Dear Friends,

Praised be Jesus Christ!

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi. In honor of this anniversary, Pope Leo XIV has proclaimed an extraordinary Jubilee Year from January 10, 2026, to January 10, 2027.

St. Francis is beloved for many reasons: his radical renunciation of worldly riches, his care for all of God's creation, his love for those on the margins, and his commitment to peace. His life reminds us that holiness often begins when we allow God to transform what is unsettled within our own hearts.

St. Francis was born in 1181 to a wealthy family and, in his youth, enjoyed a life of privilege and popularity. He dreamed of becoming a knight and joined the war between Assisi and Perugia, where he was captured and spent about a year as a prisoner. During this time, his conversion began.

After his release, Francis encountered a leper—someone he would normally have avoided. Instead, he embraced and kissed him. This encounter became a powerful moment of grace, opening Francis' heart to see Christ in those whom society rejected.

Later, while praying before the crucifix at San Damiano, Francis heard Christ call him to "rebuild my Church." He renounced his wealth, repaired the church at San Damiano, and began preaching the Gospel and serving the poor. Twelve men eventually joined him, forming the beginning of what would become the Franciscan order. Francis also inspired the Poor Clares, founded by St. Clare, and the Franciscan Third Order for the laity.

In 1224, Francis received the stigmata. The final years of his life were marked by suffering and blindness, yet he remained a witness to joy, humility, and peace. He died in Assisi on October 3, 1226, and was canonized by Pope Gregory IX in 1228.

Perhaps we can celebrate this Jubilee Year by asking: What would St. Francis invite me to change? If we are preoccupied with material things, perhaps we can simplify by giving away clothes and possessions we no longer use. We might set aside an hour or two each week to serve those in need through organizations such as St. Vincent de Paul, St. Ben's, Kinship, or the Catholic Ecology Center. Or, wherever conflict or a lack of forgiveness has left us unsettled, we can ask St. Francis to intercede for healing and peace.

Finally, I'd like to share with you this prayer from Pope Leo XIV:

St. Francis, our brother, you who eight hundred years ago went to meet Sister Death as a man at peace, intercede for us before the Lord. You recognized true peace in the Crucifix of San Damiano, teach us to seek in Him the source of all reconciliation that breaks down every wall. You who, unarmed, crossed the lines of war and misunderstanding, give us the courage to build bridges where the world raises up boundaries. In this time afflicted by conflict and division, intercede for us so that we may become peacemakers: unarmed and disarming witnesses of the peace that comes from Christ. Amen.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Rev. Aaron R. Laskiewicz

Pastor