

JPIC through the Life Cycle of Saint Francis of Assisi - Introduction

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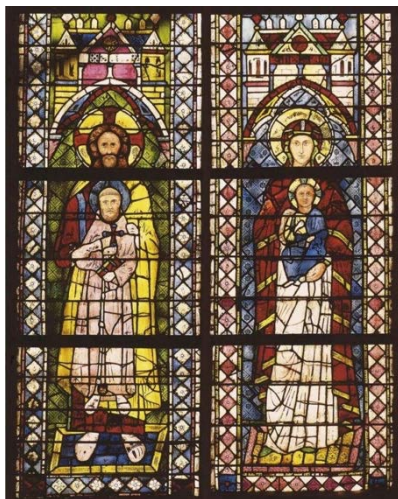
Assisi was preparing for the feast of Saint Francis. Having enjoyed the medieval pageantry in the lower piazza of the Basilica of Saint Francis, I made my way up the stone stairway to the upper basilica for a concert featuring the works of Mozart and Vivaldi. When the music began, the sound blended with soft colors of the frescos, as if holding the audience in a gentle rapture of peace and goodness. The friar sitting next to me was moved to look left, then right, then up and back. Like a restless child, he nestled himself into a comfortable space within the blanket of the frescos, soothed in the sounds of the lullaby being sung by the choir.

When the concert ended and applause filled the space where musical notes still lingered, I turned to the friar and asked, "Of all these frescos, which is your favorite?" He replied gesturing with his hands moving in ever widening circles, "All of them". I pressed further, gesturing to the life cycle of Saint Francis, "But if you had to choose one, which would it be?" Smiling he pointed upwards to the cross vault in the ceiling and said, "That image of Christ."

In these few and simple words, the friar touched the very core of the Basilica of Saint Francis. It's one and only purpose it to lead others to Christ. The stories of the life cycle of Saint Francis are intended to point to Christ alone, inviting the pilgrim to fall in love with the Lord as Francis did 800 years ago.



Returning to the basilica the following morning, I spent some time with my favorite image. It is one of a pair of stained-glass windows. One depicts Mary holding a little Jesus in front of her. This window is called the Motherhood of Mary. Its companion piece, to the left, shows Jesus holding a miniature Francis of Assisi. It is as if Francis is leaning back, nestled into the embrace of Jesus. This window is known as the Motherhood of Jesus.



The frescos of the life of Saint Francis and other images found in the basilica serve as an invitation for us to fall into the arms of the Motherhood of Jesus, to nestle ourselves into a loving embrace of the divine that soothes our hearts and minds through a lullaby of beauty. Resting in this peace and goodness, we are then called to grow into that image, of Christ as Mother.

These reflections, like the frescos of the life cycle of Saint Francis, are intended to do one thing. They point to Christ. When we gaze upon them, we see Christ. When we consider them, we understand Christ. When we contemplate them, we become one with Christ. When we imitate them, we are the Motherhood of Christ in our world today.