



EXPOSITION 2026: PREPARE FOR THE JOURNEY



1226 — 2026
Franciscus
Eight Hundredth Anniversary of the Death of St. Francis



In some time you'll be in Assisi, in the Lower Church of the Basilica of Saint Francis. You'll be offered a journey through five stages where the frescoes by the Master of Saint Francis bring into dialogue **Christ's Passion** and **Francis's life**, showing how those who give their lives, even if they die, truly live (Jn 12:24).

Francis wasn't born a perfect saint. He was a young man who dreamt of glory, who wanted to stand out.

Then he discovered that true glory isn't about making yourself great but about giving your life.

In Assisi you'll see this mystery painted on the walls:
Christ stripping himself for the cross alongside Francis stripping himself
before his father.



Christ who from the cross generates the Church by entrusting Mary to John, and Francis who becomes a pillar of the tottering Church.



Christ laid in the earth like a seed and Francis preaching to the birds,
showing the fruit already sprouted.



The lamentation over the dead Christ and Francis's stigmata on La Verna.



The risen Christ at Emmaus and Francis dying while singing, surrounded by the community that will continue his mission.



This pairing isn't accidental. Francis understood that loving means giving your life as a mother does: yielding your place, becoming smaller, not thinking of yourself. Not out of duty or good manners, but because that's how love works. A pregnant woman makes room in her body, a nursing mother doesn't think of herself first. **It's the very dynamic of love that frees us from the claim of having ourselves as our only concern.**

Prepare yourself with concrete questions. When in my life have I made space for someone by giving up occupying all the room? When have I accepted appearing weaker to help another grow? I'm not talking about heroic sacrifices, but everyday gestures: letting a colleague take the credit, allowing a child to make mistakes without intervening, truly listening instead of waiting for your turn to speak.

Francis understood that this is the path to true glory. At the journey's climax, above the altar where his remains rest, Giotto painted him in glory. But be careful: Francis's glory isn't a reward for having suffered. It's the giving of life itself that is glory. When you stop worrying only about yourself, when you yield the central position, paradoxically you finally taste love. As Paul says: "he emptied himself" (Phil 2:7) - not to punish himself but to truly love.

In the days before the pilgrimage, notice when you stiffen to avoid yielding space, when you struggle to stand out, when fear of losing paralyses you. Try instead to give way, to become smaller, to give life rather than jealously preserving it. You'll discover that **"it is more blessed to give than to receive"** (Acts 20:35).

Francis doesn't ask you to copy him literally - not everyone is called to live with nothing. He asks you **to find your own personal way of giving your life**. Perhaps for you it means forgiving those who've hurt you instead of nurturing resentment. Perhaps giving up an ambition that consumes you. Perhaps simply stopping the need to always be right.

Read chapter 12 of John about the grain of wheat. Francis took it literally and discovered it's true: those who jealously preserve their life lose it, those who give it find it multiplied. It's not poetry, it's the mechanics of love.

When you enter the Basilica, you won't be a visitor but a pilgrim. The visitor looks and passes by. The pilgrim allows themselves to be questioned: where am I holding back life instead of giving it? Where am I worrying only about myself?

Francis would say at the end: "The Lord led me" (FF 110). He hadn't found this path himself, but discovered it by allowing himself to be led.
You too, let yourself be led. The grain already knows how to sprout. It only needs to accept falling into the earth.



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