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## The Spirit of Assisi: Celebrating 800 Years of St. Francis and Giotto

Pilgrims can now book to see the saint's remains for the first time alongside new exhibits in Perugia and Gubbio

*Italian Hours*  
Lucy Gordan



The crypt of the Basilica where the Saint's mortal remains are usually kept and where they will return Photo credit: Sala Stampa

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St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals, ecology, and Italy, died on October 3, 1226. Four special events in Umbria will commemorate its 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The saint was buried in a paupers' cemetery until shortly afterwards when, in solemn procession, his followers carried his remains to the Church of San Giorgio. On July 16, 1228, Pope Gregory IX confirmed his miracles, declared him a saint and the next day laid the foundation stone for the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi. Francis was buried there on May 25, 1230, under the high altar of the Lower Church, but his tomb was hidden to protect it from theft by Saracen invaders and relic hunters. It was discovered in 1818, in 1819 the saint's mortal remains authenticated, and his tomb was rebuilt in a specially constructed crypt under the Lower Church during the 1920s.

For the first time, from February 22 to March 22, St. Francis's mortal remains will be publicly displayed for veneration in the Lower Church. This special viewing requires a free, but mandatory, online booking at [www.saintfrancisliveson.org](http://www.saintfrancisliveson.org), with options for a tour guided by a Franciscan or a self-guided visit. So far, over 250,000 pilgrims from all over the world have booked.



The mortal remains of St. Francis of Assisi ready for display Photo credit: Sala Stampa del Sacro Convento

The guided tours of up to 60 pilgrims each, on Monday through Friday from 10 AM to 4 PM, last 30 minutes and are given in English, Italian, French, Spanish, German and Polish. The Italian tours are sold out and there is limited availability for the other languages. The self-guided tours, which are offered only in English and Italian on Monday-Friday from 8-10 AM and 4-7 PM, Saturday and Sunday from 8 AM-7PM, last an hour and a half.

At The National Gallery of Umbria in Perugia, from March 14 to June 14 will be the exhibition, "Giotto and St. Francis: A Revolution in Fourteenth-Century Umbria". It will explore the historical moment, when Tuscan-born Giotto (1267-1377) went in 1288 with his teacher Cimabue to paint the frescoes in the Upper Church and replaced the static Byzantine-inspired *maniera greca* without perspective with a more natural style.

Since frescoes are not transportable, the press release tells us that: "The exhibition itinerary will retrace the different phases of Giotto's activity in the Basilica through coeval works. It will start from his beginnings, documented by the *Madonna and Child* from Pieve di San Lorenzo in Borgo San Lorenzo and the *Madonna and Child with Angels* from San Giorgio alla Costa, to arrive at his most mature phase, represented by a fresco fragment with an *Allegorical Figure* from the Lower Church and now preserved at Budapest's *Szépművészeti Múzeum*. Also contributing to the master's stylistic evolution are masterpieces such as the *Madonna and Child* from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and the panel *Pentecost* from the National Gallery in London, originally part of a Franciscan dossal."

The exhibition continues with works by Giotto's contemporaries: Sieneese Simone Martini (1284-1334) and Sieneese Pietro Lorenzetti (c. 1280/85-1348), both of whom also frescoed the Basilica, as well as with works by lesser-known Umbrian painters.

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A view of the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi Photo credit: Sala Stampa del Sacro Convento

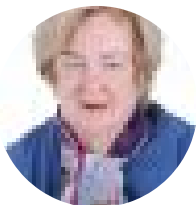
“Francis and Brother Wolf. Art Recounts the Legend of the Encounter,” is on until April 19 in Gubbio, the Umbrian town where St. Francis first wore his tunic in 1206 and where he lived again in c. 1220. Its 250 artifacts, dating from the 1400s to the present: paintings, sculptures, ceramics, engravings, and books, illustrate the legend of St. Francis and the Wolf. Supposedly the townspeople of Gubbio were terrorized by a fierce and hungry wolf who attacked them and ate their livestock. St. Francis tamed the wolf after the townspeople agreed to feed it.

This year “The Medieval Festival”, held annually in late September in Gubbio, will be called “During the Time of St. Francis” and will feature artifacts, concerts, and lectures about him and his teachings as well as the usual stands where medieval professions are taught, and books about the Middle Ages and “medieval” products are sold.

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**Lucy Gordan**

*Italian Hours*

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