

CONTEMPLATION

Rome, February 22, 2022



Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Peace and all Good!

Bonaventure wrote of Francis in prayer:

Francis “strove to keep his spirit present to God, by praying without ceasing, and thus he would not be without the consolation of his Beloved. For whether walking or sitting, inside or outside, working or resting, he was so focused on prayer that he seemed to have dedicated to it not only whatever was in his heart and body but also his effort and time.... That he might receive the infusion of spiritual consolations more quietly, he went at night to pray in solitary places or abandoned churches. ...[There] the man of God, remaining alone and at peace,...Now he entreated the Father; now he played with the Spouse; now he conversed with the Friend.

Bonaventure, Minor Legend, chapter 4

It would make sense that Francis’s early brothers might have asked him how to pray. I suspect he did not have many words on the subject, but the example of his life spoke more than pages could. Bonaventure gives us an excellent description of Francis’ prayer and Clare absorbed it well herself as she exhorts us to “Gaze upon the Lord.” All teaches us that our prayer begins and ends in our loving encounter with God, with Jesus, with the Spirit, with Mary, with all people and with all creation. Francis shows us that our prayer relationship, our contemplation, is an experience of being with, of gazing in silence that leads to an undivided heart full of love.

As we read the testimonies of the Third Order Franciscans which follow, we thank them for their inspiration as we consider our own response to God in prayer, in contemplation, in gazing,... in however and wherever we are attuned to our deep relationship with God in our daily lives. We are grateful for God’s abundant outpouring of love and grace, more than we can ask or imagine.

Sr. Deborah LOCKWOOD, President IFC-TOR
Sr. M. Magdalena SCHMITZ, Vice-President
Sr. Joanne BRAZINSKI, Councilor
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Sr. Dolores CANEO, Councilor
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Encountering God with all our Senses

Contemplation in Daily Life

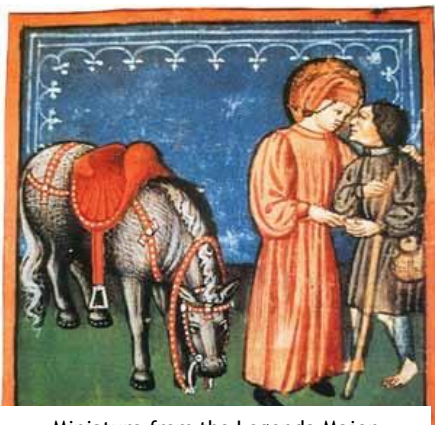
Sr. Christina Mülling OSF
Original language: German

Where do I look for God when I want to meet him? Somewhere in “heaven“- far away - or in the immediate neighbourhood? Outside of me or in my depths? Does my daily life have anything to do with God? Is prayer for me just some spare time in which pious words disappear along a one-way street into nowhere or is my whole life prayer because I live in and with God and am united with him in a living relationship, no matter what I am doing?

For almost half of Francis' life, God was for him merely an abstract figure. He lived “as if God did not exist” (R. Manselli). Of course, he went to church on Sundays. As a respected citizen in the Middle Ages he could not afford not to. In addition, in the church school of San Giorgio he learnt to read and write using the Psalms - so he was no stranger to the Bible. Outwardly then he was surely a “good Christian“. And yet he had no personal relationship with God. God was distant. He had nothing to do with his daily life.

How did Francis' living relationship with God grow? How did he become a contemplative man, i.e. a man who dwelt with the mystery of God in a “temple”, i.e. was at home in him? And what did this “Con-Templation“ look like in Clare?

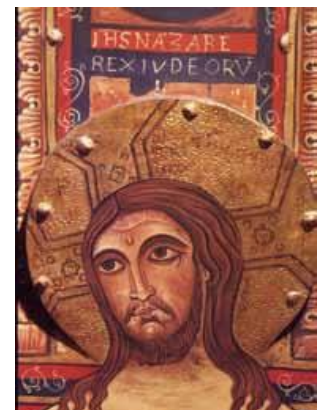
1. God comes to meet us in our Searching



Miniature from the Legenda Major
Museo Francese di Roma

After his senseless experience in the dungeons of Perugia and the inhumanity of the emerging monetary economy, Francis yearned to search for God. In his searching he experienced that Christ responded to his longing.

He came toward Francis in the form of lepers who blocked his way so that he could not walk past them. They jolted him from his path. In the contact with them he felt deeply stirred and satisfied. Through the kiss of a leper the bitterness of his life was transformed to sweetness (Testament 3).



Cross of San Damiano
Kapuziner

Before the cross in San Damiano Francis suddenly felt that the Crucified One was looking at him and speaking to him. It was as if his eyes were opened and on the cross, that he had surely seen often before then, he saw the living Christ. A non-historical legend even says that during this encounter the eyes of the Crucified opened. The nimbus, originally flat, supposedly inclined toward Francis. The legend reflected Francis' interior experience as he suddenly saw the distant God as close by: As a God who was sympathetic to him, by whom he was respected and who wanted to shape the church through him.



Miniature from the Legenda Major
Museo Francese di Roma

In Portiuncula Francis experienced an even clearer message from God through the words of Holy Scripture. All of a sudden he felt personally touched by the gospel. Words that formerly brushed past him, now spoke directly to his life. “*That is what I want ... from the bottom of my heart that is what I want to do.*” (1 C 22,3; FQ 213) He realised: This message is now, at this very moment, being spoken to me. God/Christ is speaking directly to me! Francis' longing for God made him sensitive, clear-sighted and attentive to God. Everyday encounters and experiences became transparent in God. St. Bonaventure says that only a person of longing can come to an encounter with God.¹ Francis did not have wonderful encounters that are not given to us ordinary mortals. He began to recognize and experience God in the commonplace.

¹ Itinerarium, Prol. 3

2. Encountering God with all one's Senses

2.1 Francis

Franciscan contemplation begins with the senses (hearing, looking, feeling, tasting). It is not a matter of a false mortification of the senses but rather of directing the senses to God through created things.

The whole person is directed towards God in and with creation. We can only proclaim, "*what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have watched, and touched with our own hands*" (1 Jn 1:1)

Everything that can be perceived and felt through the senses points to God and leads to an experience of God.

For example, I see creation with my physical eye. But when I look at it properly, the greatness and beauty of creation appears to me as a mirror through which I can see the greatness and beauty of God. For from the greatness and beauty of the creatures, according to Bonaventure,² one can draw conclusions about their Creator. A person who encounters creation in this way walks in the presence of God.

Thomas of Celano tells us what to walk in the presence of God looked like in Francis. How he used the whole of creation as a ladder by which to reach God. God is imprinted in all creation like a watermark. He saw God's footsteps in all creatures, the living and the lifeless, making it easy for him to span a bridge to God.

2.2 Clare:

Due to her secluded life, first in the family tower, then in the cloister of San Damiano, there is not much in the writings of St. Clare about the encounter with God in creatures. However, a statement of Sr. Angelucia made during the canonisation process witnesses to the fact that Clare, too, urged her Sisters to encounter God in and through all creatures.

3. Meeting God in Pleasing Impressions

The heart of the hearer or beholder reaches deeper than what we experience through the senses. It also grasps something of the essence of what is heard or seen. Therefore listening is more than hearing; looking is more than seeing; sensing is more than feeling. Francis learned to encounter God also in everything that triggered an inner awareness.

According to Bonaventura, something that I perceive with my senses and that is formed in me, i.e. what I take in, triggers feelings in me: Joy, when something is beautiful, or pleasure, when something tastes good or is agreeable, etc.³

When we have perceived and enjoyed something, we judge it, according to Bonaventura,⁴ i.e. we ask the reason why something gives pleasure; for every effect is a sign of the one who causes it. That is why Impressions that we experience as beautiful, lovely or beneficial and which we enjoy, show us that what we are perceiving contains beauty, loveliness, well-being and joy itself - that is, God. In God alone is the source of true joy. All other joys only want to lead us to seek this deepest joy.⁵ Therefore, always and everywhere where we rejoice, we are led on the path of true joy, on the path of God.

We find an echo of this form of divine encounter in the Praises of La Verna: You are joy and gladness! You are beauty! You are the highest good! ... *Praises of God 4 (FQ 37)*

The effects of these God experiences nourish and heal the soul. In the enjoyment of music, art, beauty, a delicious taste, and so on, my soul can find nourishment and healing because ultimately I enjoy and experience God himself in them!

4. Renewal of the "Interior Senses" through Faith, Hope, Love

In Francis and Clare, however, we can find other sensory capacities that go beyond the normal sensory functions. For example, Francis followed the "*fragrant words*" of Jesus, or carried the taste of life on his tongue, which transformed what was bitter into sweetness ... *Test 1 - 3 (FQ 59)*

Clare also followed the scent of his balsams (4 Ag 30), through which the dead are revived (3 Ag 13).

Francis and Clare smelt and tasted the presence of God, as it were. All these were abilities that had obviously only developed in them over time. These "spiritual senses" enabled them to perceive the presence of God directly. They wrought spiritual tasting, smelling, touching, seeing and hearing.

² Itinerarium I,8

³ Itinerarium II,2-7

⁴ Itinerarium II,5+7

⁵ Itinerarium II,8

According to Bonaventura however,⁶ these spiritual senses are in need of a renewal because in the human person they are atrophied and obscured. He sees the cause for this in the disorientation of the three mental abilities of human beings: memory, intelligence and desire.

- The cares of everyday life take such a hold on people that they forget their centre and no longer reflect on themselves. They are drawn into distractions.
- The power of cognition is caught up in the temporary, the superficial, without looking deeper - to the source. The "insight of the heart" is lost.
- The longing for true happiness is numbed by the craving for superficial pleasures.

However, God provides humanity with a way out of this misery. In Jesus Christ, God builds a bridge for us. He comes to meet us and helps us to rise! He is the "ladder" or "door"⁷ through which we can return to our depths and to God. This renewal happens through faith, hope and love.⁸ Through this, the ability to contemplate is restored.

The spiritual senses, which help us to perceive God, are opened again. The person thus renewed is clairvoyant, clairaudient and sensitive to God - through all that is superficial. He or she is again in God and thus at home in him or herself. He/she has again found his/her deepest calling: To become a fellow lover with God.⁹

4.1 Faith - Renewal of the Spiritual Senses of Hearing and Seeing

The Letter to the Romans states: *Faith comes from hearing, and that means hearing the word of Christ* (Rom 10:17). Faith means allowing the word of God to enter me and to abandon myself to its active power - trusting that it will not return until it has achieved what it was sent to do (Is 55:11).

Mary, the Mother of Faith, shows us how this can happen. She opens herself to the Word of God and accepts a truth that for her is initially hidden. She says "Yes!" to the plan of God with her. The Latin word "fides" (faith) has several meanings: First, it means faith, trust. But in a second step it also means faithfulness, honesty, reliability and in a third: word of honour, promise. Faith has to do with faithfulness, i.e. it is always a decision of the moment, it is the constantly newly grasped freedom to say yes or no.

Furthermore, the text of the Letter to the Romans states that faith depends on a vital listening to the WORD OF GOD. Faith is enkindled again and again by the word, in close contact with the One who is the Word itself. Faith grants knowledge of God and enables us to see God's glory on the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) and on all creatures.

Through the gift of faith, the spiritual senses of hearing and seeing are restored.¹⁰ The sense of hearing and the sense of sight are long-range senses that are still able to perceive something even from a great distance. This means that a lived faith makes us more clairvoyant and more sensitive to God in our lives and around us - even if He seems to be far away.

The symbol of faith is the cross. This symbol has power. It is like a key indication in music. This little signal changes and raises all the corresponding notes in a piece of music. This "plus sign" of the cross radiates with power into our lives like such a transforming sign. All of a sudden we see a person or a situation in a different light, a different context. Our perspective is shifted. It is a miracle of faith when the eyes of our heart suddenly open and we recognise in a disagreeable person our brother or sister; when we see the unmistakable value and unique worth of an old, senile person. When, there, where we first suspect life, we hear in the depths of our heart a quiet death melody that keeps us from doing something. Or when, in situations and decisions in which we would like to run away, we hear a gentle melody of life that invites us to jump over our shadow and stay. Just as Francis did with the lepers.

In order to train the spiritual hearing, Francis instructed his brothers in a special manner of listening. He taught them a threefold type of listening:

1. Listen with your physical ears.
2. Listen with your heart, i.e. with loving affection. Listen to the message of love that what you are hearing holds for you.
3. Keep what you have heard and listened to in your heart and then put it into practice in your life.

⁶ Itinerarium IV,1 + I,7

⁷ Itinerarium IV,2

⁸ Itinerarium IV,2

⁹ Itinerarium IV,3

¹⁰ Itinerarium IV,3



Sr. Sigmunda May,
The Listener

In the Canticle of Exhortation to Clare and her Sisters, Francis also calls on the Sisters to listen. (CA:ED; FQ 64)

“Possibly Francis recognised in the contemplative Sisterhood of San Damiano a kind of listening community which had the mission of forming and cultivating a special listening community in the very Church in which he himself heard the Lord’s call to become ‘all ear’ for the word and call of the Lord.”¹¹

While Francis speaks more of hearing, Clare concentrates on seeing. In her second letter to Agnes of Prague (2 Agnes) she presents three steps of contemplation: gazing, contemplating and beholding (sinking into contemplation). The mirror is Clare’s central image for contemplation. The mirror in which she looks is Christ, his poverty, his life, his suffering and death.

She sees her life reflected in the life of Christ. But then she looks deeper. Below the surface she discovers the active power of God in the life of Jesus and in her life. And finally she can immerse herself in this reality of

God and rest in it. She knows: through the mirror that Christ is for her, she has long since been seen by God and transformed by his gaze (4 Agnes)

4.2 Hope - Renewal of the Spiritual Sense of Smell

Paul says we should grasp the hope held out to us by God (Heb 6:18): With that we have a sure and firm anchor for the soul, reaching right through inside the curtain (Heb 6:19).

The symbol for hope, therefore, is the anchor. Hope anchors us in God. It reaches beyond all that is visible and experiential and becomes fixed in what is still to come. Just as an anchor secures a ship to the invisible seabed and prevents it from drifting away.

Bonaventura connects this gift with the sense of smell.¹² The sense of smell is one of the most primal senses and is much more deeply rooted in the psyche than we think. The sense of smell is usually responsible for well-being, sympathy, familiar and safe surroundings. We can smell danger, but we smell at least as well the good that is coming. We follow the scent, indeed we are literally attracted by it. The scent is a foretaste of the good, a reality still in the distance, yet powerfully attracting. That is why this sense of smell is also connected with longing and affection. Hope is directed towards what we cannot yet see and grasp, towards what is yet to come. It gives our life direction and a goal. This transformation also takes place in Francis: He perceives the Word of God with new senses: he tastes and smells the life that is contained in it.

Clare can also perceive the presence of Christ as a fragrance. She attributes to this fragrance of the Bridegroom a special effect on the person who contemplates him: Through him the dead are revived (4 Agnes). That is why the point is “to run in the fragrance of His perfumes” (4 Agnes). The bridegroom as the Risen One attracts the person like a fragrance, not forcefully - demanding, but enticing, so that the person runs towards the bridegroom of their own accord.

4.3 Love - Renewal of the Spiritual Sense of Taste and Touch

God is Love! That is why a loving person can recognise God and only loving persons can be in God and can recognise and experience God in themselves. Only those who themselves love, are able to sense something of the love of Christ for us and for the Father.

With the gift of love, Bonaventura associates the restoration of the spiritual senses of taste and touch.¹³ The intimacy of love can only be perceived with the senses which presuppose direct contact. Love must be perceptible, able to be experienced, to be tasted. It is not without reason that the sacrament of God’s love for us is the Eucharist. Love is nourished by the presence of the Beloved.

This transformation of tastes plays an important role in the life of Francis.

“A few days after his return to Assisi his companions elected him as their leader, so that he would bear the costs at his discretion... After the feast, they went outside; the companions all walked in front of him, and so they marched through the city singing. He himself, as their leader, carried a staff in his hand and walked a little behind them; but instead of singing, he was lost in thought. And behold, suddenly he was visited by the Lord and his heart was filled with such sweetness that he

¹¹ J. Schneider, *Kirschen im Winter*, 41-43 (transl.)

¹² *Itinerarium IV,3*

¹³ *Itinerarium IV,3*

could neither speak nor move from the place, that he could neither feel nor hear anything but that sweetness." Legend of the Three Companions 7,1-5 (FQ 615-616)

In his Testament, Francis testifies to another experience of sweetness. He writes that after the encounter with the leper, what had been bitter up to that point "was turned into sweetness of body and soul" (Test 3).

The experience of sweetness is a fundamental experience of St. Francis, which is not limited to a few privileged moments of his conversion but runs like a golden thread through his whole life, up to La Verna, where he calls God himself "all our sweetness" (Lob Gott 6).

To "exert all the powers and sensations of the soul and body in obedience to your love and for nothing else" - as Francis wrote in his explanation of the Our Father - (Vat 5), means, in this context, to be so fascinated by the goodness and beauty of God that, starting from the centre of the heart, they direct the whole person in his sensuality and physicality towards this love thus experienced.



CONTEMPLATION AND THE FRANCISCAN CHARISM

*Joanne Meyer, OSF
Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis, WI, USA
Original language: English*

Choosing to spend time in contemplative prayer as well as seeking to live contemplatively roots me, and I believe any others who do so, within an incarnational perspective. God's presence permeates everything. Further, I experience a deepened desire for metanoia, both for myself and for others. More and more I long that God's reign become the focus for my life and for the world.

I find myself choosing to begin each day anew. Today, Holy One, I want to see, hear, think, and respond from Your point of view. I am sometimes mindful how Francis of Assisi invited us to begin now, since up until now we have done nothing.

Living contemplatively fosters an awareness that all of life is relational, interconnected: all are brothers and sisters. This is true even in our very divisive world. I find a growing desire to love everyone and seek the good of each person, as well as all of creation.

Praying and living contemplatively fosters awareness and concern for the suffering poor of the world. While my life situation limits the physical activities I am able to do, I carry the suffering of others in my heart and prayer. I have experienced this as a call. And despite the pain this entails, peace, joy and gratitude prevail.

CONTEMPLATION / CHARISM

*Sr. Maria Gabriele Weber SPSF
Sr. M. Barbara Schröder SPSF
Franciscan Sisters of the Poor
Original language: German*

In 1845 Blessed Mother Frances Schervier founded our religious congregation which was called by God to “**heal wounds and save souls**“. After only four years, in 1949, a “Branch of Recluses” was founded within the community. This group consisted of at most ten Sisters.

Putting aside her deep desire to enter a contemplative order, Mother Frances allowed God to lead her ever more deeply into her vocation of active charity.

It was her wish to strengthen and support the activity of the sisters through prayer and the way of life of recluses, and thus to be open to God's will, to the Church and to all people. Mother Frances knew that a charism that is not nourished by and lived in contemplation will lose the light and energy that point to and relate to the Divine. What is given by God and received by a human being is manifested in trusting love of God and energetic love of neighbour. Care and devotion radiate goodness, kindness, benevolence and compassion and awaken strength, hope and confidence in the giver herself as well as in the person cared for.

Contemplation happens to a person through God Himself. The person allows things to happen, allows herself to be loved and guided and, in that way, brings God's will and action into the world. In the same way Father Francis came to discover and recognize God's presence everywhere, showing it through his reverence, gratitude, joy and peace.

In 2016, after 167 years, the “**Branch of Recluses**” was disbanded as an independent community. Today, three former “recluses” live a “contemplative form of life” agreed on with the Superior General. They live and work in appropriate activities in our apostolically active community. There again we see clearly that contemplation and action cannot be separated but are only effective in unity. To perceive the sufferings, needs and concerns of others, bring them to God in prayer and allow oneself to be used in service are seeds of salvation and blessing, of light and energy. Contemplation and charism unfold only when they are passed on, with sisterly care and cooperation. Not only “contemplatives” but each religious, each baptised person, each individual is called to maintain their relationship with God, to deepen it and to witness to HIM as the source of light and strength.



CONTEMPLATION

*Sr. M. Biancarosa Gotti
Monache Francescane T.O.R., ZOGNO-BERGAMO
Original language: Italian*

In the exhortation and example of the humble brother Francis, faithful interpreter of the Word of God, we recognize that humility is truth. Whoever assiduously meditates on the Word recognizes the truth of himself/herself, that is, our being humble vessels of clay. Only if we allow ourselves to be worked by Jesus, He does his work, the miracle in us.

Welcoming the Lord into one's life does not mean losing oneself in looking at the sky and becoming disinterested in everything. Conversion to God is a matter of concrete choices of life and not of words; this is what Saint Francis wants to tell us. The Word is the way which allows us to meet Jesus as the friend who wishes to communicate with us.

As the liturgy says, for those who listen,

- the Word makes us pass from death to life. It is like a lamp that gives light to our path. The daily liturgy is the real mine to draw on to overcome the emptiness, monotony and banality of daily life. There are the Psalms, whose rhythmic flows and reverberates in the most intimate fibers of the heart. The joy in the suffering of waiting, the hope of every human being that is poured into the mind and interiority of those who proclaim it with boldness and strength; with the certainty that they will make a breach in the heart of the One who always listens to the cry of the miserable.
- The Word is Bread, for us who stuff ourselves with food and who knows how many other things, never satiated with goods, primates and security.
- The Word is the humble Bread on the table of the poor, who, beyond all greed, are satisfied with this basic food, which satiates all hunger, but at the same time is a source of desire, which satisfies and stimulates the appetite for further adventures in the scriptural text. It is a source of conversion, when the old man presses from within and stimulates revenge.
- The Word is a cool drink of water in the scorching heat, it restores peace and offers forgiveness when weariness and tedium, anger and resentment stimulate revenge. When a thousand dark thoughts invade the imagination, and discouragement would like to break through the spirit, here is the Word that transcends us and makes us cross the gates of life. Yes, Christ is the living Word; Saint Francis also gave us an example of courageous and faithful following.



FRANCISCAN CONTEMPLATION IN DAILY LIFE

*Hna. Enelly Ortiz, OSF, Honduras
School Sisters of St. Francis
Original language: Spanish*

The Incarnation, the Passion, and the Eucharist were the main points of reference for contemplative prayer in the daily life of Saint Francis and Saint Clare. Today contemplative prayer continues to be what we need to strengthen our dedication. To live into each these three realities, we need to make room for silence. In embracing the silence with the greatest sincerity toward oneself, we may feel afraid of it because we suppose that frightening things can come out from our dark side—voices that reproach us, situations asking to be corrected. We should not be afraid to listen to our center. As much as it may scare us, there in the center is God, infinite love, who loves us so much, who knocks on our inner door and waits.



We have to learn the admiring silence of Mary: of adoration, of amazement at all that God is doing. Perhaps we have become accustomed not to pay attention to the continuous miracles that the living God is working before our eyes. It may be that we believe that God is always doing things, because God does not know how to stay still.

It is necessary to learn the silence of what we cannot articulate. When we realize that the things that happen are not as small as they seem, because we cannot comprehend them with our eyes and our ears—only then before the Infinite God, we have no words, only admiration. In that case, be silent and praise.

It is also with Our Lady that we learn the silence of Yes. The silence of the one who is present, understanding and accepting, listening and tuning in to the sound that gives meaning to everything.

Silence is likely to reach its highest point when, finally, we break all barriers and open all doors: We let God assimilate us. God loves us and will not destroy our personality. God has only to make us one-with-Him.

The silence of prayer is fundamental, of the highest moments of the encounter between oneself and God. But that encounter of solitude, from I-to-Thou, is impossible as long as we do not learn the silence that listens with calm, admiration, kindness and gentleness to the smallest of Jesus' brothers and sisters. Mainly those who seem to have no voice or anything to communicate, simply because we never stopped to listen to them.

The CONTEMPLATIVE is one who, in silence, looks at God with love, ready to listen to God with love. For this, it is necessary to be convinced that God has something to offer, something to tell us, and that God knows us by name and loves us. Silence is fundamental and necessary for us to find God. "God is not in the noise," says the Bible. Listen, observe, look around you. When Jesus was in our midst, when he assumed our nature and our circumstances, God revealed in Jesus Christ, was a person of silence.

Silence is poverty—that evangelical poverty that makes those who possess it happy. It is the poverty of Jesus and Mary—a poverty chosen, assumed, and sought under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE WAY - SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND LIGHT

Sr. Franka Bagarić

School Sisters of St. Francis of Christ the King

Province Sacra Famiglia, Mostar, Bosnia ed Erzegovina

Original language: Italian

"Let the brothers and sisters...with ever new joy bear witness each day to their own consecration to God." (Rule, Chapter III, The Spirit of Prayer, Art. 9)

Contemplation is a God's unmerited gift that God gives to whom He wills, when He wills, and in the way He wills. Human being, however, on the earthly path can prepare themselves for such a gift and this we can call the contemplative way.

The way to inner observation, which can make our daily life a joyful consecration to God, is only possible if our mental powers, memory, reason and will calm down and become passive. *"It is a state of inner peace and connection,"* according to Evagrio Pontico, *"which is necessary to have before the union with God"* (L. Gardet, *Mistica*). There, something happens with the praying person, our true divine being is awakened. *"The center of the soul is God,"* says St. John of the Cross (*Fiamma viva d'amor*, 12), but, we are not aware of this because it is obscured to us by our mental powers which are too strong.

But how can we live the contemplative dimension in our daily lives as a source of strength and light? How can we bear witness to our consecration to God every day with ever new joy?

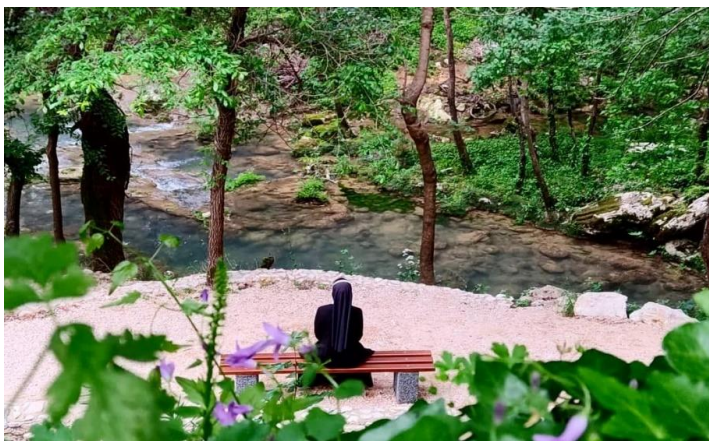
When we speak of contemplation, usually we have in mind a retreat into silence, into an oasis that serves as a refuge from the noisy and daily routine. This is certainly necessary in order to experiment God's closeness and become aware of the inner noise of our emotions, fears and thoughts.

Then, we ask ourselves what to do and how to deal with this without losing the sight of the goal? It is necessary that someone introduces us to this art and direction; someone who will teach, tell us how to do it.

Since the 1980s of the last century, the Franciscan School Sisters of Christ the King in Herzegovina, under the guidance of Br. Mladen Herceg OFM, have had the grace and privilege of practicing this way of prayer. Even today, they try to weave it into their daily lives and pass it on to those who see in it their spiritual path.

During the year, our Religious Province offers a course/a program of contemplative spiritual exercises of seven days and two shorter courses of four days. Practicing the contemplative way during these days of grace becomes the basis for transmitting the contemplative practice in daily life in which it is necessary to find, at least once or twice a day, the time of twenty minutes to be in silence before the Lord. In the silence in which the Lord himself will put our thoughts and emotions in order, and free us from fears and worries. With the persistence in silence, which is unbearable to the "external" man, the Father himself tells us and incarnates in us his Word (*cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2717*). For as, *"if Christ was born a thousand times in Bethlehem, but not in you, you remain a being who wanders lost forever"*, says Angelus Silesius.

A single word – **Jesus** - which the Father incarnates in us in silence, permeates through our entire prayer communion, making it not just a repetition of memorized formulas, but a precious time of self-giving and listening to God's will for my here and now. Through silence, that one word – **Jesus** - like pure water from the inexhaustible Source, is the source of joy, strength and true light in our active daily lives.



REPAIR... REBUILD MY HOUSE THROUGH A PROCESS OF CONTEMPLATION

*Sr Doreen D Souza UFS
Ursuline Franciscan Congregation, India
Original Language: English*

The Ursuline Franciscan Congregation is in the process of Province, Regional and General Chapters. The Theme that is taken up is: **'Repair My House'**.

"Francis, don't you see my HOUSE is being destroyed? Go, then, and Rebuild it for me" (L3C 13). These words which Francis heard from the Crucifix of San Damiano offered us a way of personal, communitarian and social analysis. The Franciscan Family continues to reflect on the mission received from the Cross in San Damiano. When God touched Francis, he had a total turn around in life. He famously wrote in his testament, "I was a sinner but when God touched me, what was bitter to me became sweet". And what was so bitter to him? It was the sight of the lepers and marginalized. He embraced the bitterness. He embraced the stench. He purified his soul. It was at this time of his prayer and contemplation he kept on asking the question: Lord what do you want me to do? 'Francis, go and repair my house,' said the voice.

At the Inaugural Address during the Province Chapter, the Superior General, Sr Susheela Sequeira expressed these words: 'It is the Holy Spirit who inspired us to take the theme: 'Repair My House' through which He invites us to restore and rebuild our personal, communitarian, and social relationship in building the Kingdom of God'. The foundation of 'My House' is Jesus Christ and the structure consists of his call to discipleship through Christian and religious vocation because of which we belong to our Church, Christian families, Congregation, and the entire universe.

Today we live in a secularized world that offers a wide range of possibilities for growth in all aspects of life. However no genuine growth can take place in the Franciscan person and community without the cultivation of basic core values. The prayer and contemplation strengthen and deepen our relationship with God and at the same time makes us capable of embracing all as brothers and sisters.

The Province Chapters dealt on the three significant texts for introspection on the theme: 'Repair My House'. First: Listen to what the Spirit says (cf. Acts 2:8). Second: Discern the signs of the times (cf. Mt. 16:3). Third: Build the Kingdom of God. (Mt. 6:33). Francis and his brothers offered their lives for the renewal of the Church in the 12th Century and now in this 21st Century God invites us, the Ursuline Franciscan Sisters to restore and rebuild the House. We are challenged: Are we willing and ready to journey with Jesus and St Francis to repair our house?

What are the present signs of the time that invite us to give our attention to Repair Our House? We are passing through one of the toughest crisis situation of our times. The Pandemic Covid 19 which began its cruel sojourn in our midst since over a year and more has shown us through the first, second and third waves, our own vulnerability and helplessness in spite of the advancement in science and technology. We have an important role to play in this crucial time. The mission of Ursuline Franciscan Sisters is to build human communities based on the Gospel Values of justice, peace and love and motivate our

mission partners in this noble enterprise. We need to proclaim that being kind, having faith and working together for the common good, are great life goals which need to be pursued (*Fratelli Tutti* 56-86).

During the Province Chapters stress was given for prayer and contemplation. Francis' prayer was contemplative. He discovered his life to be a mixture of retreat and activity, of prayer and preaching. Francis, who belonged to an active order, had the ability to withdraw from daily activity, so that he might become conscious of his oneness with God. This contemplative charism is the essence of our Franciscan Spirituality.

We who are trying to recapture the spirit of Francis open ourselves to the spirit of prayer and contemplation which alone can make us attentive to the demands of the Kingdom in accord with the Charism of Ursuline Franciscan Congregation:

'We launch deeper into the lives of the people, solely for the love of God, in simplicity of life and proclaim the message of the fullness of life of God's Kingdom'.



CONTEMPLATION: LIGHT AND ENERGY FOR MY LIFE

Sr. Raquel Hooker Algeciras, cmdp, Colombia

Capuchina de la Madre del Divino Pastor

Original language: Spanish

For me, a Capuchin Sister of the 'Mother of the Divine Shepherd', daughter of St. Francis of Assisi and Blessed José Tous y Soler, OfmCap, contemplation is a matter of love. Since baptism, I have been called to BE CONTEMPLATIVE, called to holiness. Father St. Francis was called, "Other Christ"; contemplation pushed him to identify himself with Jesus, to think, feel and act like Him. Contemplation pushed our founder, Blessed José Tous y Soler, to be "Goodness in Action." And of him it was said, "*he left no one wounded.*" Both were contemplative in BEING and DOING. They put into practice the commandment of love, and became CONTEMPLATIVE IN ACTION. Their teachings and the witness of their lives made me realize that BEING CONTEMPLATIVE makes our DOING fruitful.



My Franciscan charism helps me to feel wrapped in God's loving gaze; it helps me to put myself in His presence, to believe that He is in the air I breathe, in the light that illuminates me, in everything that surrounds me, in nature. It allows me to see Him in my neighbor, in all those around me, especially those most in need. Knowing that I meet myself in God, makes me able to move in God like the fish in the water, because God is in front of me, God is behind me, on my right, on my left, above and below me. And He is in me, in every cell of my body.

God the Father has made himself present in the person of Jesus. I am consecrated and baptized and, as such, I must proclaim a LIVING JESUS. My struggle is to try to "christify" myself so that those around me can see Jesus in me. Contemplation gives me light and energy, and so my feelings, thoughts and actions become more and more like those of Jesus. So I must try to see, hear, act like Jesus, in a word, I must try to have the heart of Jesus, the mercy of Jesus.

Life spent in LOVE makes us CONTEMPLATIVE. Practicing the commandment of love, allows us to have a different look at our surroundings, because we cannot love God and not love our neighbor. It allows us to see all events in the light of truth and divine mercy. It teaches us that we will only succeed in be united with God to the extent that we are united with our brothers and sisters, and practice the works of mercy. If I feel enveloped by God's love and mercy, I must correspond to this love by loving God as Jesus taught us: "*You shall therefore love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is this: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" (Mt. 22:36-40).

Franciscan Contemplative Lens

Sr. Mary Kemen, OSF
Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, USA
Original language: English



I do not consider myself an expert on contemplation but a fellow pilgrim with you on the journey to God. What I would like to share with you is the fruit of my own reflection on our call as Third Order Brothers and Sisters to be contemplatives-in-the-world. Franciscan contemplation is a way of seeing and being in our world. It is very integral to our way of life as we deepen our relationship with God, with others, and all

creation. It is foundational to our call as Franciscans to live the Gospel in our world. Contemplation is the capacity within each of us to become more and more sensitive to the presence of God and to become more and more responsive to the invitation to bring God's love, healing, and compassion in our relationships with others. To love God intensely and to see God in all we experience is core to Franciscan contemplation. Contemplation is not a withdrawal from the world but a profound entry into the deepest mystery of life and is grounded in a consuming desire and willingness to be filled with and lead by the Spirit.

To be contemplatives-in-the-world, we need to be women and men of prayer spending time in quiet solitude with our eyes focused on Jesus. Through gazing upon Christ, we grow in our awareness that we are in the presence of God who loves us unconditionally and is the font of abundant goodness. We come to experience that God not only dwells within us but in all people and all of creation.

Through gazing upon Christ, the Spirit calls us to conversion. Our way of seeing, hearing, and loving is transformed, and we are called to reach out to others especially those most in need. Our lives become one of service not domination, of humility not prestige and of poverty rather than wealth. With trust in God's mercy, we come to face our inner darkness and are led to greater inner integration and reconciliation. We open ourselves to receiving and responding to God's call to greater love.

Through gazing upon Christ, we become more aware of God's love and goodness within us, within others and all of creation. With new eyes, we realize the dignity of all that God has created. We desire more and more to be in right relationship with all our sisters and brothers. We become more aware of how all that we have is gift from our gracious God and how we are called to use them in service of others.

Like Francis and Clare, the living out of our call to be contemplatives-in-the-world, is a life-long journey of transformation in which we become more like Christ. Like them, may we daily gaze upon the face of Jesus. In so doing, we will be filled with a deepened awareness of the presence of our loving God and be energized to go forth in joy to bring God's abundant love to all those we meet.

HOW CONTEMPLATION GIVES LIGHT AND ENERGY IN RELATION TO THE THIRD ORDER CHARISM

*Sr. Anna Kiven Wiykiynyuy
Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis, CAMEROON
Original language: English*

The Third Order Charism invites us to live the Evangelical life of Penance. This Evangelical Life is supported by the four Pillars of our Rule, namely: Contemplation, Conversion, Minority and Poverty.

The Contemplation dimension of our Charism is the ability to make a dwelling place in our hearts where we, in the words of Saint Francis, can adore the Trinity. It is the intimate space where, in the silence of our hearts we can listen to the inner yearnings. Creating this space takes time and demands a regular commitment to communication with Him.

Saint Clare would admonish that in this space, we can only “Gaze” into Christ as in a mirror. It is in the gazing space that we touch what makes us ‘tick’ in carrying out our daily ministries. So the Light from within shines out and flows into all our activities as well as in our fraternal life. Contemplation is therefore the Source, the Fountain the Spring that refreshes and energizes us. It is In the deep listening to our soul in quiet and still awareness that the energy flows.

In Contemplative prayer, we bring our world to God and from contemplation, bring God to the people through our various apostolates and through a life of witness to the Gospel values. The fruits of our contemplation enable us to develop a language that is understandable to our world especially the world of young people who are searching for “something” meaningful to their lives and sometimes are confused.



Our Contemplation thus takes us beyond the confines of the chapel into creation. It brings us to see, to touch, to smell, to admire and to love God in all of creation. Every face we meet thus becomes a reflection of the face of God: happy faces, sad faces, tear-filled eyes, bewildered faces, hungry faces all become the Face of God seeking our loving attention. By responding to them in love, we make visible the fruits of our contemplation. In the spirit of Francis and Clare the world will truly become our cloister.

In today’s world where it is very difficult to be silent, the contemplative dimension of our Charism is very essential in all areas of our formation. The observance of those values which promote contemplation thus become an integral part of our formation program.

The Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis have as one of their spiritual legacies what we call the “hour prayer” a short prayer recalling one of the mysteries of our salvation at every hour of the day to foster a renewed consciousness of the presence of God with us in the activities of the moment.

In order to live our TOR charism of becoming a disturbing presence in our own times like Francis and Clare were in theirs, contemplation is the Fountain that gives light and energy.

FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF APARECIDA

Active-Contemplative Way of Being

Sister Edi Nicolao
Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady Aparecida
Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil
Original in Portuguese

The communities of the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Aparecida founded by Mother Clara Maria de Azevedo e Souza in Porto Alegre, the south of Brazil, are called "**Bethania**". We have given this specific name to all our communities. All the Fraternities are recognized by this name, regardless of their ministries or any other activities.

We gave this name because it was the wish of our Foundress and Fr. Pacifico, the co-Founder. "*The Congregation will have a mixed lifestyle, active and contemplative life, with great importance to contemplation. Sisters will make two meditations daily. They will be Marthas and Marys. Marthas during their activities and without ceasing to be Marys in their recollection and union with God*". Mother Clara wished to have praying souls in the Congregation. They are a precious spiritual heritage of the Congregation.



Bethany became the main mission of the Sisters and especially the internal mission of the congregation itself, which is in itself a challenge. The Fraternities were to be like the house of Martha and Mary in Palestine. Mother Clara, in her total availability to Divine action, understood it and lived it fully according to the style and circumstances of her time; facing all the challenges that she and the candidates encountered; living in a way that she could evangelize according to the insights she welcomed. She passed this understanding to the Sisters.

Enlightened by the constant reflections of the co-founder who was her adviser, Mother Clara found a concrete and particular way of living them "*... the Sisters will be Marthas by their action and Marys by their contemplation...*". In her 80s and even earlier, Mother Clara witnessed her fervour through prolonged personal daily prayer; always nurturing the life of prayer discreetly and silently as long as she lived.

The Fraternities of Bethany became the place to care for the "Divine Guest" _ Jesus in the Eucharist. Archbishop John Becker gave the first group of Sisters, while they were still in formation, the mission saying, "***I leave Our Lord to the care of all of you.***"¹⁴ Mother Clara accepted this responsibility with great respect. She defined it as one of the hallmarks of her dear "*Little Seraphic Plant*". She and the sisters received this mission to be the guardians of the "Divine Guest" in the Bethany communities. The Eucharistic celebration, that resonated very powerfully with the Foundress, resulted in two important movements:

First: she considered the 24th, a day of special Eucharistic adoration in all the Fraternities of Bethany, according to their times and circumstances;

Second: she made this date of June 24, 1928, as the foundation date of the congregation.

Now, the way to concretize this initial inspiration of the congregation forever is in the light of the encounter of Jesus with Mary and Martha in Palestine and according to our present realities.¹⁵ The Studies and reflections for the preparation of this General Chapter have updated the active-contemplative Franciscan-Aparecida way, based on the new socio-political-religious-ecclesial and Franciscan context.

¹⁴ The first Mass, on June 24, 1928, at the residence, then the first Bethania, at Rua 1º de Março, in Porto Alegre.

² Lc 10:38-42

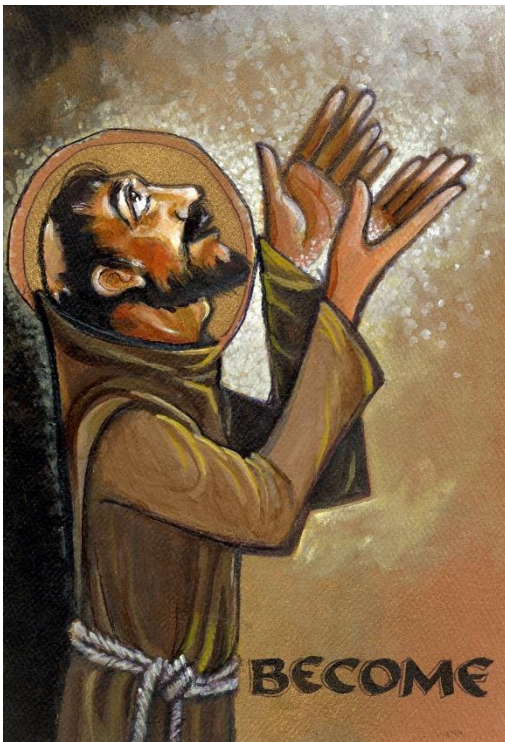
How does Contemplation give light and energy in relationship to the Third Order Charism?

*Sister Anne Marie Lom, O.S.F.
Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity
United States of America
Original Language: English*

My understanding of contemplation is the “constant murmuring of God’s life active within me and propelling me to see God’s presence in every moment, in each person, and in all of creation”. That persistent “bubbling up” of God’s love/grace in my awareness motivates me to share the Charism of Gospel Living with others who seek and share that same peace, joy, and world vision. Contemplation reminds me again and again that I am unique, treasured, and loved totally and unconditionally by God, the very essence and source of Love.

Because I am loved, I have confidence to try new adventures, to study more deeply, and to share more transparently. Letting go of my ego- the fear that I will not be acceptable enough or intelligent enough- frees me to abandon the opinions and comments of others and impels me to strike out on uncharted spiritual territory. Uncharted yet age-old in the communication that God has had for millennia with people who search and seek God’s Spirit.

In St. Francis’ Praises of God, he exclaims: “You are love, You are wisdom. You are humility, You are endurance. You are rest, You are peace. You are joy and gladness. You are justice and moderation. You are all our riches, and you suffice for us. You are beauty. You are gentleness. You are our protector, You are our guardian and defender. You are courage. You are our haven and our hope. You are our faith, our great consolation”. It seems that all action, all light, all energy of St. Francis commences and overflows from contemplation, that unique relationship each person has with God. St. Bonaventure uses the “overflowing fountain” as an image for God’s love spilling over into ordinary, daily life as that love “bubbles up” from the experience of contemplation.



The Franciscan Charism certainly wouldn’t have survived the test of time without it having Divine origin! Living a life based and inspired by the Gospel is so counter-cultural that it has to be energized by God alone. No other origin would galvanize such hope, such promise, such sacrifice and result in such peace and joy save the origin of this Divine relationship: contemplation.

Let us continue to daily nurture this relationship of love which causes sparks of holiness and joy!

*Painted by: + Sister Victoria Maisel, O.S.F. +
Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity
United States of America
Original Language: English*

How does Contemplation give light and energy in relationship to the Third Order Charism?

*Sister Mariella Erdmann, O.S.F.
Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity
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Original Language: English*

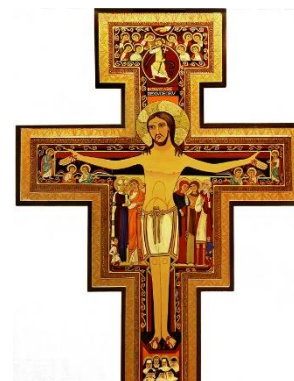
I would like to begin by explaining contemplation as I am using it in this essay. Pope Benedict XVI tells us that, "Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us the mind of Christ." This explanation covers my earlier years in Religious life to the waning of my earthly life.

I think back to my response to God's clear call to follow him as a Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity. It was filled with much zeal, idealism and hopeful anticipation that comes with youth. I indeed felt prepared to give my wholehearted service to Christ whom I loved. In community, I had the opportunity to learn about the Third Order Rule over the years. I grew to appreciate and love the amazingly simple, deep and challenging insights it gave me to live as Christ did within a Religious Community setting. Call, conversion, prayer, poverty, minority, humility, penance and community stand out as the lights, (charisms) that have guided my way.

I soon learned that the zeal I came with needed testing. In my early years on mission a Sister approached me with a sense of sadness after one of our community meetings and sharing and said, "You are idealistic and filled with such zeal. Just wait until you are older and you will be just like me." At first, I was shocked and determined not to let this happen to me but with more reflection I had such compassion for the Sister who was struggling to be what God was calling her to be but feeling as though she had lost her fervor. It was a graced moment for me in my youth and for her in her older years. We both had to reflect upon and contemplate what God was saying to us. I realized that I needed to be hewn into the person God was calling me to be through community living and apostolic service. This can only be accomplished by experiencing suffering in an imperfect world as well as the beauty of God's many blessings. There were, indeed, times of deep pain, confusion, and suffering from factors within and from outside of community. It was part of the times as we moved toward a post-Christian era.

The Third Order Rule became more alive in my mind and heart as I contemplated over the years God's call and my need for daily conversion and to be poor, humble, and little in the eyes of the world, but hopefully beautiful in the eyes of God. I contemplated God's lavish love shown to me in the most unexpected ways. I, also, came to realize more and more that God had a plan for me despite my faults, failures, and sins. This has led me to enjoy His healing power of mercy and forgiveness.

As I come closer to the end of my earthly life, I am most grateful for the inspiration of the Third Order Charisms. I know I am still learning, but I hope that I have acquired a more discerning and wiser vision and a deeper desire to be formed into the likeness of Christ who poured out his life for us. May I, also, pour out my life for others as He wills me to do. I belong totally to Him.



San Damiano Cross created by Sister Mariella for the Franciscan sisters of Christian Charity

Contemplation

*Sister Maria Goretti Scandaliato, O.S.F.
Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity
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Original Language: English*



Contemplation might possibly be described as a believing, trusting awareness of God's presence in a loving gaze upon Truth -- Truth found in the Crucifix.

St. Clare speaks of this gaze as looking into the mirror of the Crucified. Within that gaze we find ourselves, a reflection of his image. Likewise, our Seraphic Father St. Francis loved our Crucified Lord so ardently, that the wounds of Jesus were manifested in his body.

Most of us have probably experienced, at some time, someone intently staring or gazing at us. Instinctively, we seem to sense this and turn to meet the gaze. This simple analogy helps me comprehend somewhat the grace God gives in contemplation; if we are drawn to gaze upon Jesus, it is because He has first gazed upon us.

We know from Scripture that God is Light. Although the smallest flame brings clarity to darkness, a blinding light causes us to look away, or produces momentary darkness until our eyes become accustomed to it. Because God is light itself, his very nearness often causes a darkness, and we find ourselves in a state of yearning and desire, perhaps overwhelmed by a sense of loss or emptiness. Experiencing God's absence causes deep pain, and yet still we long for Him. It is my understanding that if we yearn for God, it is because He yearns for us even more-- an awesome realization! I believe this "holy darkness" has an integral role in contemplation.

As Franciscans, offering our lives completely to God, striving to follow Him in poverty and humility, longing for total union with our Beloved, we experience kinship with the Bride in the "Song of Songs," who searched everywhere in the night for Him whom her soul loves. Alongside daily joys, things happen in our lives that cause struggle, misunderstanding, loss, confusion, illness, or circumstances that lead to deep self-effacement and discouragement. Though never easy to accept, I have learned to respect such experiences as vehicles of grace effecting a purifying self-knowledge that empty us, and profoundly unite us with our crucified Lord when embraced in trust. In contemplation, we needn't struggle to find words or feelings that seem acceptable to offer Him. It is enough to simply be with Jesus in silence, lifting up the empty chalice of our hearts for Him to fill.

When our hearts are quiet and uncluttered, everything we encounter speaks to us of God. We can no longer see beauty without thinking of Him. Neither can we meet pain or sorrow without finding Him. Sinful and weak though we are, everything reveals His unconditional love and mercy. Faith opens our eyes and our hearts in awe of God's profound love for us; we KNOW Him, and know we could not live without Him.

I believe contemplation is intimate union with God, who is not just part of my life; He **is** my life, my Strength, my All.

***Contemplation
Sacred silence, wordless awe, love's total surrender,
Gazing upon Him***

CONTEMPLATION AS A VALUED PRACTICE

Sr. Roberta Agnes McKelvie, OSF,
Bernardine Franciscan Sisters
Reading, PA – USA
Original Language: English

Our Franciscan Third Order Regular life epitomizes the essential elements of St. Francis himself: living a life of itinerant preaching (even using words!) or living a life devoid of contact with “the world” so he could be completely devoted to prayer and solitude. We know that he ultimately blended these elements so well that he was canonized within two years of his death.

For our journey, we are given guidance in our TOR Rule: we can examine, reflect on, and focus on some excerpts from the chapters in the Rule entitled **THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER, THE WAY TO SERVE AND WORK, AND APOSTOLIC LIFE**. These excerpts can provide insight into how “contemplation” and “action” feed each other.

*“Everywhere and in each place, and in every season and each day, the brothers and sisters are to have a true and humble faith.... With all that they are, let them adore God because “we should pray always and never lose heart “Lk. 18:1): this is what God desires” (Art. 9). A practical understanding of what this means is the very definition of contemplation: We are called to consider all things **with attention**.*

”Let the brothers and sisters be gentle, peaceful, and unassuming, mild and humble, speaking respectfully to all in accord with [our] vocation. Wherever they are, or wherever they go throughout the world they should not be quarrelsome, contentious, or judgmental towards others. Rather, it should be obvious that they are ‘joyful, good humored’ and happy in the Lord as they ought to be (cf. Ph.4:4)” (Art. 20). Such **witness** will be a practical result of considering *all things with attention*.

“The sisters and brothers are called to heal the wounded, to bind up those who are bruised, and to reclaim the erring. Wherever they are, they should recall that they have given themselves up completely and handed themselves over totally to the Lord Jesus Christ” (Art. 30). If we are able to **heal, bind up and reclaim others and ourselves**, we will *witness* that we have learned to combine the essentials of Third Order Regular life.

We must be real here. Each of us has significant challenges in our life that are uniquely personal, whether they be certain tasks, trials, encounters, or situations that require quiet reflection, prayer, renewal of our heart and spirit of devotion, and decision-making. Fortunately, as members of the TOR family we have many companions to encourage us and journey with us in faith and love. Together, we must have true faith, compassionate generosity, and willingness to let God be God—the One who has loved us into being and Who gave the only Son to us to show us the way.



MY FRANCISCAN PRAYER

Christ embraces me

*Sr. Maria Teresa Termens CMDP.
Capuchin Sisters and Mother of the Divine Shepherd.
Sabadell (Barcelona)
Original Language: Spanish*

What is prayer for me? For some time now, I have been trying to make a silent prayer and listen to the one who inclines to the other... to be with the Father who loves me.

Each day I feel closer to Christ. It seems that he is beside me and gives me his peace. Sometimes I have the feeling that I am alone, but in fact, I am not alone, I am with Him.

Every day I feel the need to give myself to Him as I am and all that I have and feel that "It is not I, it is He who lives in me.

Why this closeness? Some years ago, I received the Gift of Sorrow; a gift that powerfully impels me to contemplate everything and helps me to grow. Thanks for the suffering.

The contemplation of the image of Francis of Assisi embracing Christ on the Cross and Christ stretching out his arms to embrace him had a great impact on my life. This is a warm embrace and at the same time... so close!

I feel that every day I need to be poorer among the poor, more fragile among the fragile, and so, step by step, enter into the greatness of Christ.

With Him I have everything. And with Mary I feel fulfilled, and I am grateful for all that I have receive from her tender, loving Motherhood.

Jesus, Mary and Francis give me the help I need to surrender myself each day and begin anew to learn to contemplate and discover that in every human being there is the image of Christ who gives himself entirely for us.



Contemplation of the Christ of the Church of St Damien

*Sister of Saint Francis of 'Assisi,
Sr Hélène Rendu (France)
Original language : French*

The daily contemplation of the Christ of St. Damien, over a long time, gratuitously, transforms me personally by changing my inner disposition. What I discover every day gives me the incentive I need to live as a Franciscan.

I am struck, astonished and renewed by the luminous colour of the Christ figure. The contrast with the red and black background of the cross is stunning. The red is massive. The black below Christ's feet, arms and hands highlights the wounds and the blood that you see running from the places of the nailsblood that runs over the angels and humanity. Christ's suffering is not indifferent to my human suffering, he did not go through all this for nothing, he consoles me by joining me in my own suffering. I can then live through what I have to go through...because he lived through all...and it ended well for him: He has risen ! The brilliant light of his body tells me that. His expression is totally alive. I can then look wounded humanity in the face, sympathise with it, ache with it. At the same time, I can see the signs of life emerging, surging, surprising and shining. I can then struggle to make life take its rightful place at the very heart of human pain.

At the top of the crucifix, I see Christ joining the heavenly multitude of the Kingdom of Heaven. He joins his Father who blesses him. He breaks and shatters the limits, the bounds of his humanity Thus he raises me up, by uniting me to him, to go beyond my limits, to let him take me beyond myself, towards what God wants, which is otherwise completely beyond me. In our Franciscan charism, the humble steps of daily life, very simple, very human as they are, Christ himself breaks through the limits and mysteriously leads everything to the Kingdom ...

