

La Foresta

La Foresta was the scene of an event in Francis' latter days when he was already a sick man, half blind. Reluctantly, on the advice of Cardinal Hugolino, and Brother Elias the General Minister of the Friars Minor, Francis left the Porziuncola for Rieti to consult with Tebald the Saracen, the papal surgeon about his eyes. The Papal Court resided in Rieti during those days must like they do at Castle Gondolfo today.

This is the original church when Francis visited. The altar top is original, while the legs are a newer additio.



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The priest of La Foresta offered Francis hospitality. When the people discovered that Francis was staying there, they went to visit him and help themselves to the grapes of the priest's vineyard. The priest was very upset. His vineyard gave 13 measures of wine which kept him for the year. Francis told him not to grumble or say anything to the people, but to trust in God's providence and generosity. He would receive not less than 20 measures or Francis would make up the difference. The parish priest received 20 measures. This is known as the Miracle of the Grapes.

The priest's house. Note the small fireplace without a chimney. The priest heated his residence and cooked here.



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This the vat that the priest made his wine in. It is in the corner of his house.





The sanctuary was a humble hermitage and one of the remote places that Francis sought out for solitude. It invites one to leave the frenetic activities of life and to sit at the feet of God in the silence of solitude.

In Luke 8:18 we read: "...for to those who have, more will be given; and from those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away." Carroll Stuhlmueller wrote: "This intriguing remark can be paraphrased: the one who has time to pray and reflect will be given more; the one who has not taken the time to turn to God and friend for advice will lose even the little wisdom that he or she possesses." (*Biblical Meditations* [Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1984].

This can also be applied to the episode of the stolen grapes. The priest grumbled at the people eating up most of his grapes. Francis stretches the hospitality and the generosity of the priest by a trust in God that never fails.

This is the cave that Francis went to for solitude and prayer often staying for weeks at a time.

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The new church.



That is Anna and the baby Mary over the altar. You can see how they added on to the original church of Francis' time.



The sanctuary is now cared for by a Mondo X community. These communities were started by a Friar in 60's to address rehab needs. These are lay run communities that take in anyone who is broken by drugs, alcohol, food addictions, video and computer addictions, incarceration or depression. They do not have any outside profession assistance and do not follow an 12 Step type programs. The community is built on work and care of one another. They feel that all these "isms" are just symptoms of disorder in one's life. They have no radio, TV, computers or electronics of any type. The person in charge has a phone for emergencies. They rise at 6 am. at 7 they meet for morning prayer. At 7:20 they have breakfast and then hear what work needs to be done that day. They work until 1 pm. Then, they meet for midday prayer followed by lunch. They rest while doing dishes after lunch. Then, its back to work until 7pm. Then, its evening prayer, dinner, and playing games or doing research. Each person is required to give a presentation every month on a topic of their choice. As a person comes into the community, they are assigned a "guardian angel" to help them find their way in the community. When someone is in crisis as often happens when addressing deep issues, the work stops while the community helps the person in crisis get through the moment. During the winter, when they can't work out in the fields, they do handicrafts. There are both men's and women's communities, and they are completely self sustaining. People

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stay as long as they need to, but typically not less than 3 years. This is the time needed to build a new foundation for life.

Reflection

Do I have a hermitage or place of solitude to which I can withdraw to slow down and change the frantic pace of my life?

How do I use the gifts God has given me? Do I look at them as too meager and try to hoard them or do I trustingly step forward in a spirit of generosity, to share them with others and watch them multiply?