

Six Weeks In Europe

This is the fourth in a series of articles describing a six week's tour of Europe just completed by the Courier Journal's assistant editor. This article describes visits to shrines in Assisi, Florence, and Siena in Italy.

By Rev. Henry Atwell

Tucked away in the hillsides of central Italy is the village of Assisi which guards the secret of St. Francis.

After an early Sunday morning Mass in Rome, our bus sped across highways which followed the routes of ancient Roman roads. Remnants of the old cobblestoned roads can still be seen.

TWO BUILDINGS dominate the Assisi landscape.

At the foot of the green hill is the majestic marble white basilica Santa Maria del Angel. This church was built at the wish of Pope St. Pius V in 1569 to be a shrine for a very unusual relic.



Doves nestle in arms of statue of St. Francis at Assisi cloister.

unusual relic that the church called Portiuncula where St. Francis launched his Order of Friars Minor.

The second landmark is the church of St. Francis with its adjacent monastery looking out from its site atop Assisi's hillside across the Spoleto valley.

We stopped first to visit the Portiuncula, a chapel about the same size as a home car garage except a bit higher and with a little steeple over the top.

Angels are said to have appeared in it long before St. Francis was born. Benedictines tended it for years, using it as a chapel to serve field workers in the area.

Worn out by age, the chapel was falling into ruins when Francis restored it with his own labor of skill and love. The rough hewn stones preserve to this day the freshness of primitive Franciscan simplicity. In the year 1211 in this same chapel, Francis gave St. Clare her Franciscan habit, thereby founding the Franciscan sisterhoods.

In an arched cloister leading from the basilica is a statue of the famous saint. For years, beyond number, as long as the statue has stood there, there are always two white doves nestled in the arms of the statue.

Some people speak about "the miracle of the doves."

The Franciscan friars simply tell how St. Francis once purchased two doves from a boy on his way to market to sell them. St. Francis then built a nest for the doves and cautioned them not to get caught again. Today, the friars tell the story, point to the doves in the arms of the statue and then ask, "How would you explain it?"

IN THE CHURCH on the hilltop is the tomb of St. Francis actually two vast churches one above the other with frescoes and paintings by Cimabue, Giotto and half a dozen famous artists.

The body of St. Francis rests in a stone coffin below the main altar. For six centuries it remained hidden until 1818 when an opening was made around it and an altar placed in front of it.

So early Monday July 8 morning I said Mass at the tomb of St. Francis and realized that the spirit of a medieval country boy could still thrill hearts seven centuries later. Is there any answer other than "God willed it to be so?"

WE VISITED the Church of St. Clare, kneeling before her still incorrupt remains, went to the convent and chapel where she and the first Franciscan sisters slept on the floor, ate but three meals a week and drove off Saracens invaders by holding before them Our Eucharistic Lord in a monstrance.

In the presence of such memories, all you do is ask God to put some of that spirit into your own life and when you leave Assisi, you leave a part of your heart there behind you.

Our next stop was Siena famous for its Palio horse race in the city square Piazza del Campo where the Franciscan St. Bernardino preached his sermons. We had to leave our bus to walk the narrow 114 feet wide winding streets to the exquisite cathedral of Our Lady a hymn in stone to her honor.

Interested originally as only one portion of a proposed cathedral the structure boasts any church in our Diocese. Unique feature of this cathedral is its horizontal style of layers of black and white marble with the result

impressing of even tided height to the soaring arches. We violated the seven hour to nurse the saint at the sanctuary of St. Catherine in order to visit the home (now a shrine) of the Dominican Tertiary saint.

By evening this is still Monday we welcomed the opportunity to take it easy in Florence. An open air concert in the square across from the hotel was an ideal way to relax after the eight hour bus ride.

Approaching Florence we passed the well kept American cemetery with his white crosses and six point stars marking the graves where GI's rest beneath blue Italian skies.

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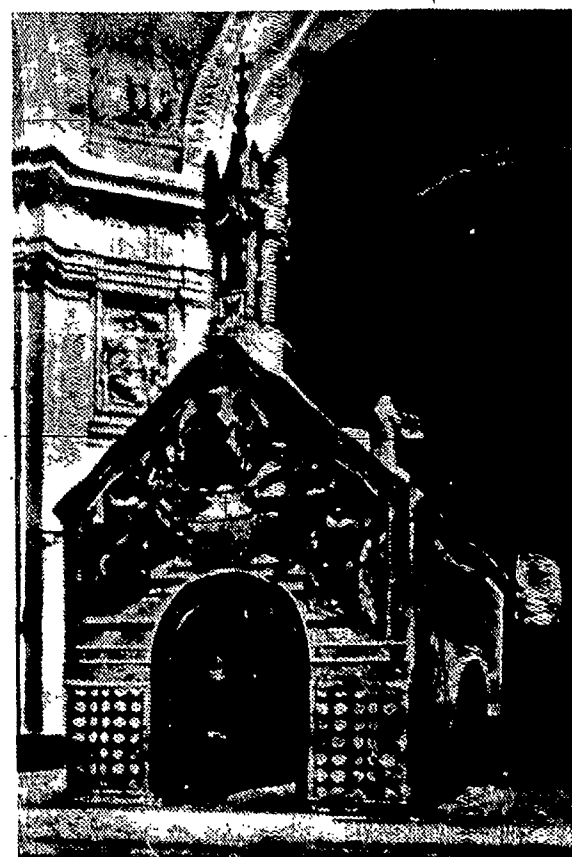
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Portiuncula chapel where St. Francis organized his order of friars is now enshrined by vast basilica called Santa Maria del Angel at Assisi.

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Priest Raps U.S. Policy To Indians

St. Louis — (NC) — A priest here has strongly denounced the federal government's policy toward Indians in the United States.

Msgr. Victor T. Suren, director of the St. Louis Archdiocesan Resettlement Committee, described the Indian problem as "a crisis more gripping than Negro and migratory worker situations."

HE DECLARED that the Indian is literally isolated from the American way of life. "But I doubt if one per cent of the people in the United States realize this fact," he added.

He said Negroes and migratory workers have mingled with society, but "the government officially regards the Indians as a segregated people."

Msgr. Suren stated that each

of the letters he receives from missionaries among the Indians are being ignored by the federal government.

The policy of the government now, he continued, is to dissolve the reservations. It wants to be freed from its responsibility toward the Indian, and as a result it has withdrawn all but a minimal subsidy for the reservations.

"What the government doesn't seem to realize," he said, "is that you can't just take the Indian out of his community and customs and throw him into our cities, and then expect him to transform overnight."

Msgr. Suren admitted that the solution to the problem is not easy. "The Indian must be educated in the ways and customs and habits of our modern urban society," he stated.

Lady of the Flowers) is another masterpiece in marble with its vast red dome and slender campanile. Opposite the cathedral is the famous eight-sided baptistry with the bronze "doors of paradise" designed by the artist Ghiberti.

This cathedral was the scene in 1438 for the seventeenth ecumenical council of the Church. The council restored the ancient unity of eastern Greek and western Latin Catholics. The healing of a schism already four centuries old lasted, unfortunately, only a few years.

Florence is famous for its art galleries, the Uffizi Gallery with paintings by Cimabue and Giotto, Botticelli and Filippo Lippi; the Pitti Palace, with masterpieces by Raphael, Michelangelo and del Sarto.

We also went shopping for leather goods at the Franciscan supervised Santa Croce school. English speaking Father Antonio took me on a private "extension tour" into the cloister for an exquisite sunset time picture of the bell tower.

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HE SUGGESTED that this education should begin by having government officials meet with the missionaries so that a longrange program might be fashioned.

"The missionary knows more about the Indian than most government officials," Msgr. Suren said. "After all, these officials are constantly moving ground from one place to another, but the missionary actually lives with the Indian."

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