

The Key Elements of Traditional Franciscan Prayer

CONTEMPLATION

The Franciscan prayer tradition is founded on contemplative prayer:

... Francis and many of his brothers spent hours each week alone with God... his favourite places to pray alone were woods, rocky caves, cliffs and abandoned churches (Sweeney, 2004, p.10).

Gaze ... consider ... contemplate ... imitate... Clare begins with a visual reading, a gazing on the image of the crucified Christ, which leads to meditation or consideration of Christ, then to contemplation and imitation of Christ. Whereas the monastic path ends at contemplation, for Clare, the goal of prayer is imitation ... we become what we love... (Delio, 2004, p.9).

SCRIPTURE

Both Francis and Clare saw scripture as their source of guidance and comfort.

... Many of Francis' prayers originated in the words of Scripture because he found all of the emotions he was feeling already expressed there so clearly (Sweeney, 2004, p.20).

The goal of the life is to be a sister or brother to all, announcing the Good News in one's example and deeds. Using the language of Clare, it is to become a mirror (of Christ) and a footprint (of Christ) for others to see and follow (Delio, 2004, p.6).

NATURE

Francis and Clare saw the natural world as infused with God's presence and love.

It is the type of prayer that impels one to find God in the vast corners of the universe ... 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 (Delio, 2004, p.4).

TRANSFORMATION

For Francis and Clare, prayer brought a change of heart as they discerned God's call to embrace the world in compassion and love.

... those who enter Franciscan prayer, therefore, must be ready for change, they must be willing to become 'another Christ' for this is where the path of prayer leads, to a new birth of Christ in the lives of the believers (Delio, 2004, p.4).

HEART

Franciscan prayer is heart focused, listening and being present as a way of encountering God in the everyday.

... because Franciscan prayer is focused on the person of Christ, it is affective. It is a prayer of the heart rather than the head, and it seeks to centre one's heart on God. The heart that is centred on God views the world as a place where God dwells (Delio, 2004, p.4).

It is Clare who reminds us that we hold a treasure in our earthen vessels, the treasure of God's image deep within us (2 Corinthians 4:7)

... Prayer, therefore, is awakening to the presence of God in our lives. It is not a matter of climbing a ladder and going to God, but realising that God has come to us, taking on our humanity (Delio, 2004, p.66).

TRINITARIAN

Franciscan prayer is based on the person of Jesus Christ.

In Franciscan theology, Christ cannot be separated from the Trinity because Jesus Christ is the word of God incarnate, the one through whom all things were made and in whom all things find their completion. To enter into the mystery of Christ through prayer, therefore, is to enter into the mystery of the Trinity, and to live in the Trinity is to live in relationships of love (Delio, 2004, p.2).

