

2nd Quarter 2024

Father John's Article

2024 is the eighth centenary of the Stigmata of Saint Francis of Assisi; making this the "Year of the Holy Cross and the Passion of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Two years before Saint Francis of Assisi died, he made a pilgrimage to the deserted mountain of Mount Alvernia. He wanted to prepare himself by forty days of fasting and prayer for the feast of Saint Michael the Archangel. (Saint Francis kept two "Lents": Ash Wednesday until Easter; and the feast of the Assumption until Michaelmas Day.)

On September 14, 1224, feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, while immersed more deeply in heavenly contemplation, Saint Francis' soul became aglow with the ardor of fervent longing for heaven. Saint Bonaventure gives the following description:

"As he was drawn aloft through ardent longing for God one morning near the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 17, 1224), and was praying in the mountainside, he saw what appeared as a seraph with six bright wings gleaming like a fire descending from the heights of heaven.

"As this figure approached in swift flight and came near the man of God it appeared not only winged by also crucified. The sight of it amazed Francis and his soul experienced joy mingled with pain. He was delighted with the sight of Christ appearing to him so graciously and intimately and yet the awe-inspiring vision of Christ nailed to the Cross aroused in his soul a joy of compassionate love.

When the vision vanished after a mysterious and intimate conversation it left Francis aglow with seraphic love in his soul. Eternally, however, it left marks on his body like those of the Crucified as if the impression of a seal had been left on heated wax. The figures of the nails appeared immediately on his hands and feet. The heads of the nails were inside his hands but on top of his feet with their points extending through to the opposite side. His right side too showed a blood-red wound as if it had even been pierced by a lance, and blood flowed frequently from it.

Because of this new and astounding miracle unheard of in times past, Francis came down from the mountain a new man advanced with the sacred stigmata, bearing in his body the image of the Crucified not made by a craftsman in wood or stone, but fashioned in his members by the hand of the living God."

Saint Francis is desperately needed in these dark days of decline for the Church and the world. At the beginning of his conversion, Saint Francis was in the ruins of the Church of Sant Damiano. From the Cross, Jesus spoke to him and said, *"Francis, repair My Church, for it is falling into ruins."* Our Lord was speaking of His Church Universal, suffering from an immoral clergy and great corruption. Days very much like our own.

Saint Francis took the Lord's words to heart and spent the rest of his short life performing great penances, attracting disciples to his life of poverty and prayer. And preaching the divine mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption – the Crib (1223) and the Cross (1224), Saint Francis sang the praises of the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of the Angels, obtaining for the Universal Church the *"Great Pardon of Assisi"* at the Protiuncula (the 'small Portion') on August 2, 1207. It was in this Church that the Franciscan order was born; and in this Church that he surrendered his soul to God in 1226.

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Saint Francis had a great devotion to Saint Michael the Archangel and all the Holy Angels. He conversed with these Angelic beings, and they interacted in the life of the "*Poor Man of Assisi*." His devotion to Saint Michael prompted him to fast and pray for the forty days before the feast of the Archangel, the "*Defender of the Church*." But, Saint Francis' greatest love was for the Holy Cross and the Fruit of the Holy Cross, the Most Holy Eucharist.

Beginning with the Church of San Damiano, Francis traversed the countryside visiting the towns and villages, repairing Churches, cleaning sanctuaries, and decorating altars with clean linens, flowers and candles, all for the greater Honor and glory of the "*Hidden Jesus*" in the tabernacles of the world.

Saint Francis wrote this prayer:

"We adore You, O most holy Lord Jesus Christ truly Present here and in all the tabernacles throughout the world, and we bless You, because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world."

In 1611, in the Conceptionist convent of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Quito, Ecuador, Saint Francis of Assisi, with the holy Archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael completed the adornment of the miraculous image of Our Lady of Good Success in the presence of Mother Marianna. Saint Francis tied his knotted Franciscan cord around the waist of the statue of the Virgin of Good Success. Her message foretold the present trials and tribulations of the Church today.

In these spring and summer months before the feast of the Stigmata of Saint Francis, and the feast of the Archangel, St. Michael, live the ***Fatima message*** in union with our Seraphic Father. In his honor, be children of Mary Immaculate before the tabernacle of the Eucharistic Lord. Meditate on the Incarnation (the Crib of Bethlehem) and Redemption (the Holy Cross of our Lords' Passion) in the mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary. Join Cardinal Burke, and thousands of faithful Catholics in the nine-month novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe for the conversion of our nation. The title, "*Our Lady of Good Success*" refers to the successful miraculous birth of Christ after nine months in his mother's womb. When Our Lady appeared to Saint Juan Diego, the Divine Infant was in her womb. Pray for the end of abortion, the great destroyer of the world's peace.

Just as Saint Francis of Assisi 'repaired' the damaged Church eight hundred years ago, so from heaven he will be instrumental in repairing and restoring a Church in decline in 2024.

"Pray for us, O Seraphic Father, Saint Francis of Assisi, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ." Amen

***Bless You,
Father John Hedges***