

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

ITALY, 13TH CENTURY

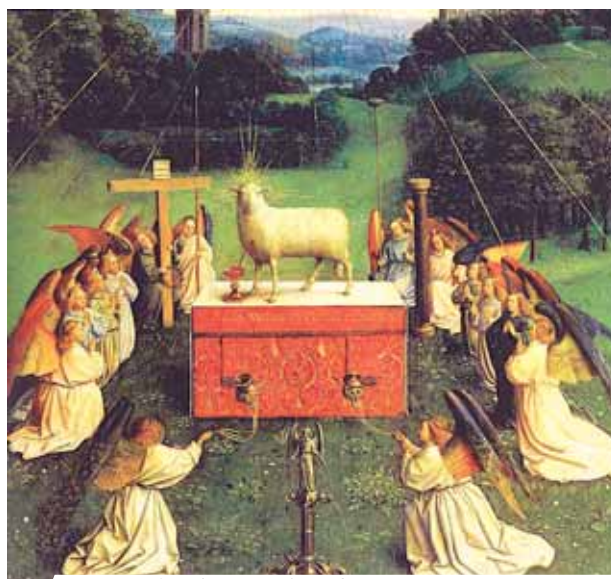
Saint Francis nurtured a particular affection for lambs, to whom Jesus Christ is often paralleled in Sacred Scripture, most especially for His gentle nature.



Portrait (Image) of Saint Francis, Speco



Saint Francis of Assisi, Giotto



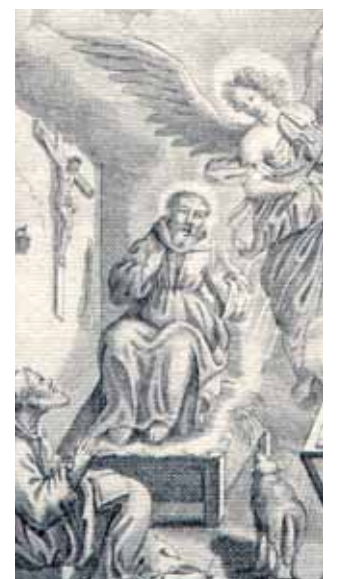
J. Van Eyck, *The Mystical Lamb*



Upper Basilica of Saint Francis, Assisi



Saint Francis, Francisco Ribalta Museum of Prado, Madrid



The Franciscan historical chronicles tell the story that “during a trip to Rome, the saint kept with him a little lamb, inspired by his devotion to Christ, his most beloved Lamb. Upon his departure, it was entrusted to a noble matron, Lady Jacopa of the Sette Soli (Seven Suns), so that she would have custody of it in her home. And the lamb, as if spiritually educated by the saint in matters of the soul, would not leave the woman’s side when she went to church, when she stayed, or returned. Some mornings, when the lady was late in awakening, the lamb would gently pounce and nudge her with his little horns, and woke her with his bleats, encouraging her with his gestures and expressions to hurry to church. For this, the lady had much admiration and love for that lamb, disciple of Francis and teacher of devotion. [...] One day

while walking in the outskirts of Siena, Saint Francis encountered a huge herd of sheep at pasture. As he always did, he kindly saluted them, and they, having stopped grazing, all ran towards him, raising their heads and meeting his gaze.

They greeted him with such festivity that the shepherds were stupefied, seeing the lambs and the rams jumping around in such a wondrous way. [...] Another time, at Santa Maria della Porziuncola, some people brought as a gift to this man of God, a sheep, and he accepted it with gratitude, because he loved the innocence and the simplicity that the sheep demonstrated by nature. The man of God admonished the little lamb to praise God and to absolutely not bother the brothers. The

sheep, for his part, sensed the piety of this man of God, and he put these teachings into practice with great care. When he heard the brothers singing in the choir, he would enter the church, bend his knees, and emit tender harmonious bleats in front of the altar of the Virgin Mother of the Lamb, as if with a strong desire to greet her. During the celebration of the Mass, at the moment of elevation, he would bow down, knees bent, as if it were that this devout little animal wished to reproach men of little faith for their irreverence and encourage devout men for their reverence towards the Blessed Sacrament.”