



On June 18, 1939, Pope Pius XII declared Saint Francis the Patron Saint of Italy. In order to celebrate the event, the Franciscan friars decided to build a monument on Terminillo at 1623 m above sea level.

The first stone, taken from the Holy Convent in Assisi, was laid on September 18, 1949. Excavation work began in 1952 and over 25,000 cubic meters of rock was carved out by workers who came from the piedmont towns. The workers would climb up and down the mountain on foot for a bowl of soup and 500 lire. Construction on the temple designed by Fidenzoni di Spoleto began in 1955 and the first Mass was celebrated on Christmas day, 1956, in the still unfinished and unadorned church. The church was **consecrated** on August 22, 1964 and the spectacular mosaic in the apse was done in 1975.

Notwithstanding decades of work, construction on the church continued in 1981 when the façade was lengthened to protect the church against the unfavourable weather conditions of the mountains. The National Votive Temple underwent years of anguish and worries, tensions and hopes, ambitions and revenge.

Exterior

On the piazza in front of the church, one can admire the **hut-shaped façade** in pink and white-pink stone from Assisi. It blends in so well with the natural surroundings that it seems a continuation of the mountains themselves. In the centre of the façade, the profile of the *prothyrum* that resembles the small façade of the Porziuncola stands out.

There are two other figurative elements of great interest. The first is a solemn monolithic stone **statue** depicting Saint Francis which is over 3 metres high. It was sculpted by Beniamino Falda (from a drawing by Pietro Vitali). The second is a bronze Annunciation by Giovanna Fiorenzi that is found in the lunette of the portal.

Below the church is the crypt that lies on bare rock and forms the true podium of the Temple. The **bell tower** rises for 25 meters next to the church. The following words are inscribed on the largest bell: "E caelis abreptum Pacis Bonique omen profundo festivo sono" suggesting that wind and clouds bring Franciscan tidings of Peace and Goodness everywhere.

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Interior

The Temple is covered by a longitudinal barrel vault that resembles the vault in the Porziuncola. The church is 36 metres long and 24 metres high. Three chapels open on either side of the church. Starting on the right side, the first chapel is the **Chapel of Saint Anthony**. One wall is covered by a mosaic in the centre of which a figure of the Saint stands out. The mosaics in the side chapels are from the Vatican School of Mosaics.

Further on we find the **Chapel of the Crucifix**. The wooden sculpture is by the master artisans of Ortisei. The Chapel of the Madonna di Loreto, patron saint of the Air Force - and donated by the Air Force - celebrates the glory of Mary being crowned Queen surrounded by a flock of angels. She is holding the Christ Child and at her feet two angels carry the house of Nazareth.

Rising towards the presbytery to the right is the **Chapel of Saint Francis**. The urn contains the **remains** of the Saint: a small amount of his ashes creating a profound tie with his tomb in Assisi. A votive lamp that is offered yearly by a citizen of the Rieti Province burns eternally in front of the urn. The glazed copper Romanesque crucifix by Prof. Abbozzo recalls the crucifix in Saint Damian's. The same artist created the scenes from the life of the Saint in majolica. From the right: Francis listens to Saint Damians' crucifix; in Rivotorto friars have a vision of the Saint upon a fire chariot; Francis delivers the Rule of the Franciscan Order in Fontecolombo; prelates and friars at the first Franciscan chapter; Francis makes the crèche at Greccio; Saint Francis receives the stigmata on Verna; the dying Saint blesses his town.

Presbytery

The current design is by Pietro Vitali. The Great Cosmic Cross is one of the oldest solar symbols and it is a sign of divinity. The altar was built from a solid block of stone and is decorated with bronze plates depicting scenes from the life of Saint Francis. From the left: Saint Francis supports the Lateran Basilica, Saint Francis preaching to the birds, Saint Francis renounces his wealth in front of his father; Saint Francis receives the stigmata; Italy and her patron saint, the cathedral and basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi; from baptism to glory.

The 16th century **tabernacle** that is set harmoniously in the modern structure, presents tempera paintings depicting the Deposition in the centre and two angels on the sides. The majolica *ambo* with the four Evangelists and their symbols was sculpted by Laurenzi. The organ can be found on the left wall. It was built in 1969 by the Pinchi Company of Foligno.

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Further on is the **Chapel of Saint Barbara**, the patron saint of Rieti. Surrounded by celestial light, the saint is depicted with a three-window tower, symbol of her faith in the holy trinity. Below is a series of people she protects: sailors, carpenters, engineers, artillerymen, bridge constructors. The statue in the **Chapel of Saint Rita** was sculpted by craftsmen from Ortisei.

The last large chapel, with a mosaic that covers an entire wall, houses the **baptismal font**. Rays of light branch off from the dove recalling Bernini's work in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. The font is made from a monolithic block of green Genovese marble with biblical scenes in glazed copper that depict the sacrament of baptism.

A fascinating and absorbing "Way of the Cross" built on 14 tables by the sculptor Aldo Laurenzi runs along the entire perimeter of the church. The decorated **windows** depict the Canticle of All Creatures and highlight the natural forces of the sun, water, the wind and even the sweet and fascinating stellar and terrestrial reflections of energy and power.

At the far end of the church, visitors can peacefully stop and admire one of the most intense spectacles that the church offers: the majestic **apse mosaic**.

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