfill my ministry among you as God wills. May God bless you; Our Lady and good St. Joseph guide, guard, and protect you; and our Father St. Francis of Assisi and our holy Mother St. Clare of Assisi watch over you and all your loved ones with loving care.

Peace and Blessings
Fr. Francis A. Sario, O.F.M. Cap
Regional Spiritual Assistant