



Aug 2 - The Feast of Portiuncula

At the foot of the mountain on which Assisi is situated, hermits from Palestine had built an oratory in the first centuries of the Christian era. This oratory together with a small plot of land was given to St. Benedict in the 6th century. The name Portiuncula, that is, Little Portion, is supposed to have been derived from the transfer of this small piece of property. The little church was called St. Mary of the Angels, and the inhabitants of Assisi went there frequently to pray.

When St. Francis forsook the world, it was his first pious act to restore this sanctuary of the Queen of heaven, which had become somewhat dilapidated. Many extraordinary favors were granted to him in this little church. The Queen of heaven designated this place as the cradle of his order. Here, likewise, she implored for him the great indulgence by which the Portiuncula chapel became famous throughout Christendom.

A special impulse led St. Francis on a certain night to go to the chapel. There he saw our Lord and His holy Mother surrounded by a great host of angels. Filled with astonishment and reverence, the saint prostrated himself upon the ground and adored the Divine Majesty. Then he heard the voice of our Lord urging him with ineffable tenderness to ask some special favor. Nothing was so near to the heart of Francis as the salvation of souls, and so, after a few moments of reflection, he asked for the grace of a full pardon for all who, being contrite and having confessed their sins, would visit this little sanctuary. Mary cast herself upon her knees before her Divine Son, and repeated the petition of her faithful servant.

Thereupon the Lord said to Francis: "It is a great favor that you request, nevertheless it shall be granted to you. Go to my Vicar on earth, to whom I have given the power to bind and to loose, and ask him in My name to grant this indulgence."

Forthwith Francis presented himself to Pope Honorius III, who, after having assured himself of the truth of the vision, granted his request, but with the restriction that the indulgence could be gained on one day of the year. The 2nd of August was the designated day, that being the anniversary of the little church's dedication. At the command of the pope and in the presence of 7 bishops, St. Francis preached the extraordinary indulgence at the Portiuncula before a great concourse of people. From that time the Portiuncula was annually the goal of innumerable pilgrims. Subsequently the indulgence was extended to every day of the year.

A large basilica was built over the chapel, and so the little sanctuary of the Portiuncula has been preserved in its original condition. By virtue of their apostolic power the popes have extended this indulgence to all Franciscan churches, and under special conditions even to some other churches. They have also granted that the indulgence can be gained not only once, but as often as anyone, who has been to confession and to holy Communion, visits the appointed church on Portiuncula day and prays 6 Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glories for the intention of the Holy Father. Besides, the indulgence can be applied to the holy souls in purgatory.

ON THE PORTIUNCULA INDULGENCE

It cannot be denied that this indulgence is one of the most precious favors that comes to us from the treasury of the divine mercy. Not only the Vicar of Christ but Christ Himself granted it at the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Mercy. It is recorded that when the pope first granted his approval St. Francis departed without having obtained a written document as a testimonial. When his attention was drawn to the fact, St. Francis remarked: "God Himself will testify to this indulgence." Was that not actually verified by the great confidence of all Christians? One may well say of this indulgence what was said of the gracious condescension of our Lord in the Incarnation: "Through the heart of the mercy of our God, the Orient from on High has visited us unto the remission of sins." (Luke 1:78) Who would not use this day of grace well?

Consider how extraordinary are the graces of the Portiuncula indulgence. If we have contritely confessed our sins and gone to holy Communion, we can gain this indulgence as often as we visit the designated church and pray the 6 Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glories for the intention of the pope. If we have gained the indulgence and leave the church, we can re-enter and gain it again. In the event that we have really gained the plenary indulgence so that there remains no further punishment to be remitted, we can help the holy souls each succeeding time if we apply the indulgence to them. How many souls may be waiting for this day, to be aided by your charity and mercy. Shall their trust in you be in vain?

Consider that the effects of the Portiuncula indulgence depend on the disposition of him who sets out to gain it. It was the spirit of penance and of trust in God that made St. Francis worthy of obtaining this indulgence. His entire life was one continuous act of penance, and when this great grace was granted to him, our Lord and His Blessed Mother, and a great number of angels appeared to him: this increased his confidence still more. With a similar disposition of mind and heart you will assuredly share the benefit of the indulgence. Awaken in yourself the true spirit of penance and of great confidence, so that our Lord may also say to you: "Go, and as you have believed, so be it done to you." (Matt 8:13)

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

O GOD, WHO DOST PERMIT US ANNUALLY TO CELEBRATE ANEW THE DEDICATION DAY OF THY TEMPLE, AND DOST GRANT THAT WE MAY ATTEND THE SACRED MYSTERIES IN GOOD HEALTH, HEAR THE PRAYERS OF THY PEOPLE AND GRANT THAT EVERYONE WHO ENTERS THIS CHURCH TO ASK GRACES FOR HIMSELF, MAY REJOICE IN THE COMPLETE ANSWER TO HIS PRAYERS. THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.

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PORTIUNCULA INDULGENCE

"THE PARDON OF ASSISI"

The *Portiuncula Indulgence* is also called the "Pardon of Assisi." It commemorates the indulgence obtained by Francis on the occasion of the official approval of his Rule from Pope Honorius III. The Holy Father approved the plenary *Portiuncula Indulgence* for all pilgrims who would go and pray for the souls in Purgatory and recite an Our Father, the Apostles Creed, and another prayer such as the *Hail Mary* for the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff.

The stipulation was that they had to kneel in the small stone chapel known as *Portiuncula* inside the cavernous Saint Mary of the Angels Basilica at the base of the hill below Assisi. There they would receive a Plenary Indulgence if performed between midday of August 1 through August 2. Needless to say, countless pilgrims swarm into Assisi during this day and a half period to merit the indulgence. Partly because of that, the Church has since extended this indulgence to those who pray in other Franciscan churches and parish churches.

The indulgence is good once each day with the conditions being that the penitent must be in the state of grace after having made a good Confession and receive Holy Communion within a day and a half of visiting the eligible church or chapel. On the first of May in 1939 Pope Pius XII extended the privilege to any pastor, with his bishop's permission and approval, to apply to the *Sacred Penitentiary* to allow the *Portiuncula Indulgence* in their parish. Many have responded where today there are countless churches and chapels where one can receive this plenary indulgence.

(sources: *Assisi Art and History in the Centuries*, Edizioni Plurigraf; *Catholic Almanac*, Our Sunday Visitor, Publisher; *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

The **Portiuncula** (small portion) refers to the land in Assisi, Italy, that belonged to the Benedictines.

On this land was an old church dedicated to the Virgin Mother of God but abandoned.

The great St. Francis had great devotion to the queen of the world and when he saw that the church was deserted, he began to live there constantly and repair it. He heard that the angels often visited it, so that it was called St. Mary of the Angels.

The Benedictines wanted to give Francis the church but in order to remain faithful to Lady Poverty, Francis rented it from them with the annual compensation of a basket of fish from the Tescio river. Here is where Francis began his service to Christ and His Church. Here Francis founded his Order, received Clare as his spiritual daughter, and where he died commending this spot above all others to the friars.

St. Francis had great love and compassion for everyone.

On a night of July, 1216, Francis was praying in the little church of the **Portiuncula** devoured by love for God and a thirst to save souls. He prayed for the forgiveness of sins of mankind. Suddenly a brilliant light shone all around. In great splendor Jesus and Mary appeared in the midst of a dazzling cloud surrounded by a multitude of radiant angels.

Out of fear and reverence, St. Francis adored Our Lord prostrate upon the ground.

Then Jesus said to him: "Francis you are very zealous for the good of souls. Ask me what you want for their salvation." St. Francis was rapt in ecstasy before Jesus.

When he regained his courage he said:

"Lord, I a miserable sinner beg You to concede an **indulgence** to all those who enter this church, who are truly contrite and have confessed their sins. And I beg Blessed Mary, your Mother, intercessor of man, that she intercede on behalf of this grace."

Our Lady at once began to beseech her son on behalf of Francis. Jesus answered:

"It is a very great thing that which you ask Me; but you are worthy of even greater things, Friar Francis, and greater things you will have. So I accept your request, but I want you to go to my Vicar, to whom I have given the power to bind and loose in Heaven and on earth, to ask him on my behalf for this **indulgence**."

With one of his companions, Francis hastened to Pope Honorius III and prostrate implored him to proclaim that every one visiting the church and confessing their sins with a contrite heart would be as pure from all sin and punishments as he was immediately after baptism. The Pope granted this petition. This **indulgence** has been extended to all parish churches throughout the world.

The date was set from vespers of the first of August until sundown on the second of August, the

Feast of Our Lady of the Angels. It is said that St. Francis was given this day by Our Lord because the Feast of the Chains of St. Peter celebrated on August first is the day Peter was released from prison and his chains removed. This is an extraordinary demonstration of God's mercy in removing the chains of sin from those who devoutly and faithfully seek to gain the **indulgence** by completing its requirements.

The conditions to obtain the Plenary **Indulgence** of the Forgiveness of Assisi is (for oneself or for a departed soul) as follows:

- Sacramental Confession to be in God's grace (during eight days before or after.)
- Participation in the Holy Mass and Eucharist
- Recitation of The Apostles Creed, Our Father and a prayer for the Pope's Intention.

The **Portiuncula Indulgence** is a grace not to miss not only for yourself but for the many suffering souls in Purgatory.

Mark your calendar for the Feast of Our Lady of the Angels beginning on the First of August to August 2.

Tell everyone of the magnitude of this gift. Once again, we see the unfathomable Divine Mercy of God.

In the words of St. Francis: O my Brothers and Sisters, I want you all to go to Heaven!

THE PORTIUNCULA INDULGENCE: Our Lady Queen of the Angels by Diana Serra Cary

The origin of the **Portiuncula Indulgence has been lost in the haze of centuries just as the origin of the chapel itself.**

The first written document we have regarding this **indulgence** is dated October 31, 1277, some sixty years after the **indulgence** is said to have been granted. As a result, many different accounts have come down to us purporting to relate the vision of St. Francis and the way in which the Pope consented to grant this **indulgence**. Each author seems to relate a different version that St. Francis beheld. However, although the accounts differ in details, in substance they are the same. The one we present here is the one accepted by Jorgensen in his *Life of St. Francis*.

One time when Francis was kneeling in prayer before the image of Our Lady, he seemed to behold men and women from every corner of the world converging upon this obscure little chapel in the Umbrian forest. He had been praying for the forgiveness of the sins of mankind when suddenly the dark interior seemed illumined by the light of a million candles. Jesus and Mary appeared in the midst of a dazzling cloud of angels, and he heard a voice that fell like music on his soul, "What do you wish me to do to help poor sinners?" Francis hardly knew how to answer, but suddenly the words came tumbling out and he asked the Lord to grant a full pardon to all who came to visit the church of **Portiuncula** and made a good confession. It then seemed that Jesus was in favor of this. He turned smilingly to His Mother and she, in turn, nodded to St. Francis and smiled.

Typical of the saint's impetuosity and generosity of soul, he marched off to see the Pope and beg from him the coveted indulgence. The reigning Holy Father, Honorius III, was literally dumbfounded at the request to grant such a generous indulgence. At that time, the summer of 1216, plenary indulgences were rarely granted by the Church. The plenary indulgences that had been granted were given to those fighting men who took up the cross and the sword and went as crusaders to the Holy Land. Later, this hard won indulgence was extended to those who remained at home but helped the Crusaders in supplying men and alms.

Francis, however, was not to be refused. The Lord Himself had promised him, and the Roman Curia was bound to relent! The Pope finally yielded and left it to the astonished cardinals to limit the application of the new indulgence. The date set was from vespers of the first of August until sundown on the second. It is said that Francis chose this date because the feast of the Chains of St. Peter (his release from prison) is celebrated on the first of August, and Francis felt that sinners should also be freed from the chains of their sins on the day following this great feast. Furthermore, this date was the anniversary of the consecration of the Portiuncula chapel.

As Francis took his leave of the Holy Father, after obtaining the unprecedented privilege, the Pope is said to have asked if he did not wish some document to prove that his request had been officially granted. With characteristic Franciscan lightheartedness came the saint's reply: "I need nothing more than your word. Our Lady is the parchment, Christ the notary, and the angels our witnesses!"

When the first great August first arrived, seven bishops gathered in the little chapel of Our Lady of the Angels to dedicate it as "Our Lady of the Angels of the Portiuncula." And St. Francis, overjoyed, cried out to the crowd that overflowed the narrow building, "I want to make all of you go to heaven!"

But at the time there seemed something almost scandalous in this indulgence, and conservative prelates did little to make it known. In St. Francis' own lifetime the Portiuncula Indulgence was enjoyed by comparatively few Christians. Travel and communications were slow, and not even such good news as a plenary indulgence could travel swiftly over the mud-choked trails that passed for roads in thirteenth-century Europe. Later, of course, the indulgence was extended to all Franciscan churches on August first and second.

This chapel was the saint's favorite spot on earth. It was here he heard the Gospel that caused him to establish his First Order, following the command of Christ to go into the world and preach and baptize all men, taking neither gold nor script nor an extra cloak for the journey. Here Francis received his first Brothers, and from here he sent them into the world. In this chapel, St. Clare knelt before the image of Our Lady of the Angels, and on the floor her golden tresses fell beneath the scissors plied by Francis himself. Indeed, Francis placed such a high value on this chapel, which he had rebuilt with his own hands, that he wrote a special rule just for "Portiuncula."