



1 December 2009, #216

Capuchin Vocation Update Province of St. Joseph

Franciscan prayer: the Word made flesh Part 5 in a series by William Hugo, Capuchin

In the last *Update* on Franciscan prayer (November 17th), I examined Francis and Clare's gaze at the self-emptying life of God visible in the enormous act of creation. We saw the four steps of prayer outlined by Clare (gaze, consider or meditate, contemplate, and imitate) as they are visible in the actions and prayers of Francis.

Francis and Clare also gazed a lot at Jesus. *A lot!* Perhaps the important word to consider in understanding this focus is *Incarnation*. This is the theological word we use to refer to the Word of God (the 2nd person in the Trinity) becoming human. Many people mistakenly think *Incarnation* refers specifically to Jesus' birth, i.e., Christmas.

Incarnation includes Jesus' birth, but properly refers to Jesus' entire human and historical existence, in other words, from conception (Annunciation) to death. No one moment is more important than another, though some moments are more dramatic for Francis, powerfully disclosing what God is like. How does this fit into Franciscan prayer?

The Incarnation as a whole and in each of its moments becomes the event at which Francis and Clare most commonly gaze. When they move from gazing to considering, again they experience a selfless God. To be precise, they are overcome by considering that a God they imagine to be powerful, great, glorious, and able to do everything and anything in the superlative, actually takes on our human nature that seems so utterly constrained by littleness and limits.

I am accustomed to describing this insight as God jumping off the tallest pedestal to live on the floor with his creatures. However, if one stays with the gazing and considering of Francis and Clare, one sees God in Jesus leaping off time after time after time, until one

realizes that the eternal God is eternally leaping to the floor. Then, perhaps the best metaphor for God is someone standing on the floor next to the pedestal that we humans put there, but which God *never* climbs. He's too busy emptying himself on the floor.

The baby Jesus and the crucified Christ are but moments on this continuum of salvation. However, for Franciscans, these two moments most dramatically disclose God's selfless vulnerability, littleness, humility, poverty, and minority. This is why we see so many works of art depicting Francis with the crucified or the baby Jesus.

Well, I've run out of space to discuss how this gaze-consideration-contemplation led Francis and Clare to the desire of imitation. Remember, Franciscan prayer by Clare's definition changes our lives. That's for the next installment.



Giotto in Assisi



Artist unknown

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St. Lawrence Seminary Alumni

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March 12-14 Pre-Postulancy Information
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New inquirers are welcome!

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