

Report on Sacred Heart Church, Flitwick to Assisi – October 2016

On the 3rd of October 32 pilgrims from Sacred Heart Parish - Flitwick, St Francis – Shefford, St Mary's – Dunstable and Turvey Abbey led by myself with spiritual leaders Canon Bennie Noonan and Deacon Philip Pugh set off late afternoon for Rome airport. Tamara from the tour operator 'Special-Pilgrimages' met us at the airport and they were on hand to transfer us by coach for the two and a half hour journey to our hotel, the Hotel La Terrazza in Assisi.

Our first day in Assisi coincided with the Feast of St Francis. We had a morning excursion to The Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli, this is the place where the Franciscan community were given the rules of the order and where St Francis left his earthly life, dying naked on the ground. Inside the monastery you will find a famous rose garden, where St Francis threw himself to atone for his sins: the plant miraculously missed all the thorns and didn't hurt the body of the saint in any way, even today, the rose has no thorns. The Porziuncola chapel built inside was given to St Francis by the Benedictines, and is important because it was the initial nucleus from which the Franciscan order was born.



Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli



The next day, a third of the group had a day excursion in Rome, while the others explored Assisi. The excursion to Rome included a visit to the San Sebastian Catacombs, the Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, a beautiful Baroque church known for its collection of relics. Then a visit to the Holy Stairs or 'Scala Sancta' these are the stairs Jesus climbed on his way to trial with Pontius Pilate and some of the pilgrims climbed the stairs on their knees reciting decades of the rosary. We then visited St. John of Lateran, the official seat of the Pope and the oldest of the Papal Basilicas and then the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, the oldest of Rome's churches dedicated to Mary. Our final destination was to go through the Holy Door at St.

Peter's Basilica, it was a long wait but very worthwhile.

Holy Door of Mercy St Peter's Basilica

For our last day in Assisi, we had a walking tour which brought us to the Basilica of Santa Chiara, inside the Cappella del Crocifisso is alleged to have spoken to St Francis in San Damiano, ordering him to repair the church. Relics of St Francis and St Claire are kept behind the grate. We then visited the house where St Francis lived when he was a young boy. The Basilica of St Francis it is here where you will find the tomb of Saint Francis, in a crypt under the altar, the most important decorations are the series of 28 frescoes ascribed to the young Giotto along the lower part of the nave. We then celebrated Mass in one of the chapels next to the Basilica.



St Francis lived here as a young boy



On our journey back to Rome for the airport we stopped at the Sanctuary of Greccio, this is a spectacular place located at 2000ft on a steep rock overlooking the "Holy Valley", where St. Francis used to wander. In December 1223, St. Francis devised the first living crib. The idea was to discourage would-be pilgrims to go to Bethlehem, as it was a risky adventure, the Holy Land being then under the control of the Turks. We celebrated Mass, saw the many wonderful cribs from all over

the world and continued on our journey to the airport and our flight back to Luton. A wonderful and blessed pilgrimage, with fellowship that will continue and strengthen our faith for many years to come.

Ros Penn
Pilgrimage Co-Ordinator