



Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all! As you know, we have been reflecting recently on Clare of Assisi, and now I want to share more with you about this wonderful saint. As a woman who lived most of her life in a convent, Clare had a remarkable insight into the depth of the human person and the great capacity we have for God.

She drew these insights from her reflections in her day-to-day interactions with the sisters of her community. She was a woman of hope, joy, optimism and faith in the promise of God's love. She described her insights to a woman she had never met – **Agnes of Prague**. In some way, as Ilia Delio says, each of us is that woman.



Painting by Maria van Galen FMM

There are few writings on Clare, and she herself left only a handful. Among her writings, we have four short letters to Agnes of Prague. These letters should interest us, as they are so rich in depth and meaning, and contain the essence of Clare's spirituality.

Clare's writings are also addressed to us, so let us listen as she asks us to take time to reflect on our own lives ...

“Love Him totally, who gave Himself totally for you. Place your mind before the mirror of eternity, and your soul in the brilliance of its glory.

Place your heart in the figure of the Divine and transform your entire being into the image of the Godhead itself through contemplation.

If you suffer with Him, you will reign with Him.

If you weep with Him, you will rejoice with Him.

If you die with Him on the cross of tribulation, you shall possess eternal life in the glory of the saints.”

Together with St. Clare, my prayer for you is ...

“May you go forward securely, joyfully and swiftly in the pursuit of that perfection to which the Spirit of the Lord has called you.”

Paz y Bien,

Sr. Liz

St Margaret of Cortona

Margaret was born in Loviana in Tuscany in 1247. After her mother's death, her father remarried. However, her stepmother had no patience with the spirited seven-year-old, and considered her to be nothing but a nuisance. Rejected at home, Margaret eloped with a young man from Montepulciano. She bore him a son, but nine years

later, the youth was murdered. Despite her grief, Margaret saw this as a sign from God. She was deeply repentant for what she had done, and decided to return to her father's house. However, he refused to accept her and the child into his household, so Margaret was forced to seek shelter with the Friars Minor in Cortona.

Because of her beauty and youth, Margaret had many struggles in overcoming her temptations, but with the help of a certain Friar named Giunta, she earned her keep by tending to sick women. She also began caring for the sick among the poor, and lived on alms – she asked for nothing for her services. By 1277, Margaret had developed a deep and intense prayer life, often receiving messages from Heaven while praying. In this same year, she received the Habit of the Third Order Franciscans.



In 1286, she received a charter to work with the sick and poor on a permanent basis. Other women gathered around her, and Margaret formed this group into Tertiaries. They finally became a congregation called the Poverelle or Poor Ones. Margaret founded a hospital in Cortona, and predicted the date of her own death.

She died on February 22nd, 1297, having spent 29 years performing acts of penance. She was canonized in 1728 and her Feast Day is May 16.

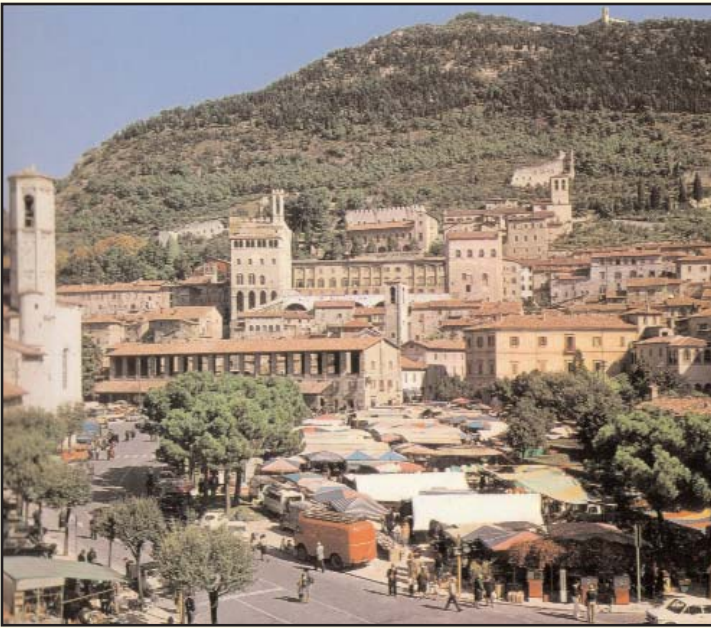
We are always near to home



Every moment is full of the deliciousness of God, every relationship is sacred – in the supermarket, in touching, in pirouetting with the ball on the soccer field, in having a Friday meal with friends. God is there with you in every moment, offering a quiet, intimate and thrilling companionship. Be glad. Rejoice. Be transformed. Become the whispering friend.

- Terry Monagle
“Fragments.”

Gubbio

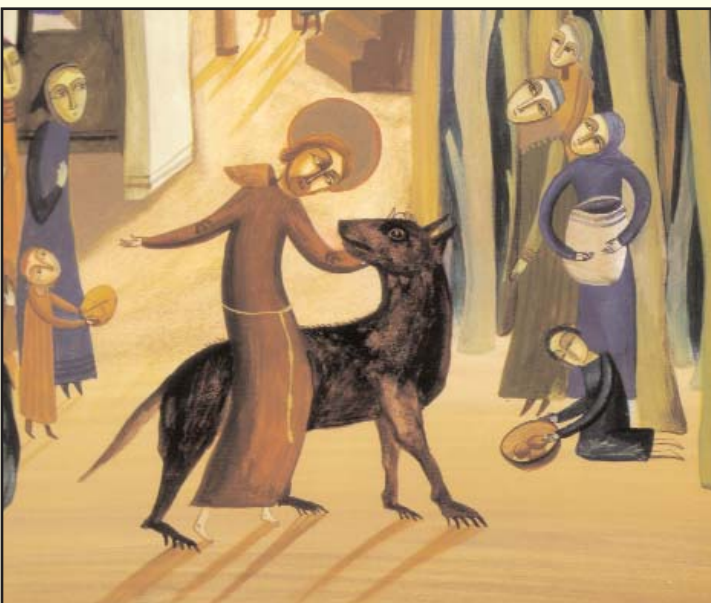


There are many wonderful stories about the life of St. Francis, and like so many good stories, some have grown with the telling. The story of the fearsome wolf of Gubbio is one of these stories, but we see how it brought peace and contentment to the heart of a wild animal, and helped a community to love God and ALL of His creatures.

Gubbio is a pre-Roman town of Umbria, and during the 11th and 12th centuries was one of the most characteristic medieval towns. When the young Francis fled from Assisi, it was here he felt the call to help the lepers – thus the initial experiences belong to Gubbio.

We learn from the Fioretti (Ch. XX1) that in those days there was a ferocious wolf that roamed the streets of Gubbio, devouring people as well as animals. No-one dared to venture outdoors, so when Francis arrived in the town, they begged him to rid them of this scourge.

The saint listened, then went out to meet the wolf and offered him peace, promising that if he ceased molesting



the people, they would care for him, as he was sure the wolf only ate them out of hunger.

The Fioretti tells us that the wolf stood on its hind legs, and placed its paw in the saint's hand. From that day on, the townsfolk fed the wolf and took great care of all its needs. When the wolf died of old age, there was great mourning in the town – its gentle presence always reminded them of Francis. (Legend tells us it was a she-wolf.) Inside the Church in Gubbio, there lies the sepulchre of the famous wolf, and underneath is written an inscription which describes this well-known event in the life of Francis.

According to certain records, the first Franciscan abode was established in Gubbio in 1213, and it was here that Francis gave the Habit to St. Benvenuto of Gubbio. After the Friars Minor departed in 1240, the Poor Clares established a foundation here.

The way of Francis was a way that earned respect from Popes, Sultans, ordinary people, and even the animals themselves. We know that stories of Francis continue to live to this day, and he continues to inspire us to respect every corner of God's creation.

The Canticle

*All praise be
Yours, my Lord
Through Sister
Earth, our mother
who feeds us
In her sovereignty,
and produces various
Fruits with
coloured flowers
and herbs.*



An instrument of peace, Francis could not bear any form of quarrelling. He spoke constantly of the mission of love, and how people were to care for one another. Often there were great disputes between the ruling parties of Assisi and very often between civil and religious authorities. This section of the Canticle was written for such an occasion. The Mayor of Assisi and the Bishop were at odds once again, and Francis responded by writing and sending these words to them both.

*All praise be Yours,
my Lord through
Those who grant
pardon for love of
You:
Through those who
endure
Sickness and trial.
Happy those who
endure in peace
By You, Most
High, they will be
crowned.*



Christine writes from Woorabinda

Christine is an Associate of the MFICs, and shares her mission in Central Queensland with us.

“I am most privileged to be a Primary School teacher at the Woorabinda State School. Woorabinda is an Aboriginal community in Central Qld. This community was founded a little over 80 years ago as a mission, but also as a detention centre without walls. Aboriginal people were brought here, mostly under forced conditions. They were taken away from their land, which was their life blood. Their kinship structures, their lore and their language groups were disrupted and discouraged. Clan groups were thrown together, where previously they were separated by distance and protocols that governed their interaction. The inheritance of this situation is anger, frustration, poverty, alienation and disempowerment.

It was daunting for a daughter of God, and one who tries to walk the way of Franciscan peace, to come here to work. However, in walking this way, I have learned more about the Lord’s goodness and mercy, as well as about myself, than I would have in an easier situation.

I am so blessed to belong to a Eucharistic community that provides missionary inspiration, worship, prayer and contemplation on a basis of encouraging, affirming friendship. All of this support has been food for the way.



In fulfilling my Mandate to educate, I initially encountered incredible frustration, working each day in the face of generational illiteracy, different social expectations, and a language barrier that is generally not acknowledged by mainstream education, or the Australian community at large. I tried vainly to get results. My whole outlook needed to surrender to God’s love before my eyes could be opened to the incredible resilience of my students and their struggle to give me what I was looking for. I think there was a point where I said to God – “Look, if You want me here, tell me what to do!”

It was then God blessed me, for I realized I had to move away from trying to prove myself and begin to contemplate with eyes of love the whole difficult situation, seeing each little child in his/her special perfect purpose that God has designed for them.

The Holy Spirit now has the freedom to use the talents

given me to problem-solve the situation around access to education. Work is the doorway to rich relationships, based on friendship, love and respect shared with my students and their families. For me, it has become a true foundation for the experience of reconciliation, forgiveness and healing. It has become a much simpler, littler walk based on acknowledgment of others on the way of life. Thanks be to God.

Love,

Chris Thomas

A Creed for the Sowing of Seeds



I believe that one of the earth’s finest moments is the sun lifting yellows and greens into life in tiny wattle leaves. It is much like God’s own spirit lifting life into me.

I believe that some dying of seeds has to take place before they can give themselves over to life.

I believe that the Word of God has many times been planted in my life, often because of another who received the seed in ready soil, brought forth a harvest and shared that goodness with me.

I believe that great things have come from even the tiniest seed planted in love and cared for tenderly in the heart of another.

I believe that it takes much patience to sow a seed, to freely give it away to the heart of another, to allow it to root and to grow in its own good time.

- Joyce Rupp

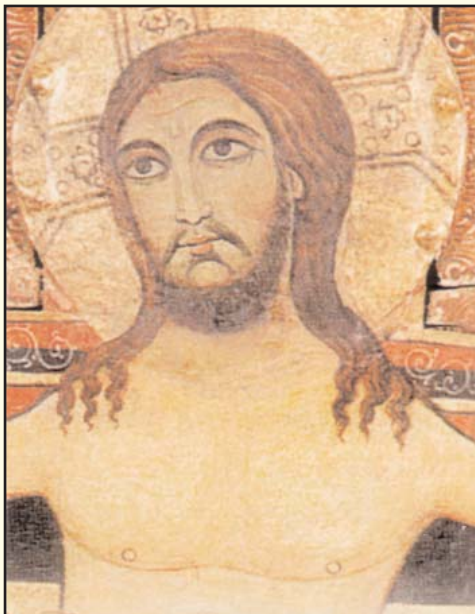
A Prayer for Winter



*We give thanks for the blessing of winter:
Season to cherish the heart.
To make warmth and quiet for the soul.
To make soups and broths for the heart.
To cook for the heart and bread for the heart.
To curl up softly and nestle with the heart.
To sleep deeply and gently – at one with the heart.
To dream with our heart
To spend time with our heart.
A long, long time of peace with our heart.
We give thanks for the blessing of winter:
Season to cherish the heart.
Amen*

- Michael Leunig, "The Tree"

Prayer before the Crucifix



*Most High and Glorious God,
Enlighten the darkness of my heart,
And give me true faith, certain hope
And perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord,
That I may carry out
Your holy and true command. Amen*

Conclusion

May you walk gently through the next six months. Let me farewell you with the Blessing of Saint Clare:



Blessing of St Clare

*May you always be with God wherever
you may be
And may God be with you always.
Always be lovers of God and your
souls,
And the souls of your sisters and
brothers.
Always be eager to observe
What you have promised to God.*

Love

Sr Liz