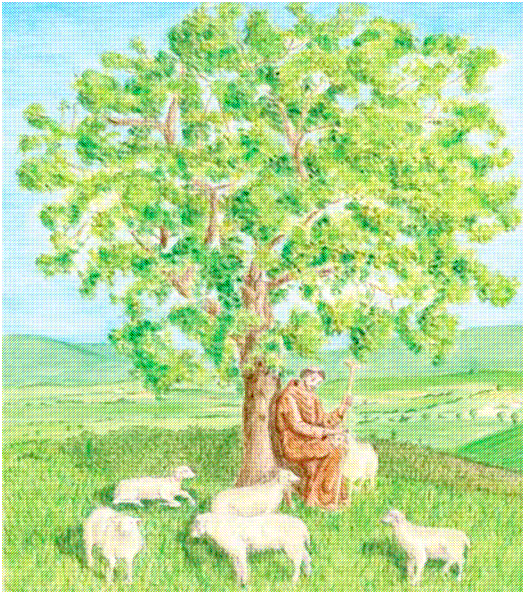


ITALY, 13th Century

Saint Francis of Assisi



During a stay at Rome, Saint Francis, moved by his great devotion to Christ, often depicted with the symbol of the Paschal Lamb, carried a small lamb with him. Before leaving, he entrusted the lamb to a noble woman, Jacopa dei Sette Soli, his good friend. The lamb seem to have been well trained by Saint Francis; it never left the woman's company, it followed her everywhere, even when she went to church, when she stayed there to pray, and when she returned from there. In the morning, if the woman woke up late, the lamb would jump up and nudge her with its little horns, wake her up with its bleating, and exhorting her with nods and gestures to make haste and hurry to Mass. For this reason, the noble woman nurtured a great love and admiration for this lamb, a "disciple" of St. Francis, which had now become her devotional guide.

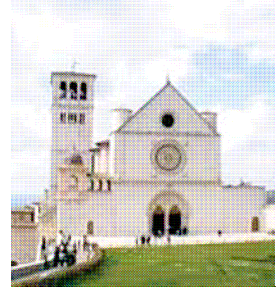
One day, St. Francis found himself on the outskirts of Siena, and along the road he came upon a great flock of sheep grazing in the pasture. As was his custom, he greeted them kindly, and the sheep, which stopped nibbling at the grass, ran up to him all together, lifting up their snouts and gazing on him with their eyes raised. They greeted him this way on so many occasions that the friars and the shepherds were utterly amazed, and news of this occurrence spread all around. On another occasion, in the church of St. Mary of the Porziuncula (at Assisi), the people brought a sheep to St. Francis as a gift, which he accepted with gratitude, since he loved the innocence and simplicity which the sheep shows by its very nature. St. Francis taught the sheep



how to praise God and not to bother the Friars in any way. The sheep, for its part, as if sensing the piety of the Saint, carefully put into practice the training St. Francis imparted. When the sheep heard the Friars chanting in choir, the sheep would also enter the church, and not even needing his master's presence, bent its knee, emitting tender sounds of bleating at the altar of the Virgin, Mother of the Lamb, as if it was anxious to greet her. During the celebration of Holy Mass, at the moment of elevation of the Host, it knelt down with its knees bent on the ground; with this gesture, it seemed that it wished to rebuke those who were less devout for their lack of reverence towards the Eucharist.



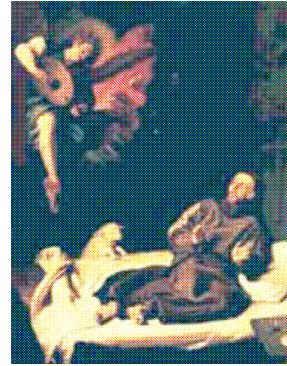
(1)



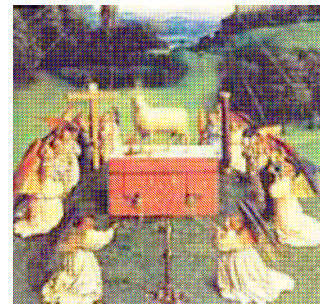
(2)



(3)



(4)



(5)

- (1) Saint Francis of Assisi, fresco by Giotto
- (2) Upper Basilica of Saint Francis, Assisi
- (3) Portrait of St. Francis by Speco
- (4) *Saint Francis*, painting by Francisco Ribalta, Prado Musuem, Madrid
- (5) J. Van Eyck, *The Mystical Lamb*