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## Christmas and Francis: Be *Real*

by Daniel Crosby, Capuchin

It's kind of sad. Ask people what they know about Francis of Assisi, and more than likely the response will be: "He liked birds and animals." Lovely. Romantic. A second, less common response might be: "He started the Christmas crib, didn't he?" They might have heard the story of the Christmas crèche – and how Francis, two years before his death, created a living crib at Greccio. Lovely. Romantic.

But real? True to history? Minimally, maybe.

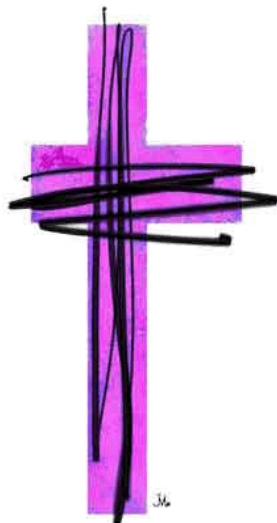
It was two years before he died. Just a few months after praying on Mt. LaVerna and receiving the wounds of Christ's passion. He had prayed, "Allow me, Lord, to feel within myself a little of the pain you experienced in the hour of your most bitter passion, and something of the love that drove you to endure that pain." His prayer was answered; he would experience something of Jesus' pain, something of Jesus' love.



Graphic by Capuchin Michael Gaffney

Christ was Francis' all-consuming passion. His thirst to know Christ, to feel with Christ and to love like Christ, never diminished.

His experience on LaVerna took place in September. Coming down that mountain his spirits soared when he thought of the coming feast of Christmas. Imagine: GOD taking on a tiny, fragile human frame like ours! What poverty, what humility! How could this become more *real* for himself, his friars and the people? In prayer he thought of a way – and a place. He knew a man who lived on another beautiful height in the town of Greccio. In words that recall his prayer on LaVerna, he wrote, "I want to do something that will bring to memory the little



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# Vocation Update



Dan Crosby is director of St. Anthony Retreat Center in Marathon, Wisconsin.

Child born in Bethlehem and set before our eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs.”

No desire for the lovely or romantic (being born in that Bethlehem stable was NOT pretty or romantic). Only the desire to experience what was *real*, how

God became *real* in weak human flesh on Christmas.

Francis' early biographer describes it. "The manger was prepared, the hay was brought, the ox and ass led in." Nothing more. No one recruited to "play" Mary and Joseph. Not even a baby brought in to shiver in the cold. Just an empty manger filled with hay – and with the Child his faith told him was real. But wait! While Francis served as deacon at Midnight Mass, "The gifts of the Almighty were multiplied, and a wonderful vision was seen: a little child lying in the manger lifeless, and the holy man of God, going up to it and rousing the child as from a deep sleep."

Our wish for you at Christmas is that you will be filled with the same desire as Francis: to get beyond the lovely and romantic glitter to experience what's *real* and more wonder-filled. Standing before the crib hear Francis' words: "Look at the humility of God, my brothers, and pour out your hearts before him!" A Blessed Christmas to you and yours!

The next Vocation Update  
will appear January 8, 2008.  
Merry Christmas!  
Happy New Year!

To attend the SLS alumni/Candidate weekend  
at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin  
January 18-20, 2008,  
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