

United States Secular Franciscan National Chapter 2019

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St. Clare's Way of Prayer

Clare instructs us on her way of prayer in her second Letter to Agnes of Prague when she says:

**“Most noble Queen, gaze, consider, contemplate desiring to imitate Your Spouse.”
(2LAg20)***

Gaze:

“To gaze is not simply to see. Rather gaze is to be drawn into the object one sees.” (Delio, 77)

“Open arms are a gesture of the body reaching for the other...I want the other to be a part of who I am and I want to be a part of the other. (Volf as quoted in Delio, 77)

“Gazing is...opening our hearts but surprising, not to the knowledge of the Crucified, but rather...to the knowledge of ourselves.” (Downing, 248)

Gazing as reflecting:

“The second phase of gazing is reflecting.” (Downing, 248) It is worth noting that the Latin translated by “reflect” is *speculare*, which is filled with echoes of looking into a mirror, into speculum...[Clare uses it with] two meanings of the word, speculum, the meaning of mirror and the meaning of example.” (Downing, 249)

Clare expands upon her instruction for **gazing** in her fourth Letter to Agnes (written 10 years later than her 2nd letter to Agnes) when she includes the image of a mirror and says: **“Reflect** upon, at the surface of the mirror, the holy humility...the Mirror, suspended on the wood of the Cross, warned those passing by that here are things to be considered, saying: *“All you who pass by the way, look and see if there is any suffering like my suffering.”* (4LAg 22-24) *EXPAND ON THE MIRROR IMAGE*

Clare goes on to urge us to pay attention to both our response and the insights received: “Let us respond to Him.” It says crying out and lamenting in one voice, in one spirit: *“Remembering this over and over leaves my soul sinking within me.* (4LAg 26)

Gazing as Attending:

Again, in the fourth Letter to Agnes, “She [Clare] tells us to attend, *attendere*. We are to be alert to the insights of our reflection and to remember them.” (Downing, 249)

“She [Clare] reminds us to direct our attention not only on what we see in our gazing and reflecting but also on what comes back to us from Him. In fact, this is the most important element, and from now on, the focus shifts more and more from ourselves-at-prayer to Christ-at-prayer and beyond that to the goal of the whole enterprise, the inner dynamic of the Trinity, the flow of love between Father, Son and Spirit.” (Downing, 249)
It is not an intellectual exercise but rather a warm response to LOVE.

“Gaze into this mirror every day and constantly see your own face reflected in it[...]so may you always catch fire more and more strongly from this burning love.” (4LAg 15,27)

Which naturally brings us to the next step for Clare: Consider:

Consider:

“Consider which means to look at something in the round, to try and see it whole and also to see it in context, both my personal context and that of the Incarnate Word.” (Downing 250)

“O marvelous humility!
O astonishing poverty!
The King of angels,
The Lord of Heaven and earth
Is laid in a manger! (4LAg 20)

Which leads to....

“Contemplate: the love which cannot be put into words, ineffabilem caritatem. We are no longer at the stage of trying to understand as we were when reflecting. Now we are face to face with the mystery and above all, with holiness.” (Downing 250)

“O Queen of our heavenly King, may you therefore, be inflamed ever more strongly with the fire of love!” (4Lag 27)

*“Place your mind before the mirror of eternity!
Place your soul in the brilliance of glory!
Place your heart in the figure of divine substance
And, through contemplation,
Transform your entire being into the Godhead Itself.” (3LAg12-13)*

So as we contemplate, so also we should imitate.

Imitate:

We imitate because there is a spiritual birth of Christ in our lives. (Delio, 150)

“...the goal of prayer is bringing Christ to birth, that is, a union in love with God that conceives the Word, carries the Word, gives birth to the Word and then is mirrored in the Word.” (Delio, 153)

“We are spouses when the faithful soul is united by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers, moreover, when we do the will of his Father who is in heaven, mothers when we carry him in our heart and

body through love and a pure and sincere conscience; and give him birth through a holy activity, which must shine before other by example.” (2Ltf 51-53)

Closing Prayer:

“O Queen of our heavenly King, may you, therefore, be inflamed ever more strongly with the fire of love! As you further contemplate His ineffable delights, riches and perpetual honors, and, sighing may you cry out from the great desire and love of your heart:

Draw me after you,
Let us run in the fragrance of your perfumes,
O heavenly Spouse!
I will run and not tire,
Until You bring me into the wine-cellar,
until Your left hand is under my head
And your right hand will embrace me happily,
You will kiss me with the happiest kiss of your mouth.”(4LAg 27-32)

Sources:

*Armstrong, Regis J. *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents: The Lady*. NY, NY : New City Press, 2006.
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Delio, Iliia. *Franciscan Prayer*. Cincinnati, OH: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2004.

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