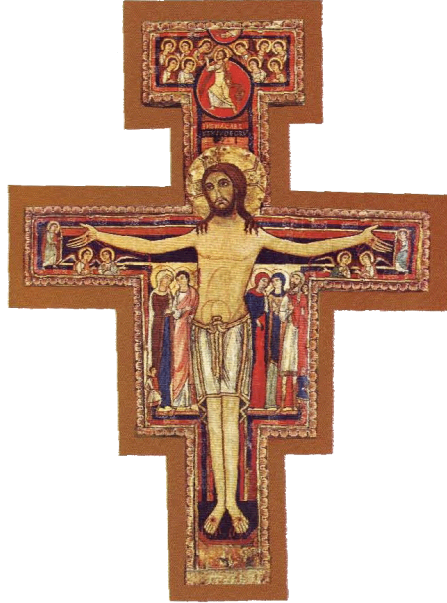


Chapter 6: Franciscan and Clarean Prayer and Prayerful Living



PEOPLE OF PRAYER

The quotes in italics below are from the Constitutions of the Sisters and also the Rule of St. Francis that the Sisters follow. They are offered for your inspiration and personal application. They exemplify the universal call to holiness that we share. They inspire us to experience the charism, or the special gift, that the Holy Spirit gives the Church through the Franciscans. This chapter is written to engage you in prayer as you learn about prayer.

We are called to be people of prayer.

*We rely not on our own strength,
But on the power of a loving Father,
In whom we place complete trust.*

*Allowing the Spirit to form us
into the likeness of the Lord Jesus,
we respond to His call
that all be holy.*

*Our spirituality is actively apostolic.
Directed by Jesus to "pray always,"
We integrate our prayer and ministry,
Letting the spirit of prayer
Permeate the whole of our lives.*

Constitutions 13,14,15

YOUR PRAYERFUL LIFE EXPERIENCE

We know the actual experience of prayer is most intimate and most personal to us. Even though we may say or sing words to pray, or use words to describe our prayer, the reality of praying is far beyond the scope of words to express.

Pause for personal reflection of prayerful consciousness within you. If the following suggestions for reflection are helpful, use them. Use whatever means you wish to express what you know of prayer. Most of these suggestions are word-oriented. However, deep knowing frequently eludes words. It may be that some other form says prayer more effectively for you. For instance, other expressions may be more eloquent, such as music...gestures...postures...dance...color...line...shapes, textures, etc. The best expression may be a sacred object from nature or ritual moments. This is your experience---your expression.

*We value personal prayer and give time to it daily.
Like our Father Francis and in the spirit of his heart's cry:
"My God and My All!"
we acknowledge God as source of all our good and all our joy.
We contemplate Him in Scripture and in Sacrament,
in persons and events,
and in the wonders of nature,
recognizing all creation as part of the Franciscan's prayer.
Constitutions 19,20*

Resources for personal prayer:

Scripture: Lk 18.1; Jn 6:54, 6:63; Mt 6:31, 11:25

Merrill, N.C. *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness*. The Psalms re-visioned in familiar words, rhythms and contemporary meanings for our times. A much-needed resource for home liturgies and individual prayer.

Livingston, P.H. *Lessons of the Heart: Celebrating the Rhythms of Life* with a forward by Henri Nouwen. A warm and compelling book that enables readers to see themselves with fresh tenderness. A celebration of the sacred in everyday life.

Reflecting on Your Prayerful Life Experience

A way to begin: Develop a cluster of words, images, colors, sounds, movements, etc. that you associate with prayer. You may also wish to journal.

How has your sense of God challenged you, changed you, or evolved for you through the years?

What brings you most effectively to a prayerful sense of God's presence?

What kinds of situations, feelings, or attitudes diminish your sense of God's presence?

THE PRAYER OF FRANCIS AND CLARE



Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF

As you prepare to become a Joliet Franciscan Associate or already an Associate seek a means to deepen your spiritual life, you may already have the experience of Franciscan prayer that may have come from a recent or long time connection with the Franciscan spirit. On the other hand, you may have been drawn to this journey through the friendship and/or example of a Franciscan Sister or Associate whom you know. You may not be familiar with the unique gifts of prayer inspired by Francis and Clare. In either case, we Franciscans welcome you to this pilgrimage. It is ongoing, always in conversion, evolving according to the needs of the world, walking in the footsteps of Jesus, the Christ.

*Everywhere and in each place, and in every season and each day,
the brothers and sisters are to have a true and humble faith.
From the depths of their inner life let them love, honor, adore, serve
praise, bless and glorify our most high and eternal
God who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit.
With all that they are, let them adore God because
“we should pray always and not lose heart” (Lk 18.1):
this is what God desires.*

Rule of St. Francis, Chapter III on Prayer (RIII)

(You can find a link to the TOR Rule at www.jolietfranciscans.org)



Painting by Joseph Malham

Communal Prayer: Praying with the Community

Fr. Edward Foley, OFM, Cap. describes how Franciscan prayer is a unique gift to the Church. First of all, he says prayer is *communal*. The early followers of Francis would be out on the road, giving or begging for alms, preaching by example or with words, working for their living, spending time in personal prayer, but Francis insisted that they gather for communal prayer daily. So when they asked him what prayers they should pray, he gave them the **Our Father**. Eventually they prayed **the Psalms in the Divine Office**. All of these were committed to memory since they owned no books. And of course, there was the **Eucharist**. Whenever they were near a church and a priest at the time of Mass, Francis had a keen sense of the power of prayer to bond the community.

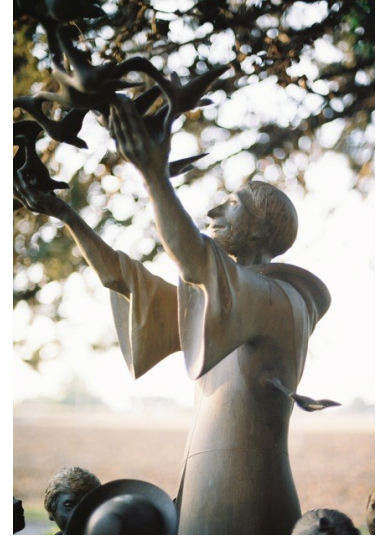


Photo by Sr. Marianne Saieg, OSF

This communal prayer had to be simple, understandable and accessible to all because his followers came from varied backgrounds. This is relevant today for those of us who participate in parish and small group prayer activities as well as when we pray in the solitude of our hearts.

The Incarnation as Center



Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF

Another facet of Franciscan prayer, Foley says, is that it is *incarnational*. By this we mean that Francis' experience of Jesus took in the **whole life of Christ** from birth to passion to resurrection. Beyond that he adored the Christ of John's Gospel. "In the beginning the Word already existed; The Word was with God, and the Word was God....Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him." So we have the stories of Francis constructing the stable in Grechio, receiving the wounds of Christ on Alverna, and singing his Canticle of the Creatures from his deathbed :

*With all creatures the brothers and sisters should praise
the Ruler of heaven and earth (Mt 11:25)
and give thanks because, by the holy will
and through the only Son with the Holy Spirit,
God created all things spiritual and material,
And created us in the divine image and likeness (RIII)*

Francis, Always the Troubadour

Another facet of the beautiful gem of Franciscan prayer is in its passion and lyricism. Its celebration through music, dance, poetry, and art overflows from the **passionate nature of Francis**. He never lost the creative spirit of his youthful troubadour days. Often he was outrageous in his expression of the extravagant love of God. On Christmas day he commanded his brothers to smear fat on the walls of the house because even the walls deserved to be fed and nourished on the great feast of the Incarnation. **All was holy!** As Franciscans, we revel in embodying our prayer in the beauty of all forms of art and music. At the core is always the celebration of Eucharist with reverence and wonder.

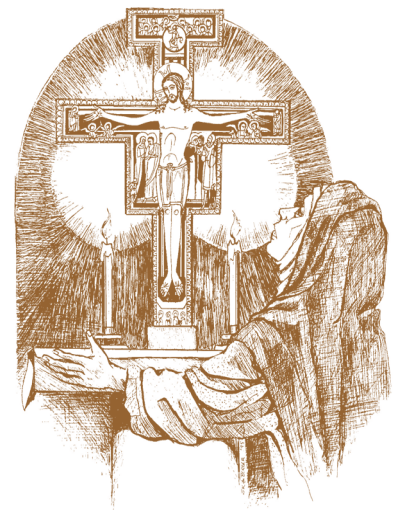


Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF

*Let them participate in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ
and receive his Body and Blood with great humility and reverence
remembering the words of the Lord,:*
“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life” (Jn 6:54)
*Moreover, they are to show the greatest possible reverence and honor
for the most sacred name, written words
and most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom all things in heaven and on earth
have been brought to peace and reconciliation
with Almighty God (Col 1:20) (RIII)*

Clare’s Vision

Clare, who called herself the “little plant” of Francis, lived many more years than Francis and enriched his legacy with her own unique gifts. Francis had advised his followers, “I have done what it was given me to do; now you go and do what you have been given.” Clare took him seriously, and was unconditionally open to the work of the Holy Spirit. One of her images of prayer was a mirror. When she looked into a mirror she saw the crucified Christ. In other words she measured herself against Christ. How much was she like him?



Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF

How far short did she fall? Christ reflects back to us who we are to be. (Delio HFL 29) Clare teaches us to pray in a fourfold admonition:

Gaze upon the Lord....see with the heart.

Consider...meditate on him in the Scriptures, spiritual reading.

Contemplate...immerse yourself in the presence of the crucified One.

Imitate...listen and live out his life in the here and now of your own life.

Our Franciscan Legacy

As Franciscans, we walk together in this rich legacy of grace that the Holy Spirit offers us through the life of Francis and Clare and all the Franciscans who have followed them throughout the ages. We are people of the story, and our story comes from the way that we live the Scriptures. Francis was called to hear the Word of God and simply live it. When the Pope asked him to write a Rule for all the people who began to follow him, Francis only wanted to give the Holy Father the Gospels. That was all he needed. Clare went through the same experience. They both took Jesus at his word. Of course, this would be an enormous challenge to the church as it is today.



Photo by Sr. Marianne Saieg, OSF

Reflecting on the Prayer of Francis and Clare

How do private and community prayer weave through my life?

What are the most fruitful aspects of each for me?

Which aspects of Franciscan prayer resonate with my life?

How can I build on these insights?

Resources for Franciscan prayer:

Scripture: Mt 6:5; 7:7; 18 ;19

The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, Franciscan Federation, 1997

Delio, I., *Franciscan Prayer*, — An examination of Franciscan prayer through the twin lenses of St. Clare and St. Bonaventure. In the Introduction, the author states "...that an understanding of prayer in the Franciscan tradition...can offer a new vitality to Christian life today because it is a path of relationship with God that strives to live in the fullness of the Incarnation."

Other books:

Delio, I, *Clare of Assisi: A Heart Full of Love* and *The Humility of God*

Bodo, M., *A Retreat with Francis & Clare of Assisi: Following Our Pilgrim Hearts*

THE PLACE OF MARY IN FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

Devotion and imitation of Mary, the Mother of God, has always been an integral part of Franciscan spirituality. Because the Incarnation was so core to Francis, his devotion to the Mother of Jesus followed. As Francis aspired to live in Christ, he also set as an ideal, to bear Christ as Mary did. “[We are] mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body...and give Him birth through a holy activity.”

In her book, *Clare of Assisi, A Heart Full of Love*, Delio describes how Clare was transformed by this mystical experience. (pp, 76-78)

“We are not only to follow Christ but to give birth to Christ in our lives. Clare’s spiritual path is a mystical one. It is a mysticism of motherhood because she not only seeks the hidden presence of God but asks that the love of God be brought to birth in our lives. She holds up Mary, the Mother of God as the model of this mystical path, indicating to Agnes that she should ‘cling to His most sweet Mother who gave birth to a Son whom the heavens could not contain.’ Clare sees the potential of the human person as one of making God present in our lives. In her third letter [to Agnes] she states that the soul of a faithful person, like Mary, is greater than heaven itself, ‘since the heavens and the rest of creation cannot contain their Creator and only the faithful soul is his dwelling place and throne.’ She emphasizes the capacity of the human soul to bear God....She [Clare] continues by saying:

As the glorious Virgin of virgins, carried [Him] materially, so you, too, by following in her footprints (cf. Pet 2:21), especially [those] of poverty and humility, can, without any doubt, always carry Him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body, holding Him by Whom you and all things are held together..(Wis 1:7)’”

Within the Joliet Franciscan Congregation, the feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8 is a special community celebration. Having been founded in 1865 shortly after the doctrine was declared, the Sisters dedicated themselves to Mary under this title, as Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate. In photos of Sisters when they wore full habits, you will see long rosaries hanging from the cords that served as belts.



Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF

The Franciscan Crown is a rosary of seven decades which became popular with Franciscans in the fifteenth century. In addition to the Joyful Mysteries, they added two more decades, the Resurrection and the Assumption and Coronation of Mary. At the end two more Hail Marys are added to become seventy two for the number of years Mary is believed to have lived on earth. Franciscans throughout the centuries have prayed this rosary and there are legends that have accompanied its use.

Reflecting on the Places of Mary

How has your devotion to Mary grown and shaped your life? How do you pray to Mary?

What titles, prayers or books about her have meaning for you?

How does the image Clare and Francis describe of birthing Christ to the world resonate with you?

PRAYERFUL COMPANIONING

The Associate Relationship usually begins with the Associate and her/his Companion in a time of mutual faith sharing and study. Gradually as the Associate participates in ongoing community workshops, retreats, and various large and small group events, the relationship grows and expands to include more Sisters and Associates.

*We commit ourselves to living with and for one another
in mutual affection and loyalty.*

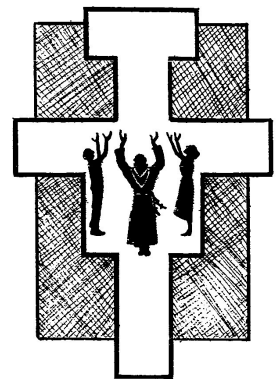
*We reverence each one's dignity
and challenge one another
to ever greater personal holiness.*

*We treasure one another as we share
our possessions and talents,
our joys, our sorrows, our ideals —
our very selves.*

*We recognize that diversity among us
marks the action of the Spirit
and serves both to enrich us
and to expand our ministry to others.*

*Our bond of community is strengthened
through our prayer and worship together,
especially through the Eucharist,
the Sacrament of faith and love.*

Constitutions 9,10



Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF

BUILDING COMMUNITY WITH CLARE

Motivated by her deep experience of God within her, Clare gathered the diverse group of women who followed her into a community of mutual charity. From Francis, she experienced the meaning of family love, that of brothers, sisters, spouses, mothers. This is the love they must have for each other. Of special significance for our postmodern world is her ideal of interdependence and mutuality. Rev. Joseph Chinnici, OFM, addressed this at the 1987 Annual Federation Council Conference:



“The point is simple; there is something that takes place among people that is at the heart of the evangelical experience of God; the vocation has as much to say about the relationships among men and women, clergy and laity, sisters and brothers, religious and seculars as about the ‘religious life’ considered in itself....This experience of the evangelical exchange goes way beyond working together, or sharing the apostolate of others, or associating with others in prayer. It cuts much deeper and implies a material and spiritual interdependence where each allows the other to change himself or herself and gives to the others the recognition that the ‘spirit of the Lord’ is at work in their humanity also. In the evangelical experience, this is the primary mode in which Christ is made incarnate; it is a shared experience of the Spirit.”

Reflecting on Community

Consider the various communities to which you already belong such as family, work, church, and other groups with whom you share time and talent.

In which ones have you experienced a “material and spiritual interdependence where each allows the other to change himself or herself?”

How might you bring Franciscan values to these kinds of communities?

Consider how your commitment as an Associate will affect the communities with whom you are already committed.