

The Passing Over of Francis

Eighth Centenary of the Transitus

Letter from the Minister
General and the
Definitorium on the
occasion of the Solemnity
of Saint Francis 2026



ORDO FRATRUM
MINORUM

1226 — 2026
Franciscus

Eight Hundredth Anniversary of the Death of St. Francis



To all the Friars Minor of the Order
To the contemplative Sisters of our Family
To the Sisters of the TOR and to the brothers and sisters connected to our Order

Rome, September 24, 2026

Dear brothers and sisters:

May the Lord give you peace!

We write to you as the feast of Saint Francis approaches, during this important year in which we remember the eight hundredth anniversary of his death.

The Centenary we are Celebrating

For four years we have been preparing for and celebrating these special moments. You'll recall that we began in 2023, celebrating the 8th centenary of the approval of our Rule while commemorating the Nativity scene that Francis created at Greccio. The following year, 2024, it was the anniversary of the Sacred Stigmata, and so we contemplated that unique grace, the wounds of love that Our Lord shared with Francis 800 years earlier on Mount LaVerna. In 2025, we meditated on the Cantic of Brother Sun, completed in 1225, and we were blessed to unearth even more of the richness and wisdom of this simple but beautiful poem. And now it is time, this year, to celebrate his Transitus, the 800th anniversary of the "passing over" of Saint Francis, the culminating moment of a life lived in intimate union with Jesus Christ, the "passing over" of a man who had lived with a deep love for the Lord's paschal mystery.

Throughout these four years, all over the world we have experienced such beautiful moments of fraternal celebration and collaboration among so many members of our Franciscan Family. We have rediscovered that it is Saint Francis himself who is the bond that unites us, even in our diversity, as we strive to live out our unique charism. We can now joyfully proclaim that these celebrations have already borne fruit, our coming together as one family is, in fact, the "first fruits" of what we have been about these last four years!

During the first months of this year, 2026, we also had the exceptional experience of viewing the mortal remains of Francis as they were exposed to the public faithful. Through his very bones, we once again heard his call to be truly lesser, instead of striving to be greater in this world. This year, Holy Mother Church also wanted to gift our entire Franciscan Family with a particular grace, granting a plenary indulgence for all our churches who celebrate this special centenary.



The Passing Over of Francis

Although we have been celebrating the “passing over” of Saint Francis all year, October 3rd and 4th, of course, mark the heart of these eighth centenary festivities.

We will relive in our celebrations the last moments of his earthly life, when Francis completed his *Transitus*, that is, his passage from this world to the Father. Even in the last days of his earthly life, he wanted to renew once again his promise to follow in the footsteps of Christ, as he had done throughout his post-conversion life. Before closing his eyes one last time, he wanted to listen to the Gospel of John starting from chapter 13, where the episode of the washing of the feet begins the account of the Last Supper and the passion and death of Christ. Francis wanted to break bread with his brothers, just as the Lord had done, to imitate that final acts of love that Jesus had enacted as his own death approached. As Jesus prayed to the Father for His own, so Francis commended his *fraternitas* to the Father, with a blessing that also included those yet to come and thus reaches us as well. Finally, just as Christ had died naked on the cross, so Francis wanted to be laid naked on the bare earth, that his own “passing over” be all the more similar to that of Jesus Christ.

The same desire for conformity to Christ and his paschal mystery was present throughout all of Francis’s life. It began when he encountered the people suffering with leprosy, when “that which was bitter turns into sweetness of spirit and body” (Test 3). Here he is referring precisely to the paschal experience of “dying” which leads to new life. And, of course, in receiving from the Lord “the gift of the brothers” (Test 14), Francis would again be called to “die” to individuality. He would now experience the Lord guiding him through the joy of brotherhood but also in the struggles and difficulties of that same fraternal life, which intensified for him as the years went on, in a succession of small “deaths” and “resurrections.”

The Paschal mystery was a constant in the life of Francis. It found its climax up on Mount La Verna, where he encountered the form of the Seraphic Christ, imprinting the Sacred Stigmata on his body, as his conformity to the crucified and risen Christ took on real flesh. Finally, his death at the Porziuncola brought to completion in Francis his journey of loving and embracing the paschal mystery.

One way to consider his life’s journey is to notice that Francis did not follow some unheard of path, but simply lived his baptismal promises to the full of the Christian life, promises which contain a call to participation in the paschal mystery of Christ. What is extraordinary about Francis is his absolute fidelity to this fundamental Christian vocation, which is also our vocation.



We too, in fact, should recognize that at various moments of our lives we are called to live out the Paschal mystery, that is, to pass over through difficulties and tribulations with faith in order to find resurrection and the peace that comes from God. Just as Francis had to live out this “passing over” many times, until the end, so must we. This is at the heart of the Gospel, when Jesus says: “Those who wish to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me, for whoever wishes to save their life will lose it; but whoever loses their life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will find it” (Mark 8:34-35). This profound and challenging call, which is at the heart of the Christian message which Francis lived to the fullest, also offers us a key to understanding how to be Franciscan during the times in which we live.

Our Contemporary Context

We live today in a world where nations hunger peace and yet seem to keep choosing war. Our society is often polarized and divided, showing perhaps more than ever a need for dialogue and communion. We understand the urgency in our care for our planet and yet, even in this area, where our great technological achievements could be used to solve so many of our problems, we witness our resources of science and technology being exploited and used for destructive ends by an unbridled consumerism. We live in a world where people seek authentic relationships and desire to be heard and known, yet the technological resources which could foster such relationships more often work against it. Technology used selfishly, along with the frenetic pace that we have set in our world of instant communication, ironically leads us to relationships that are increasingly impersonal or even combative.

“Passing Over” as a Sign of Hope

Yet, this is the world in which we find ourselves, and it is precisely in this world, the one in which we live now, that we are called to celebrate this eighth centenary of the “passing over” of Francis. Francis points us to Jesus, as we have said. His passing over calls us to consider the passing over of Christ, the Easter mystery, which alone has the power to transform our lives and is the authentic sign of hope that our world so desperately needs. It is in pondering the dying and rising of Christ that we must discern our future and consider in what ways individuals, along with the entire world, may be called to “die” and rise again. Jesus told us plainly: “Truly, truly, I say to you: if the grain of wheat does not fall to the ground and die, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves their life loses it, but whoever hates their life in this world will keep it safe for eternal life” (John 12:24-25).



Celebrating the death of Francis reminds us how he, until the very end, wanted to be the seed that falls and dies in order to produce much fruit. Francis completely trusted in this promise of the Lord, accepting that he must lose his life, according to the logic of the paschal mystery, so that we might live, to become God's fruitful, life-giving seed that would produce a large family tree, which is all of us.

What happened in Francis reveals the life-giving power of Christ's paschal mystery; his death is our life. And now we too are called to follow the Lord Jesus Christ like Francis did, and to "die" in whatever ways are needed so that others may live.

Looking to the Future

As his death approached, Francis spoke powerful words that challenge all of us who celebrate this centenary: "I have done what was mine to do; may the Lord show you what is yours to do!" (2Cel 214). This is a clear invitation to turn our gaze towards Christ. Francis does not want us to just look at him but instead directs our gaze to the Lord Jesus Christ to consider what his paschal mystery calls us to do personally. The celebration of this event from eight hundred years ago first points us back two thousand years to Christ and then directs us to set out into the future that awaits us and which God has prepared for us.

For this reason, the Franciscan Family has chosen not to hold a closing celebration for the centenary. We are leaving it open as we continue into a future where we daily witness and evangelize and, God willing, grow in holiness.

In our contemporary world, marked by such tension and conflict, we must be a sign of hope. Where the winds of war blow, we must bring the calm breath of peace; in a polarized and divided world, we must witness that *fraternitas* is possible; in a technological and consumerist society, we must call for self-sacrificing care for creation. Furthermore, in a society where relationships risk becoming increasingly impersonal, we must preserve, among ourselves and with others, true human relationships; and in a world where "truth" is often twisted to fit the interests some, we must promote a love for Christ's truth and an ecology of communication (MH 137).

The General Chapter that we Friars Minor will celebrate next year in Vietnam – where laypeople will also participate for the first time – aims to point us to God's future, to that Kingdom that Jesus came to inaugurate and that God is mysteriously preparing even within the troubled history of our times. We are encouraged and take great hope in the words of Jesus, "Behold, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mt 28:20).



Let's begin, Brothers...

And so, looking at Francis especially these last four years and celebrating this centenary, we accept the invitation to learn from Jesus Christ what is ours to do. As Francis said on his death bed: "Let us begin again, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up until now we have done little or nothing!" (1Cel 103).

We wish you great joy in whatever ways you will celebrate the feast of Saint Francis this centenary year! May we continue to learn from the one who, like Jesus, made his death a gift of love to the Father and to his brothers and sisters, and may our lives be transformed into a song of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord!

Fraternally,

Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM
Minister General
and the brothers of the General Definitorium

Prot. 115571/MG-117-2025



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