

Companions IN PRAYER



Sisters of St. Clare
Saginaw, MI

Contemplative Prayer

The most common question we are asked is: "What do we do?"

"We are a community of contemplative Poor Clare Nuns."

"And what does that mean?"

In this newsletter I'll explain how I practice contemplative prayer. Anyone can do it, and you probably do in one way or another. It is one of the oldest, most natural, and simplest forms of prayer. You don't need anything - just your desire to be with God.

The heart of contemplative prayer is one dynamic action: attentive listening and responding in faith.

I have an image that helps me in my practice of contemplative prayer. In the Hebrew Scriptures, one image for faith is the broad, long cloth or (he'min) that a woman uses to wrap around her and her child. This wrap enables her to carry her child wherever she goes. The child is nestled securely on her hip, on her back, or on her breast. We still see women in Africa and South America carrying their babies in this way. I find the image of this child wrapped in its mother's arms to be a beautiful spiritual image of faith. The child feels safe and protected by its mother. In a similar way, we may imagine ourselves safe and protected in God's powerful arms. People through the ages have found peace in this image, and it is still relevant to us today.

Like a baby resting in faith with its mother, in contemplative prayer, we can rest in faith with God. While resting, we listen for God's presence. We are

not listening for a voice or words. Rather, we are listening for God's unconditional love of us. We find ourselves at peace in that love. We find ourselves accepting it, and responding to it. We may sometimes feel so at rest that we fall asleep, even as a child sleeps in its mother's arms. This is contemplative prayer--being wrapped in faith and at rest in an awareness of God's love for us.

In order to practice contemplative prayer, find a quiet place to be alone. Close your eyes and let your mind be at rest. This may take some time. Let go of the cares and concerns of your life. Let yourself become still. Focus on your breathing. Breathe out and let go of your concerns. Breathe in and repeat a word gently to yourself. The word itself is not important. The word is just a reminder to bring you back to attentive listening in case your mind drifts off to other thoughts or worries.

As your slow breathing helps to calm you, respond with an act of faith. Imagine yourself nestled in the arms of God like a baby securely wrapped in its mother's arms. When I practice contemplative prayer, I often remember Psalm 131:2



Artwork by Liz Picken, CJ

*Like a weaned child rests against its
mother's arm,
So my soul is quiet within me.*

Now I only need to listen attentively for the presence of God. The action now is God's. God gives unconditional love in response to my trust that I am held and safe. No matter whether we are male or female, no matter our age, we all need to be held when life's cares overwhelm us. Contemplative prayer allows us to experience God's never ending, never failing love. Nothing can separate us from that love.

When you finish your prayer, take a few moments to bring this contemplative prayer time to a close.

As I enter back into my day, those moments of peace that I found in contemplative prayer can end quickly. However, during the day when I feel upset or unsettled, I go back to my slow breathing, close my eyes, and recall my experience of resting in God's love. I become once more like a weaned child, resting in its mother's arms. Once more, I find myself comforted. I find myself listening and responding in faith to the gift of God's presence.

Sr. Laura and the Sisters of St. Clare

800 Years of History

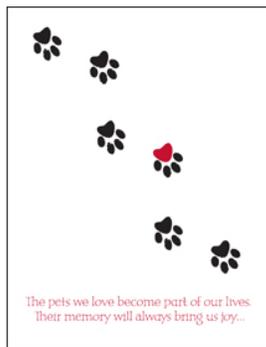
We are coming to the end of a yearlong celebration marking the founding of the Order of St. Clare 800 years ago. It was then that Clare heard St. Francis preaching in the streets of Assisi and left her family to join him.

How is it that our Order has endured for 800 years? Clare was a great spiritual leader, and we, her followers, still find in her many writings nourishment for our faith and our souls. In her description of the mirror, we contemplate the face of Christ:

*Gaze upon this mirror each day
and continually study your face within it...*

For Clare, this mirror represents our faith in God. We gaze into it with trusting faith and see not ourselves but our **essential** self, the image of our beloved creator, the source of our life. In that reflected face we see our value and our eternal destiny.

Special Request for a Pet Sympathy Card



During one of our parish visits last fall, a veterinarian asked if we would consider designing a pet sympathy card for grieving pet owners. We recognize that many households have pets such as cats, dogs, hamsters, or rabbits. We also know that they become very dear to us in spite of the fact that we

find ourselves adapting **our** lives to **their** schedules and preferences.

In response to the veterinarian's request and in the spirit of St. Francis' love of animals, we have designed an original pet sympathy card. We respect the love and companionship that pets give to so many people, and we sympathize with those who mourn the loss of such faithful companions. The unconditional love that pets give to us can remind us of the unconditional love of God in our midst. (<http://srsclare.com/our-gift-store/pet-sympathy-card>)

The Power of Prayer Video

Last summer during our 20th anniversary the diocese created a video at our home about our daily life. We invite you to view it at our website: <http://srsclare.com/about-us/media/>

Sisters of St. Clare
4875 Shattuck Rd • Saginaw, MI 48603
Phone: 989-797-0593 • Web: <http://srsclare.com> • Facebook: SistersofStClare

Please remember us in your charitable giving.

You are not alone
WE ARE PRAYING WITH AND FOR YOU.