

**PUBLIC COMPETITION FOR THE DESIGN AND REALIZATION
OF A STATUE OF SAINT FRANCIS INSPIRED BY THE “SERMON TO THE BIRDS”
AND A STONE ALTAR**

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The place in which the famous *Sermon to the Birds* occurred, according to tradition and concurred over time by scholars, is called PIANDARCA. It is in Umbria, in the province of Perugia in the area of the borough of Cannara, which borders with Bevagna.

Historical – bibliographical references

We can read in the *Actus Beati Francisci et sociorum eius* (chapters 14 and 16) and in *Fioretti* (chapter 16), that St Francis, at the beginning of his preaching, went to a castle called *Cannarium* (today Cannara).

Having left the castle, along with his companions Brother Masseo and Brother Angelo, he followed a path from Cannara which lead to Bevagna:

“... and moving on with that fervor, he raised his eyes and saw some trees lining the way, in which there was an almost infinite multitude of birds; at which St Francis was in awe and said to his companions : wait for me here on the path and I will go and preach to my sister birds; and he went into the field and started preaching...” (Fioretti, chapter 16)

It is the beginning of the famous event *“among the kindest and the most saintly and the most significant that man’s faith and poetry remember”* (A. Fortini, *Vita Nova di San Francesco*), immortalized by the genius of Giotto (cycle of affrescoes on the life of St. Francis – Basilica Superiore of Assisi), by Benozzo Gozzoli (The Sermon of the Birds – church of Saint Francis in Montefalco), by the Hungarian composer Franz Liszt in the famous *“Legend of Saint Francis who preaches to the birds”*.

The scene of the miraculous event, according to the oldest writers on the life of the Saint and according to scholars of every period, is Piandarca. Tommaso da Celano does not explicitly mention it, says *“(Saint Francis) reached an area at Bevagna, where there was a large number of birds”* (*Vita prima Francisci Assisiensis, Ad Claras, 1926*), but the commentator specifies in a note that the place, between Cannara and Bevagna and two leagues from Assisi, is called Piandarca. Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, in his *Leggenda maggiore*, writes that the event of the sermon of the birds *“took place between Cannara and Bevagna in the place called Pian dell’Arca”* (*Fonti Francescane, Padova 2000*). This, to cite the first and most authoritative biographies of the Saint.

Piandarca, the “Path of the Sermon of the Birds”

The name is not new. It has appeared in many historical documents of the town of Cannara since 1200, registered with different spellings: Planus Arche, Piandarcha, Piandarco, Pian d’Arca, Ark Pian. It indicates a flat land, still today uncontaminated by the heavy intervention of the human hand for agriculture, nestled in a quiet and unspoiled nature which offers wide views bordered by Mount Subasio, with Assisi and Spello to the North East, by Perugia to the north, by the hills of

Montefalco and Bevagna to the south, by the Spoleto mountains to the south east and by Bettona to the west.

The site is of great scenic beauty, surrounded by native trees, ditches and canals with high banks. It is crossed by a small path, less than 3km, that a centuries-old tradition indicates to have been the way of Saint Francis when he left Cannara in the direction of Bevagna.

Almost at the halfway mark, a carved stone is the only thing that reminds us of the place of the Sermon; it is there in place of a stone, documented by various writers of the early twentieth century (N. Cavanna, M. Revelli, P. Leprohon) and oral tradition, but stolen in the 1950s.

Currently, there is a project for the realization of a pedestrian and cycle path, with appropriate signs and information and a symbolic area for silence and meditation surrounded by trees of native species. The guiding principle of the project is the integrity of the place and the absolute respect of its simplicity and untouched nature.

It is within this space that the bronze statue and stone altar, subject of this notice, would be placed.

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