

# BEAUTY AND ABUNDANT LOVE:

A Springtime of Franciscan Giftedness

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## Through Franciscan contemplation of BEAUTY

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES:

Francis of Assisi: *Canticle of Creatures*

Thomas of Celano: *The Life of St. Francis*

Clare of Assisi: *Letters to Agnes of Prague*

Bonaventure: *Mind's Journey into God*



# I. CREATION: A WORLD OF BEAUTY

Not a place in need of 'fixing'

Not a realm of 'fallen, lesser being'

**BUT, a GIFT**

-- The place where we encounter the sacred

-- The place of 'conversion'







## Francis: A Model for our reflection

This happy traveler,  
Hurrying to leave the world  
As the exile of pilgrimage,  
Was helped, and not just a little  
By what is in the world.  
Toward God, however, he used it as  
The clearest mirror of goodness.  
In art he praises the Artist;  
Whatever he discovered in creatures  
He guides to the Creator ...

He rejoices in all the works of the Lord's hands,  
 And through their delightful display  
 He gazes on their life-giving reason and cause.  
 In beautiful things he discerns Beauty Itself;  
 All good things cry out to him:  
 "The One who made us is Best."

II Celano, Life of Francis

## Clare of Assisi invites us...

Happy indeed is she to whom it is given to share this sacred banquet,  
 To cling with all her heart to Him  
 Whose beauty all the heavenly hosts admire unceasingly  
 Whose love inflames our love,  
 Whose contemplation is our refreshment  
 Whose graciousness is our joy  
 Whose gentleness fills us to overflowing  
 Whose remembrance brings a gentle light,  
 Whose fragrance will revive the dead,  
 Whose glorious vision will be the happiness  
 Of all the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Second Letter to Agnes of Prague



## Some questions

- How important is the contemplation of beauty for me?
- How do I nourish the experience of beauty in my own spiritual life?
- What are my spiritual practices that promote beauty?

## II. Impelled to hope-filled, compassionate presence

- HOW???
- By following the path of love...
- By using the gifts we have been given...
- By being gift



## THE HUMAN HEART

A deep yearning, inclination for happiness, for wholeness, for perfection, the SELF (MY GOOD)

A deep yearning, inclination for VALUE, for things of intrinsic worth independent of the self, for OTHERS, for loving rightly (COMMON GOOD)

THE AFFECTION FOR  
SELF/HAPPINESS IS  
OUR *NATURAL* DISPOSITION

THE AFFECTION FOR  
OTHERS/JUSTICE IS  
OUR *FREE* DISPOSITION



## TOGETHER, THEY ARE THE KEY TO RATIONAL FREEDOM

- When we choose in light of God's generous love  
*and*
- When the two affections are in appropriate harmonic  
balance, *then*
- Our act reveals the perfection of rationality that is  
freedom

## THE RESULT: ARTISTIC PRESENCE/POISE

- Balance of presence to self and others
- The athlete, dancer, musician
- Artist
- The inner "stillpoint" of readiness

## THE PRESENT MOMENT AS GIFT FOR COMMUNION

- The Spirit's "now" (the audible...)
- When genuine self pours out in gracious, creative liberality
- When 'my' gift becomes gift for others

- **WHAT MIGHT THIS MEAN?**



## Responding to divine love

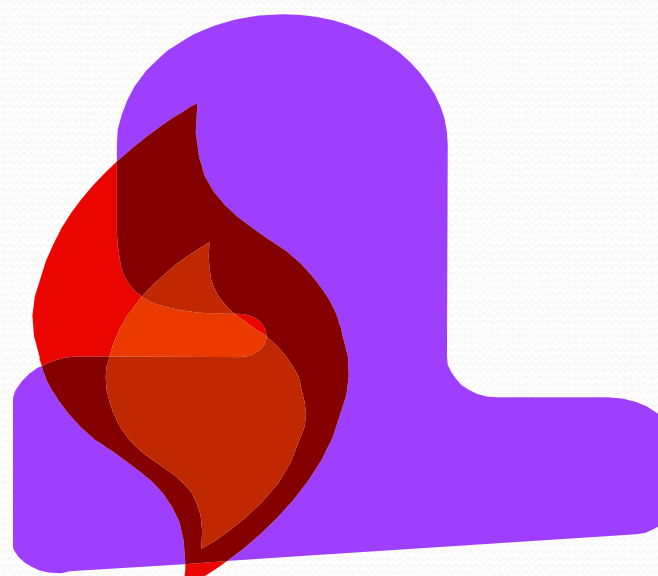
- Franciscan apostolic service as *presence*:
  - To serve in solidarity
  - To serve as the capacity to maintain beauty of hearts
  - To serve as an opportunity to liberate the dignity of human persons
  - To serve as the victory over illusions
  - To serve as a sharing of hope

“The Lord Gave me Brothers”

Letter on the Eighth Centenary of the Founding of the Order

## Reflecting on God’s invitation

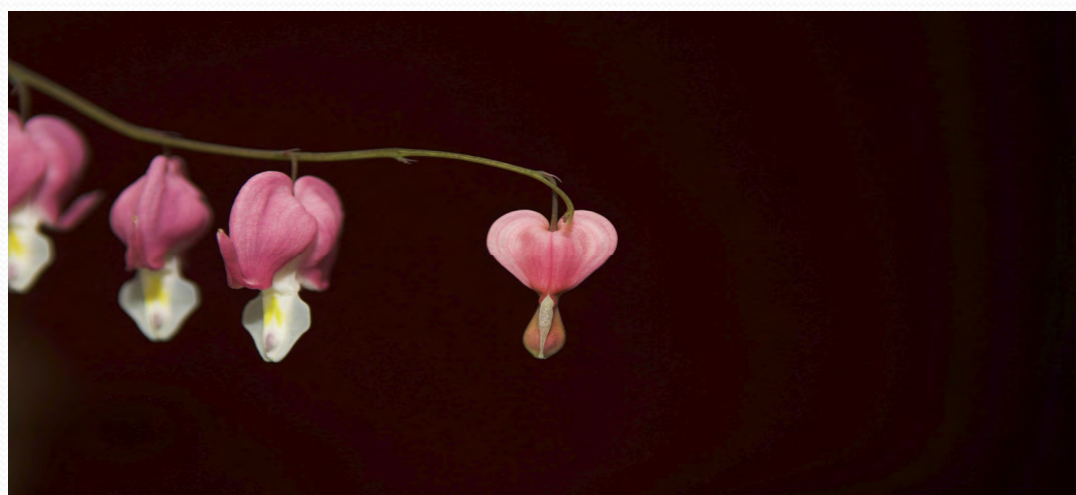
- Evangelical communion
  - Living the Gospel
  - Living in mutuality
- Apostolic mission
  - Proclaiming divine love



A RESPONSE OF LOVE, TO LOVE, IN LOVE



“Were not our hearts burning...?”



- What is the beauty being *birthed* in my heart today?

## OUR HUMAN VOCATION

“We are his mothers when we carry him about in our heart and person by means of love and a clean and sincere conscience, and we give birth to him by means of our holy actions, which should shine as an example to others.”

St. Francis, Letter to the Faithful, 230j



## A VISION OF ABUNDANCE:

- Are you jealous because I am generous? (Mt. 20)
- Tell those I have invited that my banquet is ready... come to the feast! (Mt. 22)
- And my delight is to be with the children of men. (Prov. 8:30)

**AS WE  
HAVE EACH  
RICHLY  
RECEIVED**

...

... SO MAY WE  
RICHLY GIVE





## The expanding heart ...

- How does the Franciscan vision of divine generous love inform my reflection upon my own life's journey?
- How does the Franciscan vision of inclusive, active love inform my reflection on this moment?
- How does the Franciscan vision of servant ministry call me to respond to the "signs of our times"?

"Were not our hearts burning...?"

What is the next thing needed  
to *set the world ablaze*  
with God's life and love?





***Beauty and Abundant Love:***  
**A Springtime of Franciscan Giftedness**

Only what is good draws your love. The earth..., the beautiful and fertile earth..., a human face with its balanced features, its happy smile, its rich coloring..., the heart of a friend.... But enough! There is this good, and there is that good. Take away the 'this' and 'that' and look, if you can, upon the good itself. Then you will behold God, Who is not good because He has the good of any other good thing but because He is the good of every good thing.... So, our love should rise to God as the Good itself.

Augustine, *On the Trinity*, VIII, 3, 4

**The Franciscan path of beauty:**

This happy traveler,  
Hurrying to leave the world  
As the exile of pilgrimage,  
Was helped, and not just a little  
By what is in the world.  
Toward God, however, he used it as  
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*II Celano, Life of Francis*

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Of all the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.

*Clare of Assisi, Second Letter to Agnes of Prague*

The beauty of things, too, if we but consider the diversity of lights, forms and colors in elementary, inorganic, and organic bodies, as in heavenly bodies and in minerals, in stones and metals, and in plants and animals, clearly proclaims these three attributes of God.... Therefore, whoever is not enlightened by such great splendor in created things is blind; whoever remains unheedful of such great outcries is deaf; whoever does not praise God in all these effects is dumb; whoever does not turn to the First Principle after so many signs is a fool.

*Bonaventure, Mind's Journey into God I, 14-15*

### **Proclaiming the joy of the Gospel through beauty:**

Every form of catechesis would do well to attend to the “way of beauty” (via pulchritudinis). Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties. Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus. This has nothing to do with fostering an aesthetic relativism which would downplay the inseparable bond between truth, goodness and beauty, but rather a renewed esteem for beauty as a means of touching the human heart and enabling the truth and goodness of the Risen Christ to radiate within it. If, as Saint Augustine says, we love only that which is beautiful, the incarnate Son, as the revelation of infinite beauty, is supremely lovable and draws us to himself with bonds of love. So a formation in the via pulchritudinis ought to be part of our effort to pass on the faith. ... We must be bold enough to discover new signs and new symbols, new flesh to embody and communicate the word, and different forms of beauty which are valued in different cultural settings, including those unconventional modes of beauty which may mean little to the evangelizers, yet prove particularly attractive for others.

Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*

For further reflection...

- ❖ How important is beauty for me?
- ❖ How do I experience beauty in my own spiritual life?
- ❖ Do I have spiritual practices that promote beauty? What are they?

### **Our vocation: to be artists of beauty in a broken, wounded world:**

We are his mothers when we carry him about in our heart and person by means of love and a clean and sincere conscience, and we give birth to him by means of our holy actions, which should shine as an example to others.

St. Francis, *Letter to the Faithful*, 230j

What is the beauty being birthed in my life this day? This Lent?



# Take Time Out for Beauty

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## Opening music

Leader:

We gather today to pause for a space to hold close the beauty in our lives. You are invited to breath slowly and deeply — close your eyes and focus on one object or source of beauty in your own life at this time.

## Allow some quiet time for reflection.

Please keep before you this gift of beauty during ourtime together.



## Reading

“Beauty does not stand alone in the universe, isolated and remote, under glass and precious for its rarity. Beauty is the bridge to justice. It’s the lost beauty of nature that warns us against pollution. It’s the beauty of a child’s face that brings us to see the ugliness of racism. It’s the beauty of life that brings us to rage against the injustice that obstructs it for anyone. Beauty is the glue that holds the world together. To bring peace, to nurture hope, to wage justice, then, it

is necessary to teach beauty or nothing is too valuable to be destroyed. We may well be spending far too much time teaching skills and productivity and efficiency and far too little time on music and art and poetry and flowers and literary appreciation. To raise a child well, we must seed a place in their souls for beauty. To live life fully, we must learn to take time out for beauty. To build buildings that do not become ghettos, we must be willing to spend as much time on their beauty as we do on their function. Unless we make beauty the centerpiece of our lives, we are not really living, we are only breathing. If in this millennium we really want justice, we must learn to cultivate beauty.”

--Joan D. Chittister, OSB

Leader:

Bring back the beauty in your life that you focused on earlier. Does this say to you that “beauty is the glue that holds the world together?” Is “beauty the centerpiece of your life?”

## Allow time for any shared reflections.

*Pied Beauty*

Glory be to God for dappled things--  
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled  
cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout  
that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches'  
wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced-fold,  
fallow and plough;  
And all trades, their gear and tackle and  
trim.  
All things counter, original, spare,  
strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled  
(who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour;  
adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past  
change: Praise him.

--Gerard Manley Hopkins



**Conclusion**

*Poem-Prayer*

*All present pray together.*

Beauty is before me  
And beauty is behind me  
Above and below me hovers the  
beautiful  
I am surrounded by it  
I am immersed in it  
In my youth I am aware of it  
And in old age I shall walk quietly  
The beautiful trail  
It is finished in beauty  
It is finished in beauty  
It is finished in beauty  
It is finished in beauty  
It is finished in beauty.

--Navaho Prayer

**Song**