

Conclusion – Engaged Spirituality – Joseph Nangle, OFM – pp. 89-90

A final word about obedience and the Holy Spirit.

At a particularly critical moment in his life, Jesus left us some consoling thoughts regarding the work of the Spirit in our lives and in the world. When he took his last meal with friends the night of his capture, torture and execution, he spoke about his impending departure from them in words his hearers later remembered and wrote down in detail. We read, “The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I told you” (Jn 14:26). And again, “when the Paraclete comes, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father – and whom I myself will send from the Father – he will bear witness on my behalf” (Jn 15:26). And yet again: “it is much better for you that I go. If I fail to go, the Paraclete will never come to you, whereas if I go, I will send him to you....When he comes, however, being the Spirit of truth he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but will speak only what he hears and will announce to you the things to come” (Jn 16: 7, 13).

In looking at all of the new graces God has given us to deal with the ever-changing circumstances history sets before people of faith and good will, these promises of Jesus that we will always have a guiding Spirit ring true. They must have proved enormously consoling and energizing for the disciples who first heard them, as they watched his brutal death and, then, a short time later, when he left his work in their hands. They knew at the first Pentecost that Jesus had kept his word about the help of the Spirit, because these timid, frightened recluses bust out of their hideaway on that day and began the work of preaching Christ Crucified to the ends of the earth. People like Benedict and Scholastica, Francis and Clare, Dominic and Ignatius, Teresa and John of the Cross, John XXIII, Dorothy Day, and Oscar Romero must also have felt the power of the promised Advocate. Where else could they have gotten the audacity to do the bold things they did? Today, we have the same assurance from the Lord, as the Spirit continues to challenge, console, inspire and direct the work of furthering God’s reign on earth through us – flawed human beings. Our task, just like that of every person of faith throughout history, is clear – to recognize the graces given for our times and to respond to them in obedience.

Saved in Hope – (*Spe Salvi*) – Pope Benedict XVI – Paragraph 31.

31. Let us say once again: we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. His love is at the same time our guarantee of the existence of what we only vaguely sense and which nevertheless, in our deepest self, we await: a life that is “truly” life. Let us now, in the final section, develop this idea in more detail as we focus our attention on some of the “settings” in which we can learn in practice about hope and its exercise.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html

The Franciscan Tradition Today – Poverty & Joy – Wm Short, OFM – pp 127-130

This book is destined to be among the last of many works on Franciscan spirituality published in the twentieth century and, hopefully, among the first to be read in the twenty-first. Like a previous study of the Franciscan movement, this one is being completed in the Piedmont region of northern Italy. Here, in the *Valli Valdesi*, the movement founded by Peter Waldo, a contemporary of Francis and Clare, lives on in the

Waldensian churches. Franciscans, men and women, secular and religious, live here too, following a 'form of life' initiated in Assisi, far to the south, eight centuries ago. In this place and at this time I would like to offer a summary of the Franciscan tradition that, like the ancient Roman deity Janus, ancient patron of nearby Genoa, looks from the present backward, at what has been, while looking forward, toward what is to come.

Should the Franciscan tradition teach people to recreate the experience of a Francis or a Clare? Certainly not. The attempt would be fruitless and frustrating. And even if it could succeed, then, like Francis and Clare themselves, it would have to be dead. It continues to be a living tradition today because others have carried on the tradition, in new times and places, in their own words and example. Francis presents us with one example, a moving and inspiring example, but the tradition does not stop with him. In his words, 'I have done what was mine to do, may Christ now show you what is yours.' Francis wished that his whole life would point to Christ. To stop at Francis would be to frustrate the intention he had for his followers. Clare also pointed away from herself, holding up the Mirror who is Christ, and indicating Francis as the one who showed her that Mirror. But both Clare and Francis, in their words and gestures, reveal to us, sometimes clearly, sometimes obscurely, intuitions about God-become-human that still remain profoundly challenging. That is the only reason for writing a book like this in our day: to express those intuitions in a language understandable to today's sincere Christian believer and religious seeker.

What can the medieval Francis and Clare mean today? And what is there in the long Franciscan tradition that merits attention today?

We usually ask questions of the past because we are searching for answers in the present. In the field of spirituality today there is an explosion of interest in the sacred, in ritual, in the recovery of the body and the sacredness of the earth, in the language of women's voices, and in the rediscovery of community. Sometimes with too great facility proponents of one or the other tradition lay claim to one or all of these areas as the special terrain of their spirituality. I wish to avoid giving that impression in regard to the Franciscan tradition. Instead, I would like to suggest a possible service that the tradition of Francis and Clare can offer to those who are searching for God, or simply for a sense of meaning in their lives.

The Franciscan tradition can and should begin by doing a 'disservice' to the interest in spirituality today. Forms of spirituality, broadly defined as interest in the spiritual, can sometimes be the search for religious experience that takes us away from ourselves, the daily activities of life, the world, the mundane. Some techniques of concentration or ritual point their practitioners toward a completely pure, other, spiritual reality that is characterized by utter lack of feeling, images or materiality. This world and our lives must then be inevitably inferior, if not unreal, in view of that other realm of 'soul' or bliss, or spiritual being. Such a view alienates rather than integrates spirituality and life as we live it daily.

To this type of spirituality the Franciscan tradition can offer its disservice by pointing to feet. These are the 'dirty feet' of the incarnate Word. Following the example of Francis and Clare, the Franciscan tradition today can point instead to the down-to-earth-ness of the experience of God, who has made an irrevocable decision to be incarnate.

This is also a service offered to others who are deeply concerned about an interest in spirituality that seduces people away from the pressing needs of contemporary society. A spirituality with consistent emphasis on the God who is revealed in Christ enfleshed, 'in-mattered', and in history, can offer a point of dialogue with those who see in much of the contemporary religious quest a denial of responsibility for the world in which we live.

The world at the end of the 1900s is marked by the stark contrast between the affluence of a few individuals and societies and the misery of the majority of others. In such a world, what value can poverty have, a focal point of the Franciscan tradition? Believing or preaching that poverty itself has some value is as meaningless today as it was in the thirteenth century, and can be used to justify evils perpetrated on the poor. As I hope to have made clear in the preceding pages, poverty itself can never be a value. It is the relinquishment of wealth, status and domination over others that the incarnation teaches Francis and Clare in their pursuit of the 'holy poverty' of Jesus. Following this example, living *sine proprio*, without anything of one's own, today implies the refusal to arrogate to one's self what belongs to all, because all belongs to the Creator. Everything is gift, nothing is 'property'. The gospel mandate to 'sell all and give to the poor', which Francis and Clare followed, far from being meaningless, is as urgent in our own day as it was in theirs.

The recovery of a spirituality of creation, linked with contemporary awareness of the global effects of

environmental exploitation, can form a bridge between contemporary concerns and this wisdom from the past. For Christians as well as other people of spirit, the world has become a problem or, better said, the effects of human appropriation of the earth have become the problem. In the gentle and non-possessive respect toward 'brother' and 'sister' water, air, fire, and 'our Sister Mother Earth', Francis the patron saint of ecology, can help point us toward a community of creation in which humans take seriously the role of being 'lesser', and 'subject to every creature because of God.'

Not least importantly, the spirituality of reconciliation, so evident in Francis' peaceful dialogue with Malek el-Kamil during the Fifth Crusade, reminds us of what has been called 'The Spirit of Assisi', a spirit of respectful and attentive dialogue among members of differing religious traditions. Wars and threats of war among nations, invoking God as their justification, contradict that Franciscan understanding of 'the Most High' God who is 'good, all good, the highest good'. In the figure of the *Poverello* those who continue to struggle for reconciliation among nations and individuals may find a sign of hope. Whenever he spoke to people, or birds, or wolves, he always began with these words, with which I end: 'May the Lord give you peace.'

Romans 12:1-21

The New Life in Christ

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Marks of the True Christian

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.