

FRANCISCAN NETWORK

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Dear Friends,

SINCE November of last year, we have farewelled four of our sisters. While we believe that “no eye has seen nor ear heard what things God has prepared for those who love Him,” there is still that sense of loss and sadness at their leaving us.

I have been reading the life of St Francis once again, and want to share with you what Wayne Simsic writes about the last days of Francis’s life. He tells us that . . .

“Less than a year after he wrote the “Canticle of the Sun” Francis was preparing to die. Even as he approached death, he continued to praise God, calling on his brothers and all creatures to join him. He opened his heart to the Holy Spirit and released the song he had been singing in one form or another for his whole lifetime. If the world could be imagined as one sublime symphony, with God as the conductor, then Francis’s song of joy became a great wave of harmony that flowed through the minds and hearts of his brothers.

Though Francis addressed death as “Sister” he did not take death lightly. He had kept up an ongoing dialogue with her throughout his life - Francis knew death as a constant companion, a reality which he faced daily in himself, in others and in the natural world. For some, death’s presence may be harsh or frightening, but for Francis, death was the entrance to eternal life, whose riches he had already sensed.

At the end, Francis requested that he be taken to his beloved Portiuncula and his body to be placed naked on the ground, following Jesus who had been stripped naked and died on the cross. By dying in the embrace of the earth, Francis demonstrated that his journey was rooted in the ordinary reality he shared with all things.

Nature had been his companion and had reminded him daily of his fragility and his finiteness on his earthly pilgrimage. The final leg of his journey and his entrance into Paradise would be in the company of all creation, because all creatures on God’s earth had found a home in his heart.

As Francis’ brothers chanted hymns and psalms,



the saint breathed his last. His body was then carried to Assisi, where Clare and her sisters waited in expectation to share a last loving moment.

What will our death be like? At the moment, death is a mystery for us, but Francis shows us that we should prepare by thinking of ourselves as little ones who trust completely in a loving God. Francis guides us on our journey that not only embraces humanity, but also welcomes all creation. He reminds us of the Spirit in our midst, and invites us to sing praise with all creation, even as we contemplate our own death and dying.”

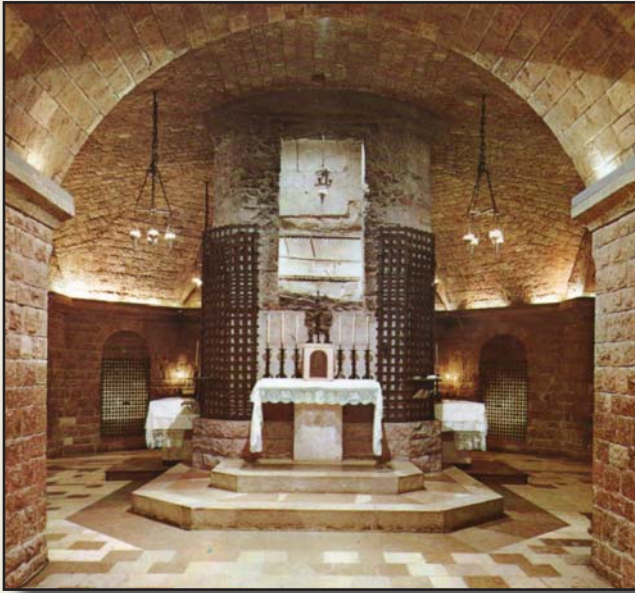
- Sr. Liz

The Tomb of St Francis

HALFWAY down the Basilica, two little staircases allow us to descend to the crypt where the mortal remains of St Francis are kept. After the burial in 1230, the stone sarcophagus containing the body was placed under the main altar of the lower Basilica. A narrow passage led to a small funerary cell. In that year, at the order of Pope Eugene IV, this passageway was walled in, so as not to permit the body to be stolen and transported to some other place.

It was a wise decision, for during hostilities between communes and ignorie, it was the custom to steal even the bodies of saints from a conquered town. In 1818, the passage was reopened, and a solemn and scientific canonical recognition was made, which proclaimed on September 5, 1820, that the body was definitely that of St Francis.

Around the tomb was built a crypt which was later



demolished because it was said that it contrasted with the style of the Lower Church. It was then rebuilt as it is at present, according to designs by the architect Ugo Tarchi in 1925. The tomb is surrounded by slabs of stone held in place by metal bars and is situated above the altar.

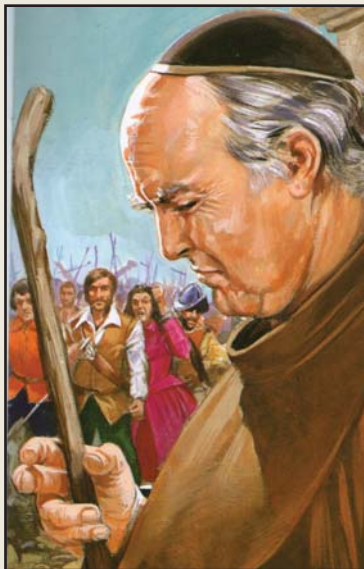
Four niches, (dug into the stone walls of the crypt and protected by wrought-iron screens,) are arranged around the tomb of the saint, and contain the remains of his four faithful and venerated sons – Friars Leone, Masseo, Rufino and Angelo.

There is something sacred about this unadorned chapel containing the body of Francis – it is a place of peace and intense spirituality which invites us to recollection and prayer.

St Peter of Alcantara

PETER was born in Alcantara, Spain in 1499. From Childhood, he spent much time in prayer. At 16, he entered a strict house of Observant Franciscans. He was ordained a Priest in 1524, and was known for his preaching and a desire to lead a more retired and penitential life.

When Peter saw that some members of the Order were lukewarm in observing the Rule, he began a reform. He sought to call them back to a more generous practice of the Franciscan way of life.



In 1555, Peter founded a new house in Pedrosa. Thus began the Alcantarine Franciscans. They were characterised by extreme poverty and noble simplicity, stressing the prayerful aspect of the Franciscan vocation.

On one of his journeys, Peter met St Teresa of Avila. She was dedicated to reforming the Carmelites. Peter encouraged her efforts and became her confessor and advisor.

The saint was called to his heavenly reward in 1562 and was canonised in 1669 by Pope Clement IX. His feast day is October 19.

Reflection

WHEN we have done all that God sent us on earth to do, we can leave our body, which imprisons our soul like a cocoon encloses the future butterfly. When the time is right, we can let go and then we will be free of pain, free of fears and worries, free as a beautiful butterfly returning home to God.

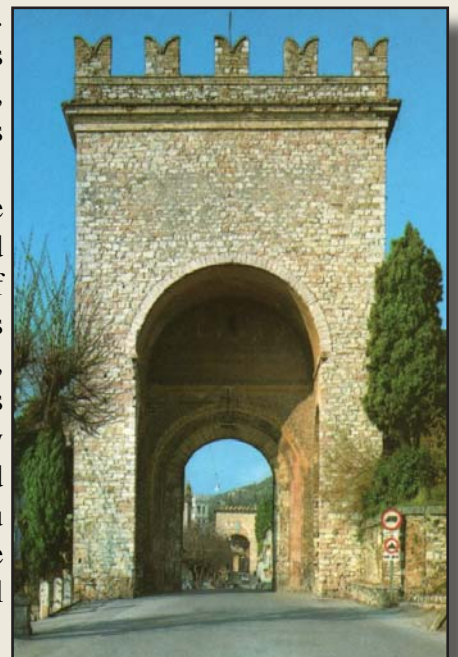
- Dr E. Kubler-Ross

Porta Nuova

PORTA Nuova is a “gateway” leading from the south-east end of Assisi into the town. On the inside of the arch is written the “Benediction of St Francis” over the city, given by the dying saint as he descended to the Portiuncula.

As he blessed his beloved Assisi, he prayed in his native tongue –

“Blessed are you, city of God for because of you, many souls will be saved, within your walls will dwell many saintly souls, and because of you many will come to enjoy eternal life.”



Sr Ursula Wilson (Sr Mary Dolores) 1931 - 2017

URSULA was born in Brisbane and was the only girl in a family of five children. Her first missions were to Silkwood in North Queensland and Coolangatta in south-east Queensland. Her skills as a musician were utilized in school and parish.

Ursula spent 26 years in Papua New Guinea in the West Sepik Province. She served as a primary teacher until independence saw expatriates phased out of teaching roles. She then moved into pastoral/catechetical work in Sissano, Ulau and Lumi in the Torrecelli mountains.



After a year in Aitape, her final assignment was to Kamberatoro near the border of Indonesian Papua. While all her missionary endeavours had been in under-developed and isolated areas, the Kamberatoro mission was particularly isolated and challenging. It was an area where non-indigenous faces are treated with suspicion and even dislike – and there was Ursula, the only expatriate in a community of Melanesian sisters.

Many remember her for her missionary energy, her easy-going manner, her frugal ways and her prayerful spirit. Ursula was always ready for a laugh, an adventure or a bit of mischief.

Ursula was local superior in a number of communities in both Australia and PNG as well as serving on the Provincial Council and as formation assistant in Australia.

Ursula enjoyed a very close connection with her brothers and their families throughout her life. In her last years in PNG Ursula wrote to her Provincial and told her of her desire to go to our missions in South America. However, some changes in her were noted, so she went to Rome for three years where she was greatly appreciated for her friendly nature and sense of humour.

During her time in Rome her health issues became more apparent. Ursula returned to PNG, but her health made it impossible for her to remain there, so she came back to Australia in 2000 and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. In 2007 she moved to the Holy Spirit Home and remained there until her death.

Ursula's life was a blessing to her family and friends, to the sisters across the world and to all those she served. May the fidelity, goodness and generosity of her life be remembered, as she rejoices in the embrace of the God who called her home to be with Him.

Sr Mary Raymond O'Brien – 105 years and 5 months.

SR Ray was born on September 27, 1912 – what a long and exemplary life! Today's world says might is always right and self must always come first, no matter what the cost or inconvenience to others. However, Ray followed the way of Jesus – the way of the Gospel – her values and principles formed a wisdom that our world seldom recognises today.

There are so many words that can be applied to Ray



– she was kind, loving, welcoming, loyal, tolerant and witty – I know because I spent eight years with her in community in Silkwood and another seven in Dajarra. She was one of the most affirming sisters I have ever lived with – she always saw a good intention behind every mistake. She loved the indigenous people of Dajarra and they loved her in return – when she opened her umbrella for a walk down town, they used to say, “Look, there go Sr Ray under her tree!”

Ray was loved dearly throughout her years of

teaching, both by her students and their parents. This was so obvious when I rang Silkwood to give them the news that she had gone to God. They spoke of her love and her loyalty and our visits to the families in the days when they lived in barracks and cut cane by hand.

No matter that language was a slight problem in those days – Ray somehow made herself understood with her gentleness, but especially her laughter that brought joy and comfort to the faces of those newly-arrived migrants.

Ray had been waiting for many years for her God to come and take her home, and often wondered what was keeping Him. She was like the good servant in the Gospel who waited without complaint for his master to come.

Sr Jeanette Gaudet, until recently our Congregational Leader, wrote of Ray – *“We are so inundated with talk of unwelcoming borders and walls, that it is disheartening. My few times with Ray surely were ones in which her humour and wit indicated her faith and trust in the One she knew for sure was waiting with open arms to welcome her in. Her manner, great smile and rosy cheeks were so friendly, borderless and inviting.”*

Ray will always be remembered for her great sense of humour and fun – who could forget her rendition of “Alice Blue Gown”, always dressed for the occasion, as we see in the photograph with Sr Liz, taken in Silkwood on St Patrick’s night, 1971. She was able to put on an exaggerated operatic singing voice that was truly hilarious.

Sr Ray, you were a good and faithful servant, and I thank you for the wonderful happy years we spent together in community, sharing the ups and downs of missionary life in the tropical climate of Silkwood and the desert heat of Dajarra. I thank God for the final hour we had together just two weeks before you died – I remember how we laughed as I was



leaving when you offered to give me your distressing cough for free! Whenever I read the following reflection “Sometimes” I always thought of Ray and the part she played in my life. However, I want to dedicate it not only to Ray, but to all our sisters who have touched our lives and have gone before us.

Sometimes

*Sometimes on our journey through life
we meet people who leave footprints on our mind
- they challenge us to see things differently.*

*Sometimes on our journey through life
we meet people who leave footprints on our heart
- they create a safe place for us
to open our hearts and feel safe*

*Sometimes on our journey through life
we meet people who leave footprints on our soul
- they share themselves with us so profoundly
that they touch the very essence of who we are
in that sacred, quiet place.*

Rest in peace, dear Ursula and Ray. You both have left gentle footprints on the minds, hearts and souls of so many. May we always remember the beauty of your love, your kindness and the sacred way you touched our lives.

In conclusion

I PRAY that the good Lord will bless and keep you all over the coming months, and that we can sing joyfully with St Francis - “Praised be You, my Lord, for Sister BODILY DEATH from whom no-one living can escape.”

Love

Sr Liz

