

The reflections, prayers and spiritual exercises in the next three pages are adapted from *Walking with Francis of Assisi: from privilege to activism* by Bruce Epperly and are based on key elements in the life of Francis and Clare. These prayers can be used by staff groups or in retreats and reflection days.

Reflections

A THANK YOU PRAYER

In this spiritual exercise take a few moments each day to say thank you. This could either be part of an inner dialogue (self-reflection) or shared with others.

Count your blessings every day, and let these blessings join you to others and inspire you to in turn bless your world.

Here are gratitude moments for your day:

- When you awake, be grateful for a night's sleep, refreshment and a day ahead.
- Before you eat, be grateful for the food you have and those who join you for meals.
- Before you get into your car, be grateful for this mode of transport and your capacity to move around freely and independently.
- Before you leave your home, be grateful for the roof over your head, the safety of your place, the possessions you take for granted.
- Before you fall asleep at night, review your day – the encounters, achievements and anxieties- and be grateful for the blessing of life and love and community.

Gratitude blesses our world. It builds connections, fosters peaceful relationships and continually reminds us of God's call to be other centred – to not take for granted what we have, but to look for ways to share with those around us.

UNITY PRAYER

In silence breathe deeply of the air that you share with all of creation, your earthly companions. With each breath, experience yourself as part of one Great Breath, the Spirit of God, flowing in and through you and all living things.

Now visualise those with whom you are most closely related: family, friends, colleagues and those you love. With each breath, experience your unity with them. Pray for their well-being, peace and wholeness.

Next visualise those people from whom you are alienated. These may be people from a different race, class or political persuasion. They may be people you regard as destructive. These are your lepers. Take time to visualise God's light emerging from each person. Accept your connection with each person. Pray for their well-being, peace and wholeness.

Take time to recognise and give thanks for the gifts each person brings to the world and celebrate each person's unique God-given dignity and beauty.

Keep the names of the people that you have prayed for in your prayer space, your diary or in a special container.

THE ECONOMIC EXAMEN

Begin with silent awareness of God's presence. Consider with gratitude the gifts you have been given and the blessings you have received.

Take time to reflect on the following questions:

What is your attitude towards money?

Do you worry about money?

What is your attitude towards possessions?

Are they a source of happiness for you?

Can you think of an occasion where you have been aware of your dependence on consumption, ownership or financial security?

Are there possessions that you find hard to put aside or cut from your life?

What areas of your life require spiritual pruning to let the light of God flow through?

How can you undertake the spiritual decluttering needed to focus on those around you who struggle?

ACTS OF SIMPLICITY

Acquisition and possession define twenty-first century consumerist culture. Community has given way to rugged individualism. Generosity has been supplanted by greed. Empathy has been eclipsed by apathy ...

In contrast, Francis and Clare invite us to follow the humble Galilean, who gave up individualism that he might embrace the world.

Take a quiet moment to look back over your past week:

Consider

What have been the acts of simplicity in your day-to-day life?

What impact have acts of simplicity had on your community and family life?

How can we build community and overcome apathy and greed in our world?

CONTEMPLATING THE SAN DAMIANO CRUCIFIX

Francis challenges every generation to reform and rebuild the church, using the materials at its disposal. God is still speaking to us through the cross and resurrection. Where we see no way ahead, God provides a way forward.

Sit quietly somewhere sacred to you.

Take a few deep breaths. Breathe deeply of God's presence and then breathe that presence out into the world.

Visualise yourself in the church at San Damiano. Place yourself before the cross of Jesus, contemplating God's presence in your life and the suffering of the world.

In your imagination, visualise where the church of our time is in ruins, physically, spiritually or culturally.

Imagine God calling you with the words *'rebuild my church'*.

Consider how you might rebuild the church in community with others.

What gifts and talents can you use as a rebuilders and reformer?

Who might you ask to help you with this quest.

Finish this reflection by reading Francis' prayer before the San Damiano Crucifix:

Most High glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart. Give me true faith, certain hope and perfect charity, sense and knowledge that I may carry out your holy and true command.

CONTEMPLATING FRIENDSHIP

Begin with silent awareness of God's presence. Remember with gratitude the gifts you have been given and the blessings you have received.

Consider the friendship of Francis and Clare. They were true *Anam Cara* – soul friends – a Celtic Christian word for deep friendships of care, support, and mutual spiritual guidance.

Take time to reflect on the following questions:

Who were your closest friends as a child?

What was special about them?

What do you still carry from those early experiences of friendship?

Who were your closest friends as a young person?

What was special about them?

What do you still carry from the deep friendships of adolescence?

What have been your most meaningful friendships in adulthood?

Were any of these relationships spiritual?

Could these relationships be called *Anam Cara* – soul friendships?

How do spiritual friendships deepen your relationship with God?

Are there persons for whom you could be a spiritual mentor or guide?

Are there people you encounter on a daily basis with whom you could strengthen or deepen your friendship?

Hold all of these people in your heart and give thanks for the blessings of friendship.

CONTEMPLATING POVERTY

Read Clare's Poverty Prayer.

O blessed poverty, who bestows eternal riches on those who love and embrace her!

O holy poverty, to those who possess and desire you

God promises the kingdom of heaven and offers, indeed, eternal glory and a blessed life!

O God-centered poverty, whom the Lord Jesus Christ

Who ruled heaven and earth,

Who spoke and things were made, condescended to embrace before all else!

Francis and Clare invite us to question our relationship with our possessions:

How can you practise simplicity in your life?

How can you let go of your possessions to be faithful to God?

In what ways can you live more simply?

How can you support initiatives for sustainability in our world today?

PRAYING WITH ST CLARE

Meditate on the words of Clare and consider whether your relationship with God is leading you more deeply into the mystery of Christ.

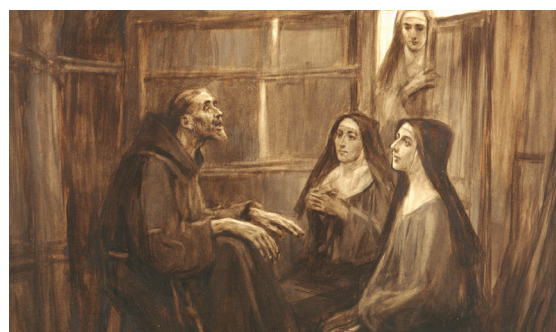
Gaze upon Him, consider Him, contemplate Him as you desire to imitate Him.

If you suffer with Him, you shall reign with Him, [if you] weep, you shall rejoice with Him, [if you] die on the cross of tribulation, you shall possess heavenly mansions in the splendour of the saints and, in the Book of Life, your name shall be called glorious among people.

Consider:

What is your image of God?

How do you envision the journey to God?



A REFLECTION ON THE PEACE PRAYER

(also referred to as the Simple Prayer)

Read the prayer slowly pausing to contemplate the questions. Read it a second time and invite the gathered to share their responses.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

In what way can you be an instrument of God's peace?

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Are there things in this world that you hate. How can you let go of this feeling?

Where there is injury, pardon.

What are the emotional, spiritual, physical and mental injuries in your life? How can you forgive?

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where are the areas of doubt in your life? How can your faith redress these areas?

Where there is despair, hope.

What parts of your life – family, friends, community – need hope. How can you be a bearer of hope?

Where there is darkness, light.

*Where do you find light in your life?
How can you bring light to the lives of those who suffer?*

And where there is sadness, joy.

How can you live more joyfully?

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console.

Who do you need to console?

To be understood as to understand.

What do you need to better understand?

To be loved as to love.

Who or what is calling out for your love?

**For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.**

<https://www.franciscanmedia.org/askafranciscan/origin-of-a-saint-francis-peace-prayer/>

NATURA DIVINA

Francis and Clare taught that nature is a visible and tangible presence of the divine. The contemplation of nature, therefore, is a way of listening to God's call, God's love, God's word.

Take a walk in nature.

Take three or four deep breaths as you set off and silently ask God to guide your path and open your eyes and ears to the wonder of creation.

Notice the ground upon which you walk – the grass, rock, sand or earth.

Take a moment to remember those who have walked this path before you – especially first nations peoples – honour the sacredness of the earth.

Notice what is above you – a tree canopy, the sky, birds, clouds – breathe in the air above and give thanks for the wide-open spaces which are a spirit blessing.

Stop to really 'see' the trees and plants that you pass.

Consider that they too are living, breathing parts of God's creation. How do they feel?

What are their varieties of colour, texture and size?

What can you smell – the salty tang of the ocean, the musty earthiness of the forest floor, the scent of cut grass or flowering trees.

Pause and take in the beauty of God's world around you.

Finish the prayer walk with the resolve to become a person of blessing – invoking God's peace in every encounter of your day.

**Natura Divina is an invitation to understand prayer as deeply incarnational, discovering the presence of the Holy as woven through every element, so that we no longer address our prayers to some transcendent being, but are right in conversation with the shimmering immanent presence of the Divine through every leaf, acorn, gust of wind, and mossy stone (Valders-Paintner, 2020, p.11).*

A PRAYER OF BLESSINGS

Count your blessings every day and let your blessedness join you with others and inspire you to bless the world.

Who has blessed you with their words, actions, presence or support today? Say a quiet thank you.

Who have you blessed with your words, actions, presence or support today? Give thanks for these opportunities.

Who could you bless in the coming days with your words, actions, presence or support? Ask God for eyes and ears open to the needs of others. Write a prayer of blessing for a friend or colleague. Choose to be a person of blessing as you step out each day.

A GRATITUDE PRAYER

Our prayers of gratitude remind us that our lives are sustained by relationships, with people, places, organisations, animals, experiences.

Take a moment today (and every day) to consider those things for which you are grateful in your life:

- those who love and support you
- colleagues who make your work life enjoyable
- people who challenge and encourage you
- those who bless you with presence and listening
- places that fill your heart with joy
- experiences which bring happiness and laughter
- animal friends who love unconditionally
- opportunities for personal growth and enlightenment

PRAYER FOR CONTINUOUS CONVERSION

Pivotal moments in our spiritual journey can come at any time. Our lives involve, as Francis showed us, a widening circle of ethical and spiritual consideration. God constantly speaks to us in the events of our lives, whether through a voice piercing the silence of a chapel, a synchronous encounter with a person suffering from leprosy or the flight of a sparrow overhead.

When have you felt God's call in your life?
What events of your lifetime have caused you to consider your spiritual journey?
One of Francis' pivotal moments was his meeting with Sultan Malik-al-Kamil – how has the call to interfaith dialogue enriched your spiritual journey?
How does Francis' call to inner conversion and simplicity challenge your faith?

Pray for God's blessing

May we be open each day
to moments of grace and conversion.
Times of compassion.
Times of joy and laughter.
Times of challenge and searching.
Like Francis may we dance and sing
listen and contemplate,
welcome and embrace,
all that God sends us on our life's journey. Amen.

PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH ST FRANCIS

Anonymous of Perugia records that the origins of the Franciscan way came in a Church in Assisi where Francis, Bernard and Peter sought inspiration from the scriptures on how they should live. With a priest, they opened the scriptures at random and revealed three passages:

If you wish to be perfect, go sell everything you possess and give it to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven. Matthew 19.21

Whoever wishes to come after me let him take up his cross and follow me. Matthew 16.24

Take nothing for the journey. Luke 10.4

Consider:

What do these scriptures mean to you?
When have you been called to 'sell everything'?
What are you carrying on your spiritual journey that you could lay aside?

Francis writes about the origin of the order with these words: And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no-one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel (Testament 14-5).

What scripture passages have given you inspiration in your life?

A Blessing of the Four Elements

On an altar or prayer space place a symbol of the elements (wind, fire, water and earth). Pause to consider the reflection questions for each element.

BROTHER WIND:

Turn to face the east. The place of the rising sun, a place of new beginnings.

Imagine the breath of God breathing into you at the very moment of your creation.

Welcome God's life-giving breath into your life.

Ponder where in your life you feel the gift of air. Where are you being invited to greater gifts of possibility? What song are you being called to sing?

BROTHER FIRE:

Turn toward the south, the place of the midday sun, the warmth and fullness of the day.

Feel the heat in your own body, the energising and expanding fire that sustains your life.

Ponder where in your life you feel the gift of fire. Where are you being called to a more passionate response? What sets you aflame with love?

SISTER WATER:

Turn toward the west, the place of the setting sun, of endings and transitions. Become conscious of the element of water. Notice in your body where you feel the gift and flow of water. Feel the gifts of tears, of your emotions, of the time of twilight, of letting go and turning within.

Ponder where in your life you feel the gift of water. Where are you being invited into a deeper surrender?

SISTER EARTH:

Turn toward the north, the place of the midnight moon, a time of reflection.

Imagine God as the potter and you as the clay being formed and shaped.

Feel the gifts of earth: of seeds holding wisdom underground, of roots sinking deep.

Ponder where in your life you feel the gift of earth. Where do you need a deeper sense of grounding?

(Valders-Paintner, 2020, p.141).

