**'I will protect you, always'**

**Clare's faith and trust in times of difficulty.**

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Acknowledgment of Country:

Prayer:

Place your mind in the mirror of eternity

Place your soul in the radiance of glory

Place your heart in the figure of the infinite heart

And through Contemplation, transform your entire being

Into the image of the Divine One, the Poor Christ,

So that you, yourself, may also experience what his friends experience

And taste the hidden sweetness of Love. *(3L of St Clare)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ2sdoDGdas>

**I Walk with You Jan Novotka**

Come take my hand and companion me.

Welcome me in. I want to live among you.
Receive the gift, that I bring to you, the gift of self.

One with you I am, one with you.

Let us be Light for the world. Let us be Love.

Let Fire transform our hearts.
Circle of Life, you are for me, life for the world!

One pace beyond is the call.

I walk with you.

One pace beyond is the call.

I walk with you. One with you.

I walk with you.

A personal story….

Our lives are always filled with challenges – but leading into the year 2020 we seem to be faced with more than ever before: drought, then the inevitable fires that come in summer – particularly when we had a dry autumn and spring – then surprisingly, we had flooding –our local bridge was closed for a few days – so we had no access to Richmond town or to our parish church.

In March we began to face the now pandemic, Covid 19 – Who would have thought that for the first time that I can remember, our Parish Churches were empty during the Easter Triduum. Families who would normally spend the Easter Weekend visiting family, going to the Easter Show, having a holiday – instead, stayed home and wondered! Interestingly, most people I speak to about the ‘iso’ experience, have actually found it a blessing and a relief. The slowing down has left us all wondering how we have been living at such a pace!

However, there is as a consequence of Covid 19, the uncertainty, unemployment has reached an all-time high – there is a prediction that 1 in 10 people will be unemployed by Christmas, and we just don’t know what is going to happen!

Added to all this is heartbreak of the prejudices that we see in America what is now called ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement – and we in Australia have also been reminded of our own history with the original people of this land.

Can we catch a break? Where is God in all this – what do we do?

Reflection:

* What has been happening for you during this first half of 2020?
* What is your understanding of a loving God in all this?

Getting back to the story that inspired the title for this input. We will have a story about St Clare - from *The Acts of the Process of Canonization (*175*) –* consisting of eyewitness testimonies given under oath concerning the life of Clare.

## **THE NINTH WITNESS**

Sister Francesca, daughter of Sir Capitaneo of Col de Mezzo,nun of the monastery of San Damiano, said under oath … Asked what she saw in her, she replied one time, when the Saracens entered the cloister of the said monastery, the Lady made them bring her to the entrance of the refectory and bring a small box where there was the Blessed Sacrament of the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Throwing herself prostrate on the ground in prayer, she begged with tears, saying among other things: “Lord, look upon these servants of yours, because I cannot protect them.” Then the witness heard a voice of wonderful sweetness: “I will always defend you!” The Lady then prayed for the city, saying: “Lord, please defend the city as well!” The same voice resounded and said: “The city will endure many dangers, but it will be defended.”

Then the Lady turned to the sisters and told them: “Do not be afraid, because I am a hostage for you so that you will not suffer any harm now nor any other time as long as you wish to obey God’s commandments.” Then the Saracens left in such a way that they did not do any harm or damage.

Reflection:

* Do we also hear the voice of the Lord telling us ‘I will always defend you!'?
* Do you sometimes feel like God has abandoned you? – or left you to deal with your issues on your own?
* Do we know a God of presence, or a God of absence?

In an article written by Grace Jordan, the God of Presence, the God of Absence: Universal and Individual Experience, she explains that we often at the beginning of our conversion or spiritual journey, we experience a God who is reassuring and familiar. This God of immanence – presence, this then manifests as a God of transcendence - absence: “…If, in immanence God can seem so present, in transcendence God can seem to be utterly absent.

The God of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures consistently reveals himself as an immanent-transcendent God, as a present-absent God. For Adam and Eve the immanent God walks win their garden in the cool of the evening (Gen 3:8), but the transcendent God expels them from the garden and places angels with flaming swords to guard its entrance (Gen 3:23-24). The immanent God speaks to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend (Ex 33:11), but the transcendent God manifests himself in the great storms that rage on the summit of Mount Sinai (Ex 19:16). The experience of God as immanent shines through the words and actions of Jesus. This God is so present to Jesus that he can be rocked to sleep in a fragile boat by the fierce rhythms of wind and wave and when awakened by the apostles expresses amazement that they should be distraught. ‘Why are you so frightened, you men of little faith?’ (Mt 8:26). Yet, the same Jesus stretched on the cross, cries out in anguish to the transcendent God, my God, why have you deserted me?’ (Mt 27:47). (Jordan, 186)

She argues though at the end of this article that: “This is a most necessary experience, is for our joy and not for our desolation.” This is how we mature in our Christian life with God.

I believe that as we mature in prayer, we move more deeply into a sense of a Transcendent God – we move into our Faith – regardless of what we experience, what we hear and what we see – we believe that we have a loving God who is always with us, who is always guiding us and who is always Protecting us. Hence, why I believe that our life of continual prayer is just so vital to our existence.

As Franciscans, our prayer is rooted in poverty. For Francis and Clare, poverty was the basis of true relationship, with God, - relationship with themselves and with others around them. But it always begins with God.

For Francis and Clare this Poverty is about joy. It is not about renunciation for the sake of it, or to appear holy or revered– but rather to make space to empty themselves, so as to be filled by God’s grace.

We are called to this poverty - a poverty that acts as a mirror, by which we can see our true identity and if we enter fully into this poverty – it will be an ointment to sooth us and the world around us.

The poverty of joy lived by Francis and Clare stood in stark contrast to the prevailing culture of power, greed, fear, anxiety and violence, in Assisi and in the world at the time.

Reflection:

* Do you think that perhaps our own time reflects this?
* Are we willing to enter into this poverty for our own time to help sooth our own world now?

**Franciscan Prayer –**

The gift of four letters of St Clare to St Agnes of Prague.

Clare’s second Letter to Agnes of Prague:

“Gaze upon [Him], Consider [Him], Contemplate [Him], As you desire to imitate [Him]. If you suffer with Him, you shall reign with Him, [if you] weep [with Him], you shall rejoice with Him, [if you] die [with Him] on the cross of tribulation, you shall possess heavenly mansions in the splendor of the saints and, in the Book of Life, your name shall be called glorious among people.” (Armstrong, 42)

For Clare, contemplation begins with the mirror of the Crucified Christ.

The God that Clare relates to is a God who desires to be in full relation with us, and her path of contemplation is one of making that relationship a fruitful union in love.

**Gaze:** Upon Him who is the living Word of God. God Incarnate.

To look steadily in admiration, surprise and thoughtfulness. We need to be amazed and confused as we look upon the Cross.

When we really gaze at the image of the crucified Christ – We see ourselves, others and the world. We see ourselves as Christ sees us.

The truth of the Cross is about darkness – we enter into the darkness of the Cross so that we can allow God to cast a light into that darkness.

This is the beginning stage of giving birth to Christ. To gaze upon the Crucified Christ is to see ourselves, others and the world with a deep, penetrating vision – to see the truth of things in their relation to God.

Some reflection points as we Gaze:

* What do I see?
* Who do I see?
* Where am I in what I see?
* Where is God in what I see?

**Consider:** Study – Sit with the Christ of the Cross.

Leads the one who desires God to perceive the poverty and humility of the Most-High God!

The God who became Incarnate is the crucified Spouse.

We ponder the mystery of a God who is - ‘the King of angels wrapped in swaddling clothes’

In this stage we take our poverty to a place where we recognise our need for God’s mercy. All comes from God – we are only stewards of God’s creation.

Consideration opens us up to move into Contemplation

Some reflection points as we Consider:

* How do we interact with others?
* Who do we crucify?
* Who are we unable to forgive?
* What keeps us nailed to the Cross?

**Contemplate:** Dwell in love: Christ is the Mirror – what is possible for us to become.

Here we recognise that the gift of contemplation is just that – A gift. We can’t make contemplation happen – it happens in us – it is pure gift from the God who loves us.

Contemplation is a means for discovering the truly human without disguise. Clare describes the crucified Christ as a ‘mirror’, a reflection of ourselves. So then, we strive to be transformed in Christ in order to contemplate the truth (depths) of Christ.

What we are before God, that we are and nothing more!

As we contemplate – we dwell with God who is in us.

Here we need to create space and make space in our hearts to allow the crucified Christ, with arms outstretched to move into our hearts.

Contemplation leads to transformation – love by way of self-gift.

Some reflection points as we Contemplate:

* Am I willing to open my heart to allow the Crucified Christ to enter in?
* What stops me from allowing me to be open to this gift?
* Am I willing to stand ‘naked’ before God – be who I truly am?
* Am I willing to give myself to others – to bear Christ to others?

**Imitate:** Become the One we love.

We are called to become what we conceive within us in the same way that we are called to become what we love. Gospel life is focused on being a ‘person in relationship; and a sharing among persons of the experience of Christ. *(153– Franciscan Prayer)*

The goal of Franciscan prayer is not contemplative union as a oneness of mind with God, but an imitation of the spouse – the Poor Crucified. In imitating Christ, we recognise our God who became in Incarnated for me! - Our response, our gift in return is to reflect the face of Christ to the world.

Here we decrease what is in us, to allow Christ to increase. We move from the inward journey to an outward journey. We become the incarnated Christ in the little things we do.

We do not need to do great things, but we need to recognise that we can do small things with great love. Radiating God’s face to the world.

Some reflection points as we Imitate:

* How does Jesus live in me?
* How do we become what we love?
* Are we willing to become a new creation in Christ Jesus?
* What are the little things that I do with great love, because I am Loved first?

Clare’s way of life and her prayer captures the heart of evangelical life. She pondered deeply what it means to be a person of the Gospel. So, convinced of God’s love in her life…

*“Transform your entire being* – is what contemplation is about for Clare, feel *what his friends feel, and taste the hidden sweetness’* and be transformed into the image of God.” (3L of Clare)

Fr Sean Kelly ofm cap – Irish Capuchin offers us this for our final reflection:

* Love rooted in God, soothes fear
* Wisdom rooted in God, soothes ignorance
* Patience rooted in God, soothes anger
* Humility rooted in God, soothes disturbance
* Poverty with joy, rooted in God, soothes greed and avarice
* Resting in God, soothes anxiety.
* Meditation upon God, soothes restlessness

When we live this way we are protected, guarded with our hearts opened, softened, filled with love for God and others.

In this time of confusion and uncertainty – I believe that our prayer is what will change our world. When we become what we love, the world will become a different place. When we transform our entire beings, we will become what we love, and the world will be transformed. Gaze, Consider, Contemplate and Imitate!

Final personal reflection:

* Who is the God to whom you pray?
* What is your image of God?
* Where do you find God in your daily life?
* How do you experience God’s intimate presence in your life?
* How can this encounter become a transformative experience?

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