fil léo

International Federation of associations and pLaces dedicated to Saint Leonard

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Translation :
Alexandre Mazin

This newsletter is distributed to around 860 people in more than 30 countries.

It is available in: German, English, French, Italian, Dutch, and Slovenian !

We need you! All the information that appears in the newsletters is transmitted by members of the great family of "Saint Leonard" throughout France, Europe and the World. If you wish to distribute information, contact us by e-mail : fil-leo@federationstleonard.com or by post : fil-leo, L'Escalier, 3 place Gay-Lussac, 87400 Saint-Léonard de Noblat (France). ***The next issue will be published end of June 2026. We're counting on you. Thank you!***

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Happy Easter to everyone !



Winter is over, spring is here, and nature is coming back to life.

And with the warmer weather comes the desire to travel, to meet new people, and to forge and strengthen bonds.

While current events are full of uncertainty and conducive to division, how reassuring it is to feel beneath our feet, in our hearts, in our minds, something we share that guides us and unites us: Saint Leonard.

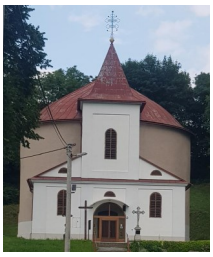
"The Resurrection of Christ with Saint Leonard and Saint Lucy" a work by Marco d'Oggiono, a disciple of Leonardo da Vinci, painted between 1493 and 1494 and housed in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, Germany. Information Concetto Stagnitta

Agenda :

- May 2026: Lenartov (Slovakia), on pilgrimage to Medjugorje (Bosnia), will visit **Lenart (Slovenia)**.

- August 21-23, 2026: International Gathering in Lenartov (Slovakia). Registration is open until May by email to obeclenartov@lenartov.sk (see details in newsletter n°26). Participants will include representatives from Bad Sankt Leonhard im Lavantall (Austria), Saint-Léonard de Noblat (France), and Lenart (Slovenia).





- **Weekend of July 3-4, 2027: International Gathering in Vains (Normandy, France).** Located at the foot of **Mount Saint-Michel,** the Saint Leonard Priory of Vains has offered to host the 2027 international gathering. Normandy will celebrate the millennium of William the Conqueror's birth in 2027. The Normans helped spread the cult of Saint Leonard throughout the United Kingdom and southern Italy (Sicily, Calabria). More information in newsletter n°28.

- November 6, 2028: Mascali (Sicily, Italy) will host Saint-Léonard de Noblat (France) on the centenary of the eruption of Mount Etna, which destroyed part of the town's houses (but thanks to Saint Leonard, the eruption caused no casualties).

Bad Sankt Leonhard im Lavanttal (Autriche) : homily of bishop Ägidius Zsifkovics, September 6th 2025



900 years of St. Leonard's church and of the town of Bad Sankt Leonhard.

This is more than enough reason to celebrate with you, to look back on the past, and to move forward confidently alongside you into the future!

I come from the East, practically from the edge—to use Pope Francis's expression—of the Hungarian Plain, from Burgenland, formerly located in the West of the Kingdom of Hungary and now part of Austria for just over a century. I am a member of a diocese which founded about 60 years ago, is among the youngest in Austria, born from the Hungarian mother dioceses of Győr (Raab) and Szombathely (Steinamanger). The founder was John XXIII, the Pope of the Council. I am the third diocesan bishop. The community of the faithful consists of a German-speaking majority, the Croatian ethnic group to which I belong, the Hungarian group, as well as the small Roma and Sinti communities. And in recent years, Slovak-speaking populations have settled in the north of the country. We all live in harmony. Our Jewish fellow citizens were expelled, their communities dissolved; the old synagogues and prayer houses, some of which have been restored, remain silent witnesses to this shared culture.

Little Burgenland is rich in languages and cultures, rich in history, but also marked by invasions and pillaging. Passing armies have repeatedly devastated our land at the gates of Vienna. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has the largest number of members in Austria, relative to the population. A Reformed community also exists in southern Burgenland, unique outside of Vienna. This region was long marked by widespread poverty, being far from Budapest and of little interest to Austria. The Hungarian nobility administered these lands, providing work for the inhabitants and ensuring their livelihood. With accession to the European Union, Burgenland has caught up in all areas, particularly economically, perhaps even somewhat hastily.

Burgenland was and remains a land that welcomes many cross-border workers. Every day, more than 25,000 men and women from neighboring Hungary cross the border to work here, thus sustaining life and infrastructure. Many inhabitants, between the two world wars and during the Great Depression, crossed the Atlantic to build a new life for themselves. We do not have grand cathedrals, imposing Romanesque or Gothic churches; we strive to carefully preserve our modest heritage. From a land of borders, we have become a place of passage and encounter: the Andau Bridge remains, to this day, its symbol. And while you have so much wealth, we possess, so to speak, only one lake, also known as the "Pannonian Sea." As Secretary General of the Austrian Bishops' Conference, I was able to contribute to shaping the life of the Church in this country. As delegate for Europe to this same Conference, as well as to the European bishops' bodies, I learned to respect the nations of the continent, the diversity of their approaches, and the plurality of their rhythms. Saint Pope John Paul II, who visited Gurk and Eisenstadt, spoke, during European Vespers in Vienna's Heldenplatz, of this Europe that breathes with two lungs—an almost prophetic statement, made at a time when our continent was still divided by barbed wire and iron curtains. The enthusiasm of that time has faded; fears and uncertainties have increased; war has drawn closer, and arms manufacturers are its true beneficiaries. Political illusionists have reached their zenith; democracies are retreating under the pressure of autocratic ambitions; new nationalisms are taking hold at the expense of the common good. No one knows how these new power games will end, what ideologies will dominate the world, whether conscience will still touch the hearts of men, whether truth can be distinguished from fake news, whether the world and creation will survive, and whether man will matter more than the machines which, through their artificial intelligence, claim to rule him. Machines and screens do not know empathy, and in war, all men are losers.

Let me highlight three characteristic features of Bad Sankt Leonhard.

First:

This nine-century-old St. Leonard's church is **among the most beautiful** and oldest in Carinthia. Dominating the Lavant Valley, between the Pack Pass and the Klippitztörl, it bears witness to a glorious past and to faith in God of the generations that came before us; it speaks of God. For the city of Sankt Leonhard—with its ancient gold and silver mines, its mining activity, its trade along the Roman road, the transformations of modern times, and its burgeoning tourist appeal—this sacred building was and remains a focal point for both locals and visitors, a place where faith is lived. Our episcopal estate is located not far from here.

Houses of worship, such as this one, are much more than mere buildings: **they speak of God in a world that lives as if He did not exist, and they encourage us to live as if He did.** Christians will still have value tomorrow, provided that the Christian life is not reduced to mere cultural Christianity. Faith in God must be a source of confidence and courage; It must offer humanity confidence, reconciliation, hope, consolation, and mercy, including to those who have turned away from God. We must speak of God again.

Bad Sankt Leonhard im Lavanttal (Autriche) : homily of bishop Ägidius Zsifkovics, September 6th 2025

Secondly

This church is encircled by a heavy **chain**. This evokes the chains of Saint Leonard, the helpful saint who intercedes for prisoners, the oppressed, the excluded, the exiled, and the persecuted, who breaks their bonds, and to whom the well-being of domestic animals is entrusted. From Bad Sankt Leonhard im Lavanttal, numerous shrines dedicated to this saint are linked and networked throughout Europe. Several churches in our diocese also bear his name. Thus, this place recalls Christian roots, the evangelizing mission entrusted to the faithful, the creative power of the Christian faith, and it shows how faith transcends borders to unite people. This, too, is Europe! May Pope Leo, tireless champion of peace, not be ignored in his urgent appeal: where discord, war, and hatred plague the world, we are far removed from our God of reconciliation and peace.

Help, I beg you, to break the chains of confinement, to free people from their shackles. Faith is freedom, joy, humility, and the quest for truth. When it binds and constricts, it has nothing in common with the God of Jesus Christ. I implore you, experience the communion of believers in this ancient city which, throughout its history, has known distress and misery, but also renewal, hope, and the presence of God.

Thirdly

A distinctive feature of St Leonard's Church is its Gothic tracery windows, adorned with **vibrant stained glass** dating from the late 14th century, crafted in the nearby Judenburg workshop, beyond the Obdach Pass. Some of these stained-glass windows are now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. These windows open our gaze to heaven: they inspire wonder, recount God's mighty deeds, and show, in the saints they depict, what humanity is capable of when it believes. At the same time, they illuminate the often unforgiving grayness of daily life and project, like a prism, the colors of heaven onto our existence.

Fears linked to economic decline, social and ecclesiastical divisions, new nationalisms, widespread anxieties and conspiracy theories, the alarming fragmentation of the world, the pandemic, climate change: all of this has engendered an almost apocalyptic anxiety, which speaks frankly of a "last generation." We no longer believe that God can save, intervene, or usher in a new era beyond the world's catastrophes. We suffer from an affliction made up of unpredictability, powerlessness, and a crisis of confidence.

Saint Augustine, spiritual father of the Augustinian order, already stated in the 4th century: "It is strange that men complain of the malice of the times. Let them cease complaining and correct themselves!" "The saints depicted in these stained-glass windows—Saint Leonard, patron saint of the parish and the town, Saint Cunegund, and so many others—have shown that faith is always a confident departure into the unknown, and that all one has to do is 'dare.'

God has made a commitment to us, to humankind: this is the meaning of the name Jesus (Emmanuel—God with us). Even when he seems absent, God is present and acts in secret.

Dear friends!

Speaking of God and living as Christians are essential characteristics of Europe. It is from these sources that the old continent has drawn new hope and written its future. You have contributed to this future here in Bad Sankt Leonhard; the generations that came before you did so as well, and those that will come after us will continue this work." The ancient church and the ancient city will have a future, and future generations will recognize that a life without God, without the communion of the Church, without solidarity and fraternity in society and associations, is doomed to failure.

Bad Sankt Leonhard is a small corner of Europe with a big impact! I, who rejoice in Europe, who desire to work towards its building, and who firmly believe that God has not forgotten our old continent, thank you all.

Appel from 4 european bishops to strenghten ties in the face of global divisions

Information : Christian Gsodam



The four signatories of the appeal, from left to right:

- Mgr Jean-Marc Aveline (France),
- Mgr Matteo Maria Zuppi (Italy),
- Mgr Georg Bätzing (Germany) et,
- Mgr Tadeusz Wojda (Poland)

On February 13, 2026, the bishops presiding over the episcopal conferences of four of Europe's most populous countries (France, Italy, Germany, and Poland) published a joint statement, a summary of which follows, calling for a reminder of the origins of the founding of Europe: *"The contribution that an organized and vibrant Europe can make to civilization is indispensable for maintaining peaceful relations. Europe cannot be built all at once, nor will it be constructed all at once; It will be born from concrete achievements that will first create a de facto solidarity."* As the world undergoes upheaval and reorganization, Europe has a crucial role to play as a moral compass.

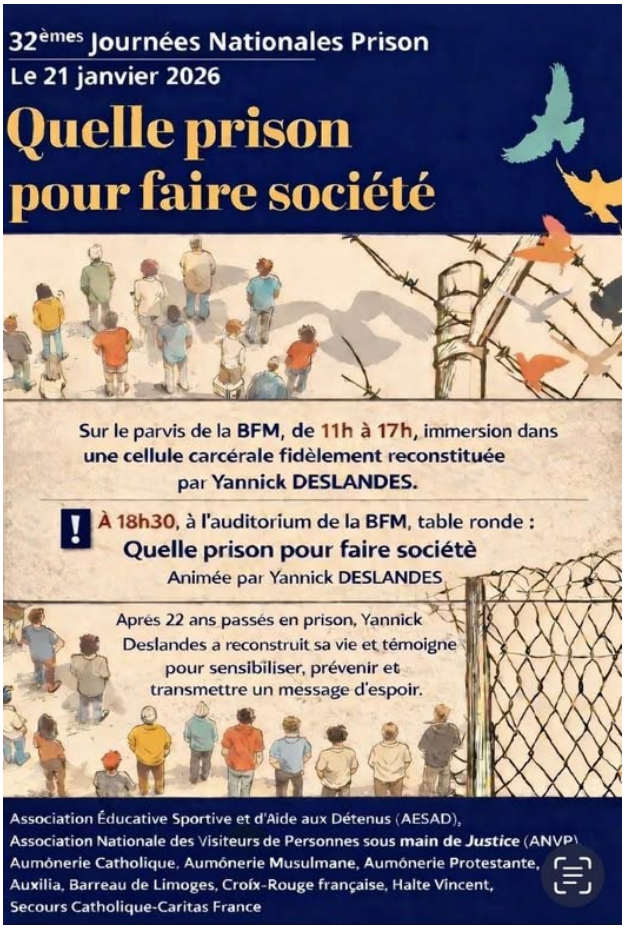
The world needs Europe. This is the urgent need that Christians must embrace in order to then resolutely commit themselves, wherever they are, to the future of Europe with the same keen awareness as the founding fathers.

See the full statement here : https://www.comece.eu/christians-for-europe-four-bishops-conferences-issue-appeal-for-a-renewed-european-vision/

Charism of Saint Leonard: Prisoner Reintegration

Conference by Yannick Deslandes, former inmate, founder of the Mur'mures association.

Information : Valérie Chwal



On Wednesday, January 21, 2026, we had the opportunity to attend a roundtable discussion at the Francophone Multimedia Library in Limoges, France, on the theme: **What Kind of Prison for Building Society?**

This event shared the testimony of Yannick Deslandes, 56 years old, 22 of which were spent in prison. He is the author of **« Beyond the Walls: 22 Years in Prison… and the Light »** (Calame Publishing) and the founder of the Mur'Mures association, dedicated to the reintegration of incarcerated individuals.

For him, writing his autobiography was a form of therapy, helping him to let go of the criminal acts he had come to accept as normal.

He owes his redemption to his faith (he was baptized in prison) and to many people who restored his confidence:

- his prison visitor, friend, and mentor,
- his probation officer who was at his baptism,
- two chaplains who taught him about forgiveness,
- a prison director who edited his autobiography even though it wasn't part of her job,
- his wife, who helped him rebuild his life and is now the president of the association.

Thanks to them, he was able to change, grow, and gain confidence. A beacon of hope for others.

According to him, reintegration represents 80% of the work which belongs to the individual themselves. The remaining 20% is about helping hands: an employer, a spouse, a friend, an association. All of this is essential for successful reintegration.



Reintegration

During the first year, it was very difficult for him to find work because of his criminal record. He found a job as a night watchman in a large shelter at the Auxilia Une Nouvelle Chance association (a housing and reintegration association) while simultaneously working a permanent contract as a water leak expert, despite having no prior experience in the field. He is still employed there on a permanent contract. Thanks to trust and hard work, he was able to save money, buy a home, get married, and publish his autobiography. He has managed to make something positive out of his past, and that's what he shares with others.

The Role of Transmission

Yannick Deslandes founded the **Mur'Mures** association in 2025. It facilitates exchanges between young people, prisoners, families of prisoners, business leaders, and victims to help them rebuild their lives. According to him, he served 20 years in prison for these young people. He is therefore a crime prevention worker, which involves creating a mobile unit staffed by people directly affected by this issue. This unit travels throughout France, visiting priority neighborhoods and housing projects.



Thanks to **Mur'Mures**, at-risk youth find a space to talk, rebuild their lives, and regain confidence.

Like Saint Leonard in the 6th century, who helped prisoners, Yannick reaches out to those trapped by their past and their difficulties. No chain is permanent. With listening and support, freedom and recovery are possible.

Find the book (in French) on the publisher's website:

https://calame-editions.fr/associations/yannick-deslandes-mur-mures

Charism of Saint Leonard: Prisoner Reintegration

Roundtable Discussion on the Prison Environment Information : father Bernard Héraut , chaplain of Limoges prison, parish priest in St Léonard de Noblat

A psychiatrist, a former lawyer, and a former prison visitor share their experiences:



During the first week of Lent, on Thursday, February 26, 2026, the pastoral team of the parishes of Saint Éloi des Hauts de l'Aurence and La Trinité (north of Limoges) wanted parishioners to discover the reality of the prison system.

Of course, a visit to the Limoges Detention Center was out of the question. Entry is not permitted. Even for the families of inmates, a judge's authorization is required to speak with an incarcerated person. Therefore, professionals from the prison system came to meet with the Christians: Three women were present: **Danièle Bourlaud, a psychiatrist; Marie-Paule Héraud, president of the Educational and Sports Association and a former prison visitor; and Edith Verger, an honorary lawyer**.

An overview of the facility was provided. The Limoges remand centre, located in the heart of the city, comprises 58 cells for men, 10 for women and 10 for juveniles. While cells for adult men and women typically accommodate two or three inmates, juveniles are housed in single cells. A typical day was outlined, alternating between periods of study (formal education), vocational training, sport and work, alongside a range of activities frequently organised by external associations.

Danièle Bourlaud explained that those incarcerated do not generally suffer from psychiatric illnesses requiring treatment in specialised medical institutions. Rather, they tend to present with severe personality disorders that went undetected during childhood.

A wide range of questions was raised, reflecting the strong engagement prompted by the topic. Although the possible future construction of a new correctional facility in Limoges was mentioned, no decision has yet been taken. Given that the current establishment dates back to 1856, however, the case for a new building—one that would ensure proper standards of hygiene and decency, and uphold the dignity owed to every human being—appears increasingly compelling.

Film screening and discussion: "In the Name of the Law, I Set You Free"

Information : France Dumont Saint Priest





On Thursday, February 26, a film screening and discussion took place in Limoges, featuring the documentary "In the Name of the Law, I Set You Free." The discussion that followed was led by Christian Jacquot (who co-wrote the documentary) and a former inmate.

This documentary retraces the journeys of several inmates sentenced to long terms and how they managed to rebuild their lives thanks to the "Gare BTT" association

(https://www.gare-btt.fr), located in Franche-Comté. This association offers jobs in construction, mechanics, and recycling, with positions tailored to each individual, and develops a broader reintegration program, particularly regarding housing and assistance with daily living. The documentary presents the strengths of this association, but also its shortcomings, emphasizing the difficulty for individuals released from long sentences to readjust to life "on the outside," given that preparation for this release was often extremely rudimentary in the facilities where they were held.

The path taken by these inmates, as depicted in this documentary, is sometimes fraught with obstacles and requires significant logistical support (regarding daily life, housing, administrative paperwork, etc.).

The ensuing discussion focused primarily on the difficulties of preparing for release, whether in remand prisons for short sentences, or in detention centers or central prisons for longer sentences. The prison service has departments responsible for this preparation, but these departments are often overwhelmed and not always tailored to individual needs.

This lack of preparation for release is also one of the causes of recidivism. The opportunity offered by an association such as the one presented to us is encouraging, and we should try to deploy this kind of initiative, which also exists in other regions, but not enough, and not always in connection with the prison services which should be more involved.

Saint-Léonard de Noblat (France) :

Mass at the hospital with the relic of Saint Leonard.

Information et photo : Jean-Louis David



On November 18, 2025, as is customary once a month, a mass was celebrated at the hospital in Saint-Léonard de Noblat (France).

Following the pilgrimage of September 2025 and inspired by Lenart (Slovenia), the members of the Confraternity of Saint Leonard implemented the best practices observed during their trip and decided to participate in this ceremony with the relic of the skull of our shared patron saint, Saint Leonard, and to offer its veneration to the hospital residents at the end of Mass.

Usually, every year during the Quintaine festival, the members of the confraternity and the riders would stop in front of the hospital before the traditional Quintaine equestrian game. But since the hospital moved outside the city center in early 2019, this is no longer possible. An alternative solution was implemented: a replica of the wooden model of the Quintaine was displayed in the hospital lobby during the week-long celebration of Saint Leonard, from November 6th until the Quintaine.

However, it is in 2025 that the relic of Saint Leonard will be brought to the hospital for the first time and offered for veneration by the faithful. This gesture is greatly appreciated by our elders, who are very attached to traditions and to the city's founding patron saint.

New documents added to the Saint Leonard collection

Information : Michel Braem

At the Georges Emmanuel Clancier Municipal Library in Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, more documents have been added to expand the collection dedicated to Saint Leonard.

Created in November 2017 at the initiative of the Saint Leonard Confraternity, in partnership with the Ostensions Committee and the International Federation of Associations and Places Dedicated to Saint Leonard (fil-leo), its purpose is to gather documents related to the history of the city's founder, the traditions associated with him (including the Ostensions, inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2013), and his European and international influence (more than 900 sites throughout Europe and beyond). Among the original deposits, noteworthy are the work of Patrick Brissard, who cataloged the iconography of Saint Leonard worldwide (more than 3,000 representations identified), documents belonging to Marcel Roudeau, father of Bernadette Lagrange, a fellow member of the confraternity 100 years ago, and books that belonged to René Chamaud, father of Dr. Alain Chamaud, former president and founder of the Saint Cosmas and Damian confraternity of Pierre-Buffière.

The newly deposited documents include archives from the Ostensions Committee, books and documents donated by delegations visiting Saint-Léonard de Noblat or during visits to sites dedicated to Saint Leonard in Europe (deposited by Michel Braem), as well as all the quarterly bulletins of fil-leo. These documents, available for consultation on-site only and complementary to the collection of the association "Connaissance et Sauvegarde de Saint-Léonard" (which focuses more on the town's history), are accessible to everyone, whether residents of Saint-Léonard or not, historians, researchers, or simply curious individuals.



Michel Braem, founder and honorary member of fil-leo; Alexandre Mazin, president of fil-leo; Jean-Michel Carpenet, assistant treasurer of the confraternity; Raphaël Martin, director of the municipal library; Michel Defaye, president of the confraternity; Martine Roussel, member of the confraternity; and Patrick De Chalain, assistant archivist of the confraternity.

You can find the list of documents in the collection on the library's website: https://www.bibliotheque-st-leonard-de-noblat.fr

Kirkop (Malta) :

Information : Kenneth Cassar



Statue of young Saint Leonard

The Għaqda Mużikali San Leonardu (Saint Leonard Band Club) of Kirkop (Malta) is unstoppable! After inaugurating their new premises in September 2025, they have recently implemented various initiatives that demonstrate their dynamism:

- The creation of a new statue of the young Saint Leonard (at the moment he receives Divine Grace), displayed in the entrance hall of their new premises.
- The strengthening of their music school, named the "Kirkop Music Academy," which offers introductory music lessons from a very young age.
- The first phase of the restoration of the ceiling frescoes in St Leonard's Church in Kirkop by renowned contemporary Maltese artist Anthony Spagnol, which depicts the appointment of St Leonard as a deacon.
- The creation of a series of commemorative stamps to mark the opening of their new premises.
- The hosting of the Hajdúszoboszló Brass Band (Hungary) for the inauguration of the premises (not pictured).

Music academy







Renovation of church ceiling frescoes



Commemorative stamps

In short

Erratum Serradifalco (Sicily, Italy)



A location error crept into the previous newsletter. This embroidery is indeed in Sicily, but in the parish of Serradifalco, not in Capizzi.
Sorry. Information Michele Anzalone

Capizzi (Sicily, Italy)



Restauration of the statue of Saint Leonard.
Information Francesco Sarra

Saint Léonard (Seine-Maritime, France)



Church
information Daniel Cadet

Zamora (Spain)

Former 12th-century Saint Leonard'church (left), deconsecrated at the end of the 19th century, sold to a private individual in 1913 and protected as a Historical Monument since 1998, currently undergoing restoration.

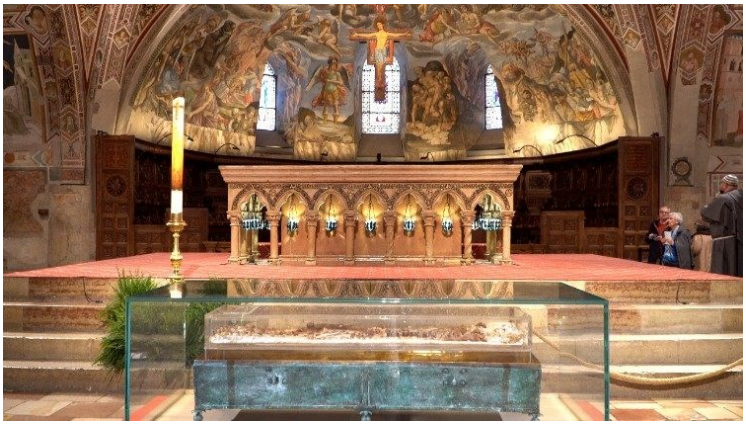


Ancient relief from Saint Leonard's church in Zamora, now on display at the Cloisters Museum of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York). Information Ademar Vala Marques



Details of the relief : https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/472278

Assise (Umbria, Italy) : Display of the relics of Saint Francis for the 800th anniversary of his death





From February 22 to March 22, 2026, the Saint Francis' Basilica presented, for the first time, the display of the relics of Saint Francis for the 800th anniversary of his death (photo on the left). Near the basilica is a small church dedicated to Saint Leonard, decorated with a 15th-century exterior fresco depicting the two saints (Francis on the left and Leonard on the right). Information Concetto Stagnitta