



## An interview with Father Massimo Fusarelli (OFM) Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor

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Father Massimo Fusarelli, Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor, tells us about the intuition of Saint Francis as we mark the anniversary of the first depiction of the Nativity scene created by the Saint at Christmas 1223 in the little Italian town of Greccio, near Rieti, north of Rome.

That year the patron saint of Italy stopped in the Reatino valley, probably returning from Rome where on 29 November he had received the Bull confirming his Rule from Pope Honorius III. The caves near Greccio reminded him a lot of those he had seen in the Holy Land and especially the panorama of Bethlehem.

“The first biographer of Francis describes that Christmas to us in a very simple way: Francis brings an ox and an ass into the cave, puts some hay on the rock and has the Eucharist celebrated. So, the profound meaning of these signs, which in the Bible are understood as Messianic, is peace. Francis wants to live a Christmas in peace, not a psychological or emotional peace, but the peace that is Christ. In a very violent age, both then and now, Francis gives himself this contemplative pause [...] he knew that his gestures had great power, great strength.”

“This year’s celebrations to mark the eighth centenary of Greccio's Christmas is not a parenthesis, it is not an escape from a bitter, dramatic, uncertain reality, but it helps us to look at things from a different perspective,” concludes Father Massimo, who continues that “the poverty in which Jesus wanted to be born is the same poverty that is present today in every place of suffering, in places of war and desperation.”

