



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

Office for Ethnic Chaplaincies and Eastern Catholic Churches
Co-ordinator: Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Called to be Saints

Reflection on the Special Jubilee Year of St Francis 2026

Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Go and Rebuild My Church”

A while ago I was privileged to be asked to be the Celebrant at the Mass marking 50 years of St Francis Church, Kineton, Warwickshire. The occasion is being marked (a week today) on 15 May 2026. It is a special day for parishioners there, and like all priests, Father Tams, the Parish Priest, will be taking inspiration on this occasion from the Patron of the Church, St Francis of Assisi.

Assisi is such a wonderful medieval town, and I needed little encouragement to return there: these past couple of days I have been very happy to go to stand, to reflect, and to pray at some of the key locations associated with



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Francis. It is 800 years since his death in October 1226, and the Church has declared a Special Jubilee Year of St Francis, following on the Ordinary Jubilee, ‘Pilgrims of Hope’, which came to an end in January on the Feast of the Epiphany. The Church sees the Year of St Francis as a continuation of “the Jubilee where we were all called to be ‘Pilgrims of Hope’; Francis is an inspiration to us all as we journey on seeking to become saints in the contemporary world.” (Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary)

During my visit to Assisi, with a friend from my days in Rome, I stopped at a number of spots and spoke ‘to camera’ for our weekly vlog ‘Burning Bush’ (which can be accessed on the Diocesan Ethnic Chaplaincies Our Lady of Good Counsel Website). Standing in the beautiful little Chapel, marking the spot where Francis was born, I reflected on his birth into a wealthy family, and his decision later to become poor, like Our Lord himself - there is a special image of his casting his clothes aside in the Church of the Franciscans in Gubbio. Francis teaches us so much by his life and, one thing especially, is the spirit of poverty, not to be too attached to material things. On the occasion of the year of St Francis we ask ourselves “where does my heart lie?”

I also went to the Cathedral Church of Assisi, San Rufino, a 3rd century Martyr. There the Baptismal Font where St Francis and St Clare, who founded the Poor Clares with the help of Francis, is the centre of much



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devotion. We all owe so much to those responsible for our Baptism. This is how our journey as followers of Our Lord began. Thanksgiving for this gift is what should underpin this Year of St Francis, and our vlog has the famous hymn of thanksgiving, the Te Deum, underpinning it.

As I write this Reflection, I am conscious that we are celebrating today the 100th Birthday of David Attenborough, a naturalist who highlights the wonder of creation. When walking through Assisi and its environment, we are reminded that this was one of the great gifts of St Francis to the Church: his love of nature as a gift from God. Pope Francis, who was inspired by this saint, chose the opening words of his hymn to the Holy Beauty of Creation for the title of his second Encyclical 'Laudato Si' on the care of our common home. One of my favourite frescos in Assisi is of Francis speaking to and blessing the birds in the Church of San Francesco. I also enjoyed visiting the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Gubbio which commemorates the legend of Francis and the wolf that terrorised the people of the area until he was blessed and embraced by the Saint. We ask ourselves how we care for nature created by God and given to humanity.

I loved having the opportunity to visit Greccio where Francis created the first crib - the scene we all love of the birth of Our Lord in simplicity as a child – on the way back from Assisi to Rome. That scene has been recreated all over the world, and it is a symbol of God's love for humankind - coming



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as a child to live among us and show us the way to live that brings true happiness. It is indeed a scene that gives the ‘peace and wellbeing’ (*pace e bene*) that St Francis and St Clare used in greeting all whom they met. Again, it is a gift that Jesus gives to each while being a challenge to our way of life when we seek to follow the way St Francis embraced.

I was sad not to have time to get to La Verna where Francis, who sought to be like Christ in everything, received the gift of the Stigmata, the wounds of the Our Lord in hands, feet, and side, but I did get to the Portiuncula where St Francis founded his Religion Community and died, surrounded by his Brothers in Religious life. And, of course I got to the Basilica of St Francis where his remains now lie in the lower basilica. It was a special moment to be there with so many others coming to seek the Intercession of this great saint, who truly lived out the mission given to him by Our Lord from the Crucifix in the Church of San Damiano in Assisi: “Go and Rebuild my Church”. It is a mission in which we all seek to participate through the forgiveness and indulgence of the Church in this special year. And we pray that the Holy Spirit, promised to the Disciples by Our Lord in the Gospel, this coming Sunday, may rest on us through the Intercession of St Francis, so that we may all fulfil our calling.