

Advent 2023 Reflections/Action Steps (Week Two)

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 800th 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 Eloi Leclerc, O.F.M., found in his book *Francis of Assisi: Return to the Gospel*.

Sunday, December 10, 2023

“Finally, the holy man of God comes
and, finding all things prepared,
he saw them and was glad.” (1 Celano 85)

“A vehement desire took possession of Francis: to celebrate Christmas among the mountain folk, and to do it in a vivid and dramatic way by arranging a living nativity scene. ... This novel and touching idea had suddenly occurred to him, but it expressed his deepest feelings.” (Leclerc, 116)

Action Step: Take a few minutes today to make a list of five things you are grateful for. Thank God for these gifts.

Monday, December 11, 2023

“Indeed, the manger is prepared,
the hay is carried in,
and the ox and the ass are led to the spot.” (1 Celano 85)

“It was indeed an extraordinary thought, a genial one such as poets alone can conceive and imagine; he wanted to see, and have others see, with childlike eyes the coming of salvation, God descending in his gentleness and love. What's more important for the future of the world?” (Leclerc, 116-117)

Action Step: Place your nativity figures of Mary and Joseph far away from your manger; each day move them a little closer to your crèche scene.

Tuesday, December 12, 2023

“There simplicity is given a place of honor,
poverty is exalted,
humility is commended,
and out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem.” (1 Celano 85)

“In a merchant society dominated and riven apart by money, it was necessary to rediscover the poverty of God. In a world of clerics, athirst for honor and prestige it was urgent to come back to the humility shown by God. In a world of holy wars, it was time to proclaim again God's tenderness, the gentleness of an infant God.” (Leclerc, 117)

Action Step: Consider giving a donation to an organization in your community who cares for those experiencing economic hardships.

Wednesday, December 13, 2023

*“The night is lit up like day,
delighting both man and beast.*

The people arrive, ecstatic at this new mystery of new joy.” (1 Celano 85)

“Christmas came. The inhabitants of the locality and of the whole neighborhood had been invited, as well as the friars living in the surrounding hermitages. That night, bearing torches they all went to the grotto halfway up the mountainside.” (Leclerc, 117)

Action Step: Go for an evening walk and look at the stars. Consider inviting a friend to join you.

Thursday, December 14, 2023

*“The forest amplifies the cries
and the boulders echo back the joyful crowd.
The brothers sing, giving God due praise,
and the whole night abounds with jubilation.”* (1 Celano 85)

“The woods re-echoed with their songs. Under the overhanging a cliff a crib had been prepared, with a manger and some straw; someone had brought in an ox and an ass.” (Leclerc, 117)

Action Step: Put your animal figures in your Christmas crèche. Listen to “Away in a Manger” or “Silent Night” and sing along.

Friday, December 15, 2023

*“The holy man of God stands before the manger, filled with heartfelt sighs, contrite in his piety,
and overcome with wondrous joy.”* (1 Celano 85)

“It seemed that [Francis] really saw the Child lying on the hay. His mind and heart were indeed at Bethlehem.” (Leclerc, 117)

Action Step: Spend a few minutes in prayer before your Christmas crèche. Imagine the baby Jesus lying on the hay.

Saturday, December 16, 2023

*“Over the manger the solemnities of the Mass are celebrated,
and the priest enjoys a new consolation.”* (1 Celano 85)

Francis “proclaimed the joyful event, announcing to the people present there, but also to all the rest of the world. That night Christianity had begun to see again with the eyes of children.” (Leclerc, 117)

Action Step: Reflect on your favorite childhood memory of Christmas. Write about it in your journal or share it with a friend and ask them to share one of theirs.