

A Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of Blessed Franz and Franziska Jägerstätter

The Catholic Church honors many of its holy people with beatification and sainthood. However, one man on his way to sainthood, Blessed Franz Jägerstätter, is fairly unknown, at least in the United States. Yet his history is rather recent, dating back to World War II. So in May of 2025, a group of devoted and intrepid Secular Franciscans from Flagstaff, AZ., embarked on a journey to learn the story of Jägerstätter. and his wife, Franziska.

They, and others made a pilgrimage with André Cirino OFM, and Josef Raischl OFS, to Germany and Austria, with a visit to Assisi. The Secular Franciscans took an interest in Jägerstätter when their fraternity was formed years ago. He has since become their patron, and the fraternity is named after him. Blessed Franz Jägerstätter is certainly known in most of Austria, Bavaria, even Italy. But still, controversy surrounds his life, even though he was beatified by Catholic Church in 2007 for refusing to bear arms during World War II. He was beheaded by the Nazis in 1943.

First, the Jägerstätters' story. Franz Jägerstätter was born on May 20, 1907 in the small village of St Radegund, Upper Austria, to Rosalia Huber and Franz Bachmeier. His father was killed during World War I. After his death, his mother married Heinrich Jägerstätter, who adopted the young boy.

Through the influence of his step-grandfather, Franz became an avid reader. Early on he worked the coal mines. He had quite a reputation for being a fun-loving, rowdy sort of fellow. He put aside those rambunctious ways when he met Franziska Schwaninger, who was born in 1913. They were married in 1936. Her devotion to the Catholic Church drew him in and eventually he became as pious as his wife, with a fierce devotion to his faith.

After their marriage, Franz and Franziska settled into raising a family and taking care of their farm. He became a sacristan at his church and attended daily Mass. Eventually he became a Secular Franciscan. He and Franziska had three daughters over the next seven years, Rosalie, Maria, and Aloisia. By all accounts their relationship was passionate.

In the mid-1930s, much of Austria was falling under the influence of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. As the movement grew, Franz became more rooted in his Catholic faith. His devotion to God, the Eucharist and the commandments seemed to clash with the Nazi idealism.

Although he was not a part of any resistance movement during that time, he was the only one in his town to vote against the annexation of Austria by Germany. Still, he was called up to military service, along with all the other men in his village. He served from 1940 to 1941, when an intervention by his mayor allowed him to return home to take care of his family and farm. During this time he and his wife decided that he would refuse to fight if called again.

In February 1943, Franz was again summoned for military service. He reported to the German

authorities in March, and announced his refusal to fight. Instead, he offered to serve as a medic in the army. His request was denied. He was imprisoned and tortured. His wife and family were shunned in their village, where many of the men went off to war. Franz was seen as a coward.

Franz's and Franziska's story is a remarkable story of courage, love, and faith. By all accounts they had a very loving relationship. The two of them were also very devout, living a life focused on their family and Franciscan beliefs. Although resistant at first, Franziska later supported her husband's decision even though it meant his execution. She knew she and their three children would lose him but she respected his decision, despite criticism from friends, family, and townspeople. She had the courage to let him go, and the strength to survive without him, solely running her farm and providing for her family after he was executed by the Nazis.

At one point he went to his local priest and bishop for advice. Both told him to obey the Nazi orders. But he could not, in all conscience, pick up a gun to fight what he called "an unjust war." Aside from his wife's support, he was alone in this stance. Yet he never wavered in this decision. Throughout all this, he and his wife wrote beautiful letters to each other expressing their love and devotion for each other and God. He went on trial in July of 1943 and was condemned to death for sedition.

Before being executed, he wrote:

If I must write...with my hands in chains, I find that much better than if my will were in chains. Neither prison nor chains nor sentence of death can rob a man of the faith and his free will. God gives so much strength that it is possible to bear any Suffering. . . . People worry about the obligations of conscience as they concern my wife and children. But I cannot believe that, just because one has a wife and children, a man is free to offend God.

There remains an ambivalence about him in some parts of Austria, his own country. But it is getting better. Thousands attended his beatification in 2007. Some feel that to honor him casts a bad light on those men who did serve. Were they doing the right thing by following orders or not? This was one of many questions that the Secular Franciscans had.

In Assisi, the Seculars rediscovered their roots, visiting such sacred spaces at the Basilica of St. Francis where they prayed before his tomb and at San Damiano where St. Francis prayed at the foot of the crucifix and heard the voice of Christ. They also visited the Porziuncola, the tiny chapel that St. Francis rebuilt, which became a focal point of the Franciscan movement. They celebrated an outdoor Mass at the Carceri, where St. Francis often went for solitude. The group had Eucharist at the Basilica of Santa Chiara, where the original San Damiano Crucifix is on display.

After a week in Assisi, immersed in their Franciscan history, the pilgrims took a 10-hour bus ride to Germany. There they were welcomed by the staff at the House of Encounter of the Holy Spirit



Left: The Porziuncola, the tiny chapel that St. Francis rebuilt. Right: Mass at the Carceri, where St. Francis often went into solitude.

in Burghausen. This tranquil retreat house is within walking distance of the Salzach River, and the Austrian border.

Each day they visited an historic site pertinent to the history of the Jägerstätters. But these visits brought to the forefront many burning questions: Does fascism align with the Gospel? Could they do what Franz and Franziska did? Did they have the courage to stand up to power, even if it meant giving up their lives and putting their families at risk? Franz lost his life, but Franziska lost so much more: her husband, and the life they had built in their small village. The fallout of their decision to go against the Nazi regime was felt by her, her children, and her grandchildren. Yet, throughout it all, she remained steadfast in her faith, and continued to live in the community that for years shunned her and her children. Many feel there is cause for her beatification and perhaps canonization, too.

At the beginning of their trip the pilgrims had hoped to somehow bring Franz to sainthood (and, many felt, his wife) at least in their own hearts. But instead they felt emboldened to honor both of them in a greater way: to live as they did and speak out against social injustice in their own communities.

Following are the reflections of the visits made to the important places in the lives of Blessed Franz and Franziska Jägerstätter by Secular Franciscan Bridget Durham and affiliate Secular Franciscan Catherine Golski. In order to better understand the Jägerstätters, the pilgrims were introduced to other people who most likely influenced the couple.

Day 1: Altötting, Germany

Our pilgrimage began in Altötting, home of Our Lady of Altötting, a beloved Marian shrine and

a place long associated with miracles and prayer. We also visited the nearby friary of Saint Konrad of Parzham, the humble Capuchin Franciscan whose simplicity and devotion profoundly influenced Blessed Franz's spirituality. Standing before these shrines, we reflected on how Marian devotion and Franciscan humility shaped Franz Jägerstätter's own faith.

The Marian Shrine is tiny, just a little bigger than the Porziuncola in Assisi. In 1489, a local child drowned in a brook and his family rushed him to the chapel and laid him on the altar in front of the Mary statue. He came back to life! The site became a focal point for pilgrims seeking healing. Some left "ex-votos"—an offering of gratitude for a prayer answered or a miracle reported. There are old and new ex-votos—meaning miracles are still being reported to this day. There are candles and prayer cards, but also letters, artwork and photographs. One of them was an old picture of someone having what looked like torturous eye surgery (we thought of St. Francis). Another, newer one, was of an injured person at an accident being air-lifted from the scene by a helicopter. You could feel the devotion and hope and gratitude to Our Lady in this place; it felt holy and impressive.

Mass was held next door to the shrine at a pretty church dedicated to Mary. Our readings that day were Hebrews 5: 7-9 and Luke 2:33-35. The homily was about meditating on the life of Mary—her joys as Jesus's mother but also her many hardships.

We then had free time there before taking the bus back home for lunch. We used that time to walk, rest, and process what we had experienced that morning.

Next, we had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Erna Putz, an Austrian theologian, journalist and a foremost leading expert on the life of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter. She was also a good friend of his wife, Franziska, who passed away in 2013 at age 101. Putz was full of energy and passion about the holiness of the Jägerstätters, who were Secular Franciscans. She spoke about his being a conscientious objector and refusing to serve in the Nazi military or participate in armed conflict. He did volunteer twice to serve in the medical corps instead. His requests were denied, essentially as punishment for raising questions about a conflict between religion and the aims and activities related to the war. He was eventually beheaded. What was most remarkable today were the translated letters between Franz and Franziska while he was imprisoned, including the



The Marian Shrine in Altötting, Germany, where pilgrims place cards, artwork, photographs in gratitude for answered prayers.

letter that he wrote to her just before he was killed. Dr. Putz had us read them out loud so we could hear and feel their convictions, suffering and love.

They had a beautiful and happy marriage. They credit their love and grace from God for giving Franz the strength to hang onto his faith during his imprisonment and ultimately death. At first, Franziska was not fully supportive about his decision to risk his life over his political/religious beliefs, but they came to an understanding. They encouraged each other to carry on following the Gospel and doing what they could to love Jesus and their neighbors with their whole heart and soul and mind and strength. The contents of their letters echoed the Gospels; they wrote like Jesus spoke, of love and forgiveness and faithfulness and suffering:

- “Don’t be angry at the town for their hostility and don’t be angry with my mother for not understanding us.”
- “Whoever refuses to suffer with Christ won’t rise with him.”
- “I take consolation in the joy of Easter — we no longer have to fear death.”
- “It is better that the hands be shackled than the spirit.”

And a reflection on doing what’s right even when it’s hard and no matter what the circumstances:

- “A deed isn’t more or less OK because I’m married with children or whether or not the majority of Catholics are doing it.”

Some take-home points....

We believe that these were truly holy people. Franz became holier, thanks in large part to Franziska. He ultimately followed Jesus until martyrdom. Instead of giving in to the Nazis, he sounded more like Jesus and the early courageous apostles. Franziska was the holiness-catalyst and supported, encouraged and prayed for Franz to hold on to his convictions for the sake of the Gospel, even though it meant it tremendous suffering for her and their family. Franziska’s suffering and sadness reminded us of Mary at the cross. Franziska knew it would be a hard life without her husband, raising and supporting three young daughters in a village that had mixed feelings about the Jägerstätters’ choices. Still, she remained a faith-filled and joyful servant of God and her parish until her death in 2013. Truth be told, many of us on the pilgrimage felt there is cause for her beatification and canonization as well.

There was discussion of what our fraternity might do to advance her cause as well. Evening prayer was the sung version of Psalm 6 from St. Francis’s *Office of the Passion*, which seemed quite apropos given all of the above.

Day 2: Enns, Austria

We began the day with a trip to Enns, Austria, an important city for Blessed Franz. We were enthralled with the scenery during our bus ride there, but our joy was tempered when we passed by the town where Adolf Hitler was born.



Left: Blessed Franz's name in the book of professions into the Secular Franciscan Order. Right: Entrance to the Franciscan church at Enns.

Franz was first imprisoned at Enns. It was there that he was questioned about his refusal to serve in the military and urged to change his decision, but he remained firm in conscience.

Upon arrival in Enns, we were met by Ewald Kreuzer, the Secular Franciscan national formation director in Austria. Our first stop was to the Franciscan church in town where Blessed Franz frequently attended Mass and where he was professed. Enns is also the place where Blessed Franz became a member of the Third Order Franciscans (now known as the Secular Franciscan Order). Seeing the church where his Franciscan vocation took root offered a powerful connection to our own call as Secular Franciscans. We viewed the book of professions in which his name is written, a simple record that marked a life of extraordinary fidelity to the Franciscan charism. We celebrated Mass at the church; the readings were from Deuteronomy 6:1-15 and John 5:19-28. The homily centered on what it means to develop one's conscience and make good, holy, courageous decisions, even if the whole world seems against us. Making these decisions requires a deep listening to God to help determine who we are and who we should become. There is no life without this listening, and this listening also allows us to grow in love. Several quotes from Blessed Franz were incorporated, primarily dealing with his deep inner freedom, even when in prison, because he was at peace with God and with his conscience. His deep listening can be a model for us, as it can allow us to find the God who is leading us into life, peace, and joy.

After lunch we returned to the church for a renewal of commitment to Franciscan life, highlighted by readings from Psalm 116, Philippians 3:8-14, and the blessings written by St. Francis and St. Clare. The experience of rededicating our call as Seculars in the same place that Blessed Franz Jägerstätter professed is beyond words.

We then traveled with Ewald Kreuzer to the Austrian Military Academy in Enns where Franz had been imprisoned for several months before his execution. The base now houses a chapel dedicated to him. We were the first Americans to visit the base, and the guided tour was

tempered with armed soldiers everywhere. But they were very open to discussing the impact of Franz' life. We learned that cadets study his example as part of their moral and ethical formation, reflecting on the dedication and courage it takes to form and follow one's conscience. The academy also acknowledges the lasting effects that World War II has on its community, reminding its cadets that true strength lies not in obedience alone, but in moral responsibility and character. Blessed Franz's life continues to guide future leaders toward integrity, humility, and peace.

Upon visiting the chapel on base, we noticed a circular stone in front with Blessed Franz' name, birth year and death year. In the middle is there is a cross with four figures, each in a quadrant around the cross and a symbol of the evangelists: a winged man for Matthew, a lion for Mark, an ox for Luke, and an eagle for John. What stood out for us was the broken swastika behind the cross.

From Enns, we journeyed to Puppung, a small Franciscan friary and retreat center in Upper Austria that also houses a chapel dedicated to Blessed Franz Jägerstätter. Inside the chapel is a guillotine in place of a crucifix. The juxtaposition of these two instruments of execution is a stark but powerful reminder that both Jesus Christ and Blessed Franz accepted death rather than deny truth and conscience. Walking into the chapel, a startling reverence washed over us, and silence fell as we absorbed the reality before us.

Before going home, we stopped at the friary that has communal living/dining/prayer with friars, secular Franciscans and refugees from Ukraine. The church, grounds, gardens, and hermitage were breathtakingly beautiful. They had a square of carpet down on the floor of the church with blocks and toys for children to play. It felt very welcoming.

They also have an incredible Jägerstätter chapel which you access after walking down a wooded little path to a garden. The nearby local community had requested a pretty wedding venue on the grounds, and the friars thought it was a good idea but thought it should be a chapel, not a secular space. They decided to dedicate it to Blessed Franz Jägerstätter and designed it accordingly. When you walk in, you are immediately behind the altar (which symbolizes following Christ). You then have to make a decision on which way to go—left or right, symbolizing the choice Jägerstätter had to make. The walls and the floor under the altar are made of granite, the same material used in concentration camps and here symbolizes the heaviness under a dictatorship, as well as the weight of making poor choices to fit in and not rock the boat.

Windows encircle the top of the chapel, a symbol of light and grace from God that comes in. There's a wooden Tau on the wall at the entrance just behind the altar. But what is most startling is a guillotine (Jägerstätter's "cross") with a mirror where you can see yourself at the guillotine as you're entering the chapel. It was all very intentional and effective as well as impressive.



The guillotine in the chapel in Puppung, a reminder of Jägerstätter's "cross".

The other thing to note is that this is a busy chapel with frequent weddings and baptisms, which also seems appropriate as so much of the Jägerstätter story is related to marriage and love and family. As moving as it was, we loved this place!

Day 3: St. Konrad of Parzham, Germany & St. Radegund, Austria & Bl. Franz's Birthday

We went back to Altötting where we met our guide, Klaus, a Secular Franciscan from this town. We began the day on a pretty patio outside, below the second story window from the room in which Saint Konrad of Parzham died. We had prayer time there, with music and readings from Saint Konrad's letters before visiting St. Anna Basilica. We then toured the Capuchin friary where Konrad lived, worked and died.

Both Franz and Franciska Jägerstätter likely had a devotion to him, and they independently attended events in Altötting in 1934 related to his canonization. Konrad was simple, humble, and holy, but otherwise a regular guy and successful farmer, who gave up his farm and joined the Capuchins at the age of 31. He then worked as a porter there for the next 41 years. He had a deep prayer life and took frequent long walking pilgrimages to shrines and other holy places. What was most notable about him were his hospitality and patience and kindness and humility in his decades of work as a porter.

He was kind to everyone and tried to meet everyone's needs, even the annoying or aggressive or otherwise challenging folks that came to the door. There's a story about him getting a bowl of soup for an unpleasant man, and the visitor threw the soup at Saint Konrad. Instead of getting angry, Saint Konrad said, "Oh, you didn't like that soup? Why don't I try to get you something else?"

He often would sneak away from his station as a porter and gaze through a crack in the wall at the Blessed Sacrament and the crucifix in the church to contemplate and pray.

There are 9 stones set with "Saint Konrad's nine steps of contemplation" engraved in the floor of his church up the center of aisle from the entrance towards his tomb and the Blessed Sacrament. They are:



The church of St. Konrad of Parzham in Germany, where pilgrims can walk his nine steps of contemplation.



Step 6 of Saint Konrad's nine steps of contemplation: "God Will Help".

1. Look and Be Still
2. With Great Trust.
3. Love and Suffering
4. Look to and Learn from the Cross (his motto)
5. Be Merciful
6. God Will Help
7. Wonder and Adore
8. Love without End
9. Be United with God



Step 2 of Saint Konrad's nine steps of contemplation: "With Great Trust".

On the birthday of Blessed Franz, May 20th, we had Mass at Saint Konrad's tomb with readings from Revelation 3:14, 20-22 and Luke 11:9-13. We also sang the Way to Peace from the St. Bonaventure mantras. The homily touched on Saint Konrad's humility, charity, zeal, patience, and especially holiness. It was said that whenever he responded to the door, he gave bountifully to the poor, believing he was responding to and receiving Jesus Christ himself. He understood that Jesus is the center of all creation, and he centered his life on the body of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and in the little ones and poor who came to him. We talked about the importance of recognizing Jesus in ourselves as a first step to recognizing Jesus in others.

After lunch, we visited St. Radegund, a quiet village nestled between the Alps, where Blessed Franz Jägerstätter lived with his family and farmed the land. We visited his modest home, its simplicity reflecting the life he chose. We also attended Mass in his parish church, where he once served as sacristan, and where his ashes are enshrined within the altar. Standing in the same pews where Blessed Franz prayed, and before his visible mortal remains, we felt the nearness of someone who wrestled honestly with faith and fear.

As we learned more about the Jägerstätter family, we were moved by the stories of Franziska Jägerstätter, whose love and devotion sustained him through his struggle. She is remembered as a woman of remarkable faith who supported her husband's conscience, cared for their three daughters, and, after his death, quietly lived the Gospel with strength and grace. After the war, others in her village who had family members who had joined the Nazis under pressure or out of fear, shunned her. They were angry for the stand her husband had taken by refusing to bear arms. Yet she forgave and endured with humility, remaining a devoted Catholic and a gentle witness to mercy and peace.

We were also deeply blessed to visit with their daughter, Maria Dammer, shortly before her passing in June 2025. Her warmth, joy, and steadfast faith were a living continuation of her father's witness and a grace to all who met her.

After dinner in Burghausen, we had an evening meeting with several Secular Franciscans from Bavaria. Our common joy in living the Gospel in the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare

overshadowed any language barriers. We shared stories, songs, and smiles, discovering that the bonds of fraternity and faith transcend words.

Like us, they feel like their fraternities are shrinking and aging, but they're still doing good works, such as supporting Capuchin work in Chile and Albania and an olive oil project employing refugees.

Day 4: Linz, Feast Day of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter

Today we had a wonderful day in Linz, Austria, which was a few hours away by bus. Jägerstätter was imprisoned in a complex here at one point. We started the day with Mass at an Ursuline church that had memorials dedicated to Jägerstätter.

He was treated terribly in prison and the military tried to break his spirit. We learned conscientious objectors were treated the worst because they were perceived as dangerous traitors. Despite this, he still sent home beautiful letters to Franziska encouraging her and telling her about little things he was grateful for during his imprisonment.

Dr. Putz met us here for Mass and was our guide around the complex as well as to the bishop's residence where Franz met with the bishop to discuss his faith and hesitancy to fight for the Nazis. Franz didn't get a lot of support from his bishop, possibly because the bishop may have been concerned that Jägerstätter might have been a spy, trying to get the bishop himself to say something against the Nazis.

We celebrated a beautiful Mass there. Our opening song was called Food for the Journey and was based on John 6:30-59 on St. Oscar Romero's last homily just a few days before he was murdered in El Salvador for his religious and political convictions in 1980. The readings were Acts 16:37, 28:17; and Matthew 26:47-56. We thought about Jägerstätter's imprisonment and the psychological stress he was under. Yet he stayed very close to Jesus. He wasn't afraid, but he felt very alone. There were not a lot of other Christians standing up to the Nazis. We considered Jesus, our poor and humble king, being arrested and killed, which also obviously happened for many of the early Christians, including St. Paul and most of the apostles. We also heard about a few other Christians throughout history who made courageous choices to promote peace and help usher in the Kingdom of God in spite of the danger to themselves, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, St. Oscar Romero, and Alfred Delp. We asked God for courage and that true and lasting peace may enter into this world, and that we might find a way to work for that peace.



The cathedral in Linz, the site of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter's beatification.

We walked through Linz and had lunch before a visit to the Linz Cathedral, the site of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter's beatification, where we saw a memorial dedicated to both Jägerstätters. Vespers was at the cathedral with new Austrian friends who have either been involved in Jägerstätter's canonization process or are interested in his life. We used St. Francis's *Office of the Passion*, Psalm 7 plus some readings from Jeremiah 20:7-8; and a portion of a letter from Jägerstätter.

The Bishop read a little reflection in English; he ended by saying Jägerstätter couldn't end the war or stop nationalist socialism, but he could put the Gospel of Jesus into practice in his life. There was so much meeting and greeting and talking after the prayer service that we all were reluctant to leave. Nevertheless, we returned to Burghausen for dinner and a nice evening.

Day 5: Service Day

This was the first time on whole trip that we had a rainy day, but it was a gentle, beautiful rain that didn't soak us nor ruin our plans; it actually fit the mood of the day quite well.



Left, the burial site of Franziska Jägerstätter, who died in 2013. Her husband's ashes are entombed in the altar inside the church.

Today's theme was family, or maybe "warm relationships." We started the day with Mass at the St. Radegund church where the Jägerstätters are buried. Franz Jägerstätter's ashes are in the lower part of the altar and visible through glass. The church and the church grounds are beautiful.

We sang O Silent God to start Mass, and the readings were Romans 8:35-39; the second reading from the Office of Readings for his feast day May 21; and Luke 9:23-26. The homily was very inspiring with Jägerstätter's ashes visible beneath the altar and some of his quotes imprinted on the walls.

We learned how St. Francis felt very strongly when he first established the Secular Franciscan Order that Franciscans should not be involved in fighting or war, and that Jägerstätter's conscientious objections to participating in war/combat and cooperating with the Nazis likely stemmed from his commitment to the Franciscan way of life.

We learned that the Rule of Life for all branches of the Franciscan Order can be summed up as "live the Gospel," but that living the teachings of Jesus in our daily lives can be both satisfying and challenging. Completely loving God, neighbor and self can be very uplifting, but truly doing this and following Jesus as best we can, may turn our lives upside down.

The Jägerstätters seemed to follow the Gospel very closely; they let nothing separate them from the love of Christ or take away their faith or free will. God then gave Blessed Franz the grace to die for his faith. However, it was hard at times for him to walk in the truth of Jesus and challenge the political system by his stance. He was called to put on a prophet's mantle and take on all the struggles that stem from that, his faith being challenged though all of this. The homily ended with a consideration of Psalm 34: how good the Lord is and how God can protect and defend us if we are committed to living the Gospel, even when it is very difficult. God gives us the strength and grace to survive even the most challenging times. When we finished, we visited the Jägerstätter's gravesites, and sang the hymn to Mary, Salve Regina.

Next we went back to the Jägerstätter home where we were a few days ago. We had a discussion there with family members, parish council members and a local deacon—such nice people, and very easy to talk to despite a small language barrier. We learned more about the Jägerstätters and their family, community, and church. Franziska was remembered as "joyful, faithful and helpful."



The pilgrims at the the Jägerstätter home. At center is Maria Dammer, Franz and Franzika's daughter.

The parish council brought us traditional family dishes for lunch, and we spent a few hours talking with them. We would like to maintain a warm connection with them.

We went back to Burghausen, had a little break, then boarded our coach for a visit to Josef's family farm, which his brother operates now. The land and home were beautiful. Lots of cows and cats! We met two more of his six brothers, as well as his nephew's family.

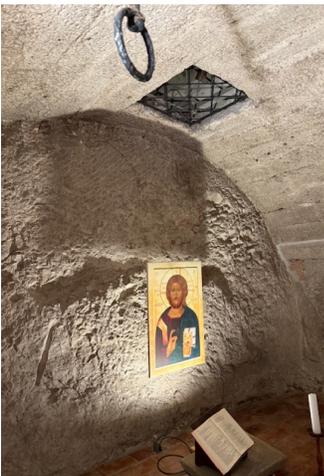
We visited their community church and talked to the president of the parish council who is also a farmer and writes plays as well. In 1989 he wrote one about Blessed Franz Jägerstätter that has been performed by community members and which has helped heal the wounds stemming from the war as well as Jägerstätter's stance. Maybe, if someone translates the play from German into English, we could perform this in Flagstaff!

Once back at the house, we had dinner and then a beautiful concert in the chapel. We met two more of Josef's brothers. We sang along with some of the songs and also listened to some contemplative pieces related to Saint Konrad and the ideals on the 9 pavement stones in his church.

All and all, we learned a lot and are thinking about how we can nurture our relationships with the Jägerstätter family and the St. Radegund church community, and how we can advance the cause of Jägerstätter's canonization, and hopefully that of his wife as well. We talked about how we can grow in faith and courage, so that like Jägerstätter, we will be able to peacefully follow Jesus where he leads us.



Father Christian, above, leads pilgrims on a tour of the Capuchin friary in Salzburg. Below, the former storage room that is now a prayer cave.



Day 6: Salzburg, Austria

We headed to Salzburg after breakfast. We began our visit by ascending Capuchin mountain called Kapuzinerberg. The Capuchin friary there is perhaps the most beautiful and peaceful place in all of Austria. We were given a tour by Father Christian Häfele, a delightful friar in his 80s who used to live in Burghausen. My favorite room was a former storage room that is now a beautiful prayer cave. Some of the original structures date back to the 1600s.

We celebrated the Mass of the Sacred Stigmata in the Capuchin church there. Father Christian concelebrated Mass with Father André. Readings were Galatians 6:14-18 and Luke 9:23-26. The crux of the homily was one of St. Francis's sermons:

“So great the good I have in sight, that every pain I count delight.”

With his eyes fixed on the crucifix, St. Francis could realize that the greatest good of all is union with God. We also thought about St. Bonaventure's quote: “There is no other way to God but through the most burning love of the Crucified.” And finally, how Blessed Franz Jägerstätter also totally got it. It wasn't that he wanted to suffer, but the greatest good he had in sight was what kept him going; he was ready to meet his God.

We took our packed lunches to the friary patio overlooking the whole city of Salzburg. Although it threatened to rain and we got a few sprinkles, everything was still so green and pretty. So many flowers were in full bloom. The scent of flowers and rain was everywhere. What a crisp and beautiful day!

After lunch we walked to a different part of the city so we could meet with Dr. Andreas Schmoller, the director of the Blessed Franz and Franziska Jägerstätter Institute. This was a great wrap-up session for us to learn about the Institute's work and to get Dr. Schmoller's responses to any Jägerstätter questions we had. We discussed the Church's relationship with the Nazis in Germany and Austria and the Church's willingness to speak out against some things going on but not others, the need to work for a just peace throughout the world and what propelled Jägerstätter in his early 20s to a stronger faith and a new determination to follow Jesus. This was an eye-opening session. We had some free time in Salzburg. Some of us visited churches, others went to the Mozart museum. A few of us wandered through the gardens and cobblestone streets and admired the city, while sampling gelato and other treats.

We then returned for a farewell dinner at our house in Burghausen. A few of us took one last climb up to the long castle that overlooks the city, ending the night with one last stop at a famous pub just up the road from our lodgings. Another great day!

This was an excellent pilgrimage that really drove home Francis and Clare's simple but all-in ways of following Jesus, and how their lives can be models for Secular Franciscans, such as Franz and Franziska Jägerstätter. The Jägerstätters then became role models for others to follow Jesus as well!

The pilgrimage to Assisi and Bavaria left many participants thinking about faith, courage, moral conscience, and the boundaries of authority in today's world. But there were so many other lessons as well, including the depth of love as was experienced by Franz and Franziska. So much to think about, so much to put into practice. At the beginning of this pilgrimage, we went searching for the man; we came back with a deeper understanding about living a true Franciscan life, and a resolve to live as courageously as Blessed Franz and Franziska Jägerstätter did.

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