

Intimacy with God Presentation - Part I

April 11, 2015 at St. Clare of Assisi Parish

Quotes taken from the 'Franciscan Prayer' by Ilio Delio (a Franciscan sister and Associate Professor of ecclesiastical history and director of the Franciscan Centre at the Washington Theological Union in Washington)

Slide #1 - INTIMACY WITH GOD

Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God"

Slide #2 - RULE #8

As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is about God and our relationship to God

When you pray, you step out of the ordinary world of space and time and enter into the properly eternal realm of God.

Augustine of Hippo, "Prayer is the longing of the human heart for God. It is a yearning and desire for relationship with God. In God is the source of my identity, the truth of who I am and who I am called to be. "

FP: Prayer is an awakening to the fact that the fulfillment of my life lies in God. Therefore, prayer is God's desire to breathe in me, to be the Spirit of my life and to draw me in the fullness of life.... Draws me into the circle of love between the Father and the Son... I am drawn into the dance of the Trinity.

... this was at the heart of the life of Francis of Assisi.

Slide #3 - The Franciscan Path of Prayer is a particular way of experiencing God and growth in prayer is the measure of our journey to God.

FP: Francis advised his followers to have above all things the Spirit of the Lord and his holy manner of working, to pray always and to have a pure heart. Breathing in the Spirit of God and exhaling his holy manner of working exemplified Francis' life. The biographer of Francis, Thomas of Celano, described Francis as "living prayer". This idea helps us realize that Francis did not recite many prayers, but rather he lived in a deep relationship with God – he became prayer. Prayer is the expression of intimacy with God and ultimately must shape the way we live our lives and what we become among the living. ... for Francis the world was his cloister.

Slide #4 - The journey to God is not linear, but a journey inwards where God takes on flesh 'anew' in one's life – A spiral downwards would be a good image

FP: Prayer that leads to the beauty of the image within is difficult for it requires honesty and humility. In one of the Admonitions Francis wrote, “what a person is before God, that he is and no more.” For Francis humility and self-knowledge belong together. When we accept our “thisness” then we are free to breathe in the love of God and can go out to embrace God in the other.

FP: Prayer therefore, requires an honest encounter with God, a turning of the mind and heart to God.

Slide #5 - Franciscans pray to disclose the image of God in which we are created in who lies the seed of our identity

The Paradox – What we lose we find....we have to lose ourselves in order to find our true selves and discover God

FP: Prayer is that love of God that clears away the dross that covers the image of God in which I am created. It uncovers something that is precious and glorious within me. Prayer, therefore, is like the birth of a child. It is the discovery of the new being within me.

FP ...like a sculptor who chisels away until a beautiful image is revealed, removing matter leaving the noble and beautiful form in the stone”

QUOTE: Richard Rohr

Losing is Finding (Sunday, March 15, 2015)

We have to let go of our identification with being *merely* human – and all the humiliation of our human faults and limitations – which is a lot of letting go of your shame, guilt, and powerlessness, you do not lose yourself, but fall into your foundational and grounded self. This is your True Self, or divine self in God.

FP: The journey of prayer for Franciscans is the discovery of God at the center of our lives. We pray so as to discover what we already have – we pray not to “ascend” to God, but to “give birth to God”, to allow the image in which we are created to become visible.

FP: Since it is the most direct line of communication to my interior reality, every denial of that reality is a diminishment of myself.

The Result:

Quote: Fr. Barron

In the depths of prayer, when you have achieved a communion with the Lord, the light of God's presence is kindled deep inside of you, at the very core of your existence. And then it begins to radiate out through the whole of your being. The God discovered in

prayer should radiate out through you to the world, so that you become a source of illumination.

Slide #6 - The Journey to God for St. Francis was attaining the height of contemplation through a penetrating vision of creation

FB: To be a human person is based not on what we are or what we do, but who we are in relation to God, self, others and the world. As Francis entered more deeply into prayer, the more he discovered his *self* in God.

Francis' conversion encounter with God (*seeing the Crucified God at the little run down church in San Damiano*) became an encounter with the other, the leper, the poor and the sick. Francis came to realize that he was no self apart from the other. The more we are in union with others, the more we are "ourselves". To be human is to be on the way to salvation, that is, to be brought into relationships of wholeness and healing in union with God.

Intimacy with God Presentation - Part 2

St. Clare of Assisi's Method of Contemplation

Slide 7 - I come, O Lord, unto Thy sanctuary to see the life and food of my soul. As I hope in Thee, O Lord, inspire me with that confidence which brings me to Thy holy mountain. Permit me, Divine Jesus, to come closer to Thee, that my whole soul may do homage to the greatness of Thy majesty; that my heart, with its tenderest affections, may acknowledge Thine infinite love; that my memory may dwell on the admirable mysteries here renewed every day, and that the sacrifice of my whole being may accompany Thine. - St Clare of Assisi

Intimacy with God was the foremost priority for Francis, being in love with the One who loved him first.

Prayer was Francis' starting place, his **chief comfort and sure refuge in everything he did**. He eagerly sought to pray to God without ceasing, to keep his soul always in the presence of God. Completely dependent on the Lord, never relying on his own efforts, he put his trust in God's loving providence and cast the burden of his cares on him.

Francis understood that progress in God's service was futile without prayer. In fact, he placed prayer at the highest pinnacle of all of the spiritual exercises and used every means to have his friars concentrate on it.

He was convinced that the grace of prayer was something a religious should long for above all else. **No one, he declared, could make progress in God's service without it.**

Slide 8 - Go calmly in peace, for you will have a good escort, because He who created you has sent you the Holy Spirit and has always guarded you as a mother does her

child who loves her. - St. Clare of Assisi

In other words, it is not enough just to spend time in contemplative prayer and not have it affect what we do with the rest of our lives. To “love” is a verb, which makes prayer a decision. However, the prayer itself is not the end. We decide to love by spending time in prayer, but it is how prayer transforms us which is important. As it transforms us, it leads to action, so the easiest way to tell if we are on the right path is to look for the fruits of it in our apostolic life.

- 1) Do my actions reflect God or are they left wanting?
- 2) Does my prayer affect what I do?

We might not know how God does this transformation in us, but rest assured that He does. We spend time in prayer in unity with the Crucified Lord because we desire it and when we are transformed into the likeness of the Crucified, we carry Him to others. We become the image of the Godhead to others. This is what makes us Franciscan contemplatives. This is Franciscan prayer.

Franciscan Sr. Ilia Delio acknowledges the foundation of Franciscan prayer as both prayer and penance which permeated the lives of Francis and Clare.

She says this - “Prayer is the relationship with God which opens the eyes of believers to the sanctity of life — from earthworms to humans, to quarks to stars. Everything that exists reflects the goodness of God. Prayer is the breath of the Holy Spirit within us that opens our eyes to the divine good which saturates our world.”

“The wisdom of Francis makes us realize that God loves us in our incomplete humanity even though we are always running away trying to rid ourselves of defects, wounds and brokenness. If we could only see that God is there in the cracks of our splintered human lives we would already be healed.”

Slide 9 - “Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the brilliance of glory! And transform your entire being into the image of the Godhead itself through contemplation.” - St. Clare of Assisi

St. Clare of Assisi’s Method of Contemplation

St. Clare articulated in words many of the disciplines and truths that Francis lived out in his life and ministry.

(2LAg 19-22) Clare fixed her eyes on the poor and crucified Christ.

- "Look upon him who became contemptible for you, and follow him, making yourself contemptible in this world for him. Your Spouse, though more beautiful than the children of men, became for your salvation the lowest of men, was despised, struck, scourged untold times throughout his entire body, and then

died amid the suffering of the cross.... Gaze upon him, consider him, and contemplate him, as you desire to imitate him. If you suffer with him, you shall rejoice with him; if you die with him on the cross of tribulation, you shall possess heavenly mansions in the splendour of the saints, and in the Book of Life your name shall be called glorious among men".

The Franciscan pattern of prayer; a four-fold pattern while similar to other monastic disciplines, was very unique and a deep mutual relationship with God. Beginning with the gaze of the Crucified moves inward toward self-reflection (consider); identity (contemplate) and transformation (imitate), and finally outward so that we may radiate God's face to the world.

- 1) **To Gaze (upon the image or gospel text)**: Similar to the discipline of reading the Scripture, St. Clare intentionally used the visually influenced term because she understood that many people of her time were illiterate, gleaned a great deal of the Gospel story through icons, fresco and other visual displays. Francis practiced this a great deal, starting the first live nativity, barn animals and all. Beyond literacy, though, the intent was to center us on the reality of the texts, reinforcing the deeply incarnational convictions of the Franciscans.
 - Fix your attention in one place in a relaxed way. Rest your eyes on what you see, and let it still you. Though eyes and thoughts may be drawn elsewhere, bring them back to the image that is the focus of your prayer.
- 2) **To Consider (self-identity)**: Again paralleling the monastic discipline of meditation, Clare framed it in terms that the common people could understand. Here she appealed to the imagination, to invite us into the text as though we were physically present. Again, the incarnational emphasis is central to the process, as it was for Francis too.
 - Involve your mind and your imagination. What is before you? What strikes you in what you see? What do you glimpse of God through it? Do you sense a challenge or a call? Can you give what you are feeling a name?
- 3) **To Contemplate (identity)**: Explicitly using the term common to other monastics. Not to be confused with consideration/meditation, this was the mystical discipline in which we seek to be present with the God who is eternally present with us. This is a prayer of silence, to empty oneself of all but the Spirit of Christ within us. Clare knew that to truly enter into the Gospels through gazing and consideration, we begin to encounter the intimate presence of God in and around us.
 - This is a time of simply being there, present to God as God is present to you.
- 4) **To Imitate (transformation)**: This fourth step is what sets the Franciscan pattern of prayer apart. While many others have emphasized imitation of Christ, most believed

that such behaviour was the fruit of prayer. Francis and Clare knew that the imitation of Christ was itself, the culmination of prayer. For many, prayer was meant to bring them into a state of spiritual ecstasy or peace or love in God's presence. However, Clare and Francis **understood that we encounter the presence of Christ most genuinely when we live His truth with our own lives.** After all, we are the Body of Christ, the incarnate presence, united and empowered by the very present Spirit of God within us.

- **Praying with art, as with all prayer, moves us toward transformation. We become the one we love.**

Intimacy with God Presentation - Part 3

Slide 10 - We've heard from Carmen about using prayer to build relationship with the Lord and from Heather about a taste of St. Clare's of Assisi method of contemplation.

The desire to pray, is indeed the grace from the Lord and to me personally, it is a form of invitation from the Lord. Once we have the desire to pray, we use a method to communicate with the Lord. Some methods are praying the office, reciting the rosary or Chaplet of Divine Mercy, using prayer cards, meditating on the gospel, Centering prayer, Ignatian prayer, Franciscan prayer, and going to mass. Some of us offer our daily activities and suffering as prayers. We use a certain prayer method for sometime and we may change as our prayer life evolves. In the process, God knows what's best for us and sometime God challenges or leads us to something unknown to us, or even uncomfortable to us so that we may attain intimacy with Him. As an example, in my recent experience God invited me to use a gospel story, in this case, John 5:1-16 that describes my relationship with the Lord:

After this, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem at the Sheep Gate a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes.

In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled.

One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be well?"

The sick man answered him,

"Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me."

Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk."

Immediately the man became well, took up his mat, and walked.

Now that day was a sabbath.

So the Jews said to the man who was cured,

"It is the sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat."

He answered them, "The man who made me well told me,

'Take up your mat and walk.'"

They asked him, "Who is the man who told you, 'Take it up and walk'?"

The man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away, since there was a crowd there.

After this, Jesus found him in the temple area and said to him,

"Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you."

The man went and told the Jews that Jesus was the one who had made him well.

Therefore, the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he did this on a sabbath.

From the story, I can see myself that my prayer life and faith were "ill" or "not well" for a long time. Jesus approached me and I told Him that I was relying on my own efforts, consulting experts and books on spiritual healing, and following the ways of the world to provide "healing" of my spiritual "illness". Then, Jesus simply told me to "get up" on my faith. Without me realizing it, Jesus strengthen my faith. Just like in the story, Jesus finds the cured one in a temple, He keeps finding me, more often than I find Him. Moreover, He put Himself as the centre of my life. It was mostly His efforts than mine. All I need to do was just to let Him. I told some of my friends about this relationship and how He cured me, and sadly, in their own way, they rejected Jesus, just like the end of the story.

Using this gospel to describe my prayer life is very helpful in making me aware where I am in faith and prayer life and moreover, this made me realize that how much the Lord loves me in a very personal way. This feeling of gratitude make me desire to sin no more, pray more and to do His Will and eventually, to unite with Him.

God also invites you to grow in your prayer and faith life. Whatever method you use, use it such that you can have a personal relationship with the Lord - intimacy with God, like making a signal to someone to make aware that "someone" is in your thoughts, whether that "someone" is across the room or across the globe. The method is not the goal. It is a just tool to achieve intimacy with God.

Slide 11 - In closing: why do we want to achieve intimacy with God?

Mother Theresa's prayer the Fruit of Silence may provide the answer to that question:

"The fruit of Silence is prayer.

The fruit of Prayer is faith.

The fruit of Faith is love.

The fruit of Love is service.

The fruit of Service is peace. " - Mother Teresa

Slide 12