

## Advent 2023 Reflections/Action Steps (Week One)

### *Celebrating Christmas at Greccio (1223-2023)*

In October 2021, the Conference of the Franciscan Family—a group made up of the leaders of all three orders of Franciscans—called all Franciscans to join in the Centenary which will commemorate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of several significant events in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. We began 2023 with the celebration of the Later Rule and will conclude with Christmas at Greccio. During this Advent season, we will examine the story of the celebration of Christmas at Greccio and how we can apply the lessons learned from this event to our everyday lives. This week's reflections include a part of Celano's description of Christmas at Greccio and a quote from *Admirabile Signum*, Pope Francis' 2019 Apostolic Letter on the Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene.

#### **Sunday, December 3, 2023**

"We should note then, as matter worthy of memory and something to be recalled with reverence, what he [Francis] did, three years prior to his death, at the town of Greccio, on the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Celano 84)

"The enchanting image of the Christmas crèche, so dear to the Christian people, never ceases to arouse amazement and wonder. The depiction of Jesus' birth is itself a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God." (*Admirabile Signum*, 1)

**Action Step: Unpack your Christmas crèche and set up the stable and the empty manger. The first Christmas in Greccio took place in a cave. Consider making a cave for your nativity scene out of paper mâché or books draped with material.**

#### **Monday, December 4, 2023**

"There was a certain man in that area named John who had a good reputation but an even better manner of life. Blessed Francis loved him with special affection, since, despite being a noble in the land and very honored in human society, he had trampled the nobility of the flesh under his feet and pursued instead the nobility of the spirit." (1 Celano 84)

"The nativity scene is like a living Gospel rising up from the pages of sacred Scripture." (*Admirabile Signum*, 1)

**Action Step: Think about the people in your life whom you love with "special affection." Send a letter or Christmas card to someone who has made a positive impact and tell them how they improved your life.**

#### **Tuesday, December 5, 2023**

"As usual, blessed Francis had John summoned to him some fifteen days prior to the birthday of the Lord. 'If you desire to celebrate the coming feast of the Lord together at Greccio,' he said to him, 'hurry before me and *carefully make ready* the things I tell you.' ..." (1 Celano 84)

"As we contemplate the Christmas story, we are invited to set out on a spiritual journey, drawn by the humility of the God who became man in order to encounter every man and woman." (*Admirabile Signum*, 1)

**Action Step: St. Francis sent John to prepare things for the Christmas celebration at Greccio. Think of ways that you can ready your heart for the coming feast while you make your own preparations. Make a list of two or three things you can do to keep Jesus at the center of your holidays.**

### Wednesday, December 6, 2023

Francis continued, “For I wish to enact the memory of that babe *who was born in Bethlehem*: to see as much as is possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he *lay in a manger*, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay.” (1 Celano 84)

“Coming into this world, the Son of God was laid in the place where animals feed. Hay became the first bed of the One who would reveal himself as ‘the bread come down from heaven’ (Jn 6: 41).”

*(Admirabile Signum, 2)*

**Action Step: Get a grocery bag and place it somewhere visible. Each time you go shopping, buy an extra nonperishable food item, and place it in the bag. When your bag is full, take it to your local food bank.**

### Thursday, December 7, 2023

“Once the good and faithful man had heard Francis’ words, *he ran quickly* and prepared in that place all the things that the holy man had requested.” (1 Celano 84)

“I wish to encourage the beautiful family tradition of preparing the nativity scene in the days before Christmas, but also the custom of setting it up in the workplace, in schools, hospitals, prisons, and town squares. Great imagination and creativity is always shown in employing the most diverse materials to create small masterpieces of beauty.” *(Admirabile Signum, 1)*

**Action Step: Research nativity scenes from other countries and consider buying one for school, work, or home.**

### Friday, December 8, 2023

“Finally, *the day of joy* has drawn near,  
*the time of exultation has come.*

From many different places the brethren have been called.” (1 Celano 85)

“Friars came to Greccio from various parts, together with people from the farmsteads in the area, who brought flowers and torches to light up that holy night.” *(Admirabile Signum, 2)*

**Action Step: Call a friend or family member who is far away or visit someone you haven’t seen lately. Give the gift of your presence.**

### Saturday, December 9, 2023

“As they could,  
the men and women of the land with exultant hearts  
prepare candles and torches to light up that night  
whose shining star has enlightened every day and year.” (1 Celano 85)

“At Greccio there were no statues; the nativity scene was enacted and experienced by all who were present.” *(Admirabile Signum, 2)*

**Action Step: Light a candle and say a prayer for peace in our world.**