



HOLY HERO for February 2010
Let's get to know.....**ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI**
Feast Day Oct 4

I was born in Assisi, Italy many centuries ago in the year 1182. The day of my baptism, I was given the name Giovanni Bernardone, but my father, a wealthy fabric merchant, loved all things French, and changed my name to Francesco (Francis). As a young man, my future was guaranteed in my father's business. I led a carefree life wearing the finest clothes and attending parties with the rich. Even during this time of my life, I felt a special sympathy for the poor, and often gave to the needy. I was taken as a prisoner of war in a battle between my city of Assisi and the city of Perugia. It was during this time that my thoughts began to turn from war to peace. After my return home, I gradually felt the Lord calling me to a more serious and spiritual life. I had a vision in which God said to me, "Francis, rebuild my Church." I rebuilt the local church with my own hands, but soon understood God meant rebuild His ENTIRE Catholic Church through works of mercy. At age 27, I heard a sermon that would change my life forever. The priest spoke about the gospel story (Matthew 10:9) in which Jesus told his followers to go forth and proclaim that the Kingdom of God was upon them, that they should take no money with them, not even a walking stick or shoes. This inspired me to live a life of poverty. Many of my friends laughed and made fun of me when I gave away all my money and worldly possessions. So there I was, barefoot and wearing poor shepherd's clothes, preaching to the people about repentance; peace with God, peace with others, and peace with oneself. I looked upon all people, rich or poor, and all the creatures of the earth, as my brothers and sisters because we were all created by the same God.

In 1209, I took my first twelve followers and traveled to Rome to ask Pope Innocent III for permission to start a new religious order. The Pope agreed, and I became the founder of the *Franciscan Order of Preaching Friars*. The brothers and I lived in community, leading a simple, humble life. We wandered through the towns, cheerful and full of song, preaching the Gospel of the Lord and showing honor, respect, and love to each person we met. My new order grew quickly, and I also helped St. Clare of Assisi start an order of sisters known as the *Poor Clares*. I discovered that the richness of life does not come from money or worldly goods, but from imitating Christ in His poverty and humility, and loving each person, be they beggar or king.

While gazing at a crucifix in 1224, it was made known to Francis that he should be transformed to resemble Christ. As a result of this vision, the marks of the real and painful wounds of Jesus were left in his hands, his side and his feet (the stigmata). These marks remained with him until his death in 1226.