

+ Dear Brothers and Sisters, it is a Lenten joy to share with you some thoughts, gleaned from the prayer and ponderings of your Poor Clare Sisters in Belleville, on the impact of the Eucharist on our contemplative life. It is a subject for which many things could be said – and one for which very little can be said, except in the silence of love and faith and prayer. But since we need the vehicle of words to convey these thoughts to you, we will do so via some simple statements of fact and of faith.

JESUS IS THE GOD OF OUR HEARTS. It is He who has chosen us, and most of us can point to a Eucharistic moment (or, moments) when the seed of our contemplative vocation was planted, or when the call was heard or confirmed. For one Sister, it was at the time of her First Holy Communion. For another, at the end of Mass when a man turned to her in the pew and said, “Always stay close to the Blessed Sacrament.” For others, it was in the quiet of Eucharistic adoration. For yet another:

I first encountered the Blessed Sacrament when I was an 11 year old Protestant attending public school. Our sixth grade class was studying “Religions,” and we went on a field trip to visit different churches. We visited a Mormon church, a Methodist church, a Jewish synagogue and, lastly, a Catholic Church.

When we walked into the Catholic church, I was immediately overwhelmed by a presence. I didn’t know what it was. I kept looking around the church at the statues, the sanctuary, the crucifix, and I kept thinking, “What IS it about this church?” The Presence was so strong.

Six years later, I found myself in the very same church, this time attending Mass with a friend. We walked into the church, and again I was met by that Presence. It beckoned me, it drew me.... Less than a year later, I was taking instruction in the Faith.

How has the Eucharist impacted my life? Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament IS my life.

THE EUCHARIST IS THE CORNERSTONE OF FRANCISCAN LIFE AND PRAYER. St. Francis took the Church’s ancient antiphon in honor of the Holy Cross and made it an act of profound Eucharistic faith: *We adore You, O most holy Lord Jesus Christ, HERE and in all the churches which are in the whole world.* From our first days in the monastery we learn to pray this prayer as Francis and Clare did – prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament, adoring Him who in the form of a little Bread shows us the pattern of Franciscan holiness: to be simple and humble and pure... and poor. This Eucharistic reverence has very practical implications, too. St. Francis swept churches; St. Clare sewed altar linens. Thus, as we keep our chapel beautiful, as we sew and mend and launder altar linens, our Eucharistic contemplation gains tangible expression.

THE EUCHARIST WIDENS THE HORIZONS OF CONTEMPLATION. Two of our Sisters were teachers; one was a missionary. But as God’s plan unfolded, they realized that one classroom, one mission station, was not enough. Another Sister shared: *It was in college that I first realized my inability to influence people just by speaking to them. It was Jesus in the Tabernacle who taught me that only God can change souls, and He does it silently. He remains humble in the Host and works great, hidden miracles.* It is through the Eucharist that we enter into the prayer of Him who lives forever to make intercession for us.

When I feel the weight of my own frailty, I know that on my own, I am too small and completely inadequate as an intercessor. But, I have an answer. Jesus is my answer. I can kneel quietly before Him, day after day placing each individual person and the troubles of the whole world into His hands. And I know all shall be well.

THE EUCHARIST MAKES OUR CONTEMPLATION INTO A HOLY COMMUNION: In a culture where everyone feels the need to be connected, it is in the Eucharist that we find the truest and

unending means of communion – communion with our Divine Spouse which leads to inner unity; communion with our Sisters, *a fraternal communion so intense*, remarks St. John Paul II, *that it could be described as “holy unity;”* communion with our families, so deep that it transcends any physical separation; communion with the universal Church and with the local Church of Belleville; communion with all who ask our prayers; communion with all the suffering ones of the world. The Eucharist enables us to be contemplatives who *hold the hurts of the world to the heart of their prayer*.

THE EUCHARIST MAKES CONTEMPLATION A MISSIONARY OUTREACH: Our Mother St. Clare is often depicted holding the Blessed Sacrament – sometimes in a gesture of strength, other times in an attitude of tenderness. It has been said that *a contemplative is someone who lives in the radiance of Christ’s Face*. Like our Seraphic Mother, we seek to live in the radiance of His Eucharistic Face. It is from the radiance of that hidden Face that we ourselves become radiant, and from our cloisters “hold up” the saving Light of His Presence. But Clarian contemplation impacted by the Eucharist is also tender, hidden and humble. He speaks to our hearts in the silence of faith, and we speak to His Heart – your names and needs, your hopes and hurts – in the silence of trust and adoration.

THE EUCHARIST IS FOOD FOR OUR JOURNEY TO THE MOUNT OF CONTEMPLATION. In the dark nights and dry days of the contemplative life, Jesus in the Eucharist Himself is the food for our journey. In trial and temptation, weakness and weariness, we discover that our inner poverty is enriched precisely when we cry out: I need Him! In our quest for contemplation, Jesus is the Bread of holy perseverance:

In life, it is important to eat in order to keep going. Holy Communion is even more important nourishment; it keeps my spiritual life healthy and is my source of strength each and every day.

THE EUCHARIST IS THE PATTERN OF OUR CONTEMPLATION. St. John Paul II declared: *In reality, Clare’s whole life was a “Eucharist” because from her cloister she raised up a continual “thanksgiving” to God in her prayer, praise, supplication, intercession, weeping, offering and sacrifice.* Gratitude, wonder, amazement and joy spring from the Poor Clare’s realization: *I live in the same house as our Lord! Anyone who has ever visited our monastery’s chapel can see what place the Holy Eucharist has in our Poor Clare life: our Eucharistic Lord is at the CENTER! He is the focus; everything comes from Him and leads back to Him.*

THE EUCHARIST GIVES CONTEMPLATION AN ETERNAL DIMENSION: The culmination of a Christian’s Baptismal consecration is the eternal contemplation of the Blessed Trinity in heaven – the Beatific Vision. Our Mother St. Clare told us *to be models and mirrors for those living in the world*. This is achieved by rooting our lives in that *pledge of future glory* which is the Eucharist. Our contemplative life is to be a reminder that our Eucharistic Lord calls *you* to contemplative union with Him in prayer and through the reception of Holy Communion. The Eucharist stamps Christian contemplation with enduring truth: God is near us; Christ is our Brother, our Savior, our Lord, our Friend, our eternal Life.

LET THE LAST WORD BE: “HE IS ALL!” The final thought on the impact of the Eucharist on our contemplative life comes from our beloved eldest Sister, who this year will celebrate the 70th anniversary of her entrance into the cloister:

For me, prayer is simple: I just go to the Tabernacle and kneel before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. When I look back in my life at the really big things, that’s what I have done, and it is what I still do. In those big things, when humanly you can do nothing and even in the smaller things, it is always the same – the Blessed Sacrament. I was that way even at home. We lived right across the street from the church, and when all the relatives came to visit (there were lots of them, and so much noise and talking), I would disappear and go over to the church. I’d just kneel there, and I was so happy. My brothers knew what I would do, but they were sworn to secrecy, and they were really good! They never told anyone where I was. I felt such security there with the Blessed Sacrament... That was probably the start of my vocation. When things feel beyond you, go to the Blessed Sacrament. The Blessed Sacrament is GOD – He’s there!

**St. Clare of Assisi,
ardent lover of the Blessed Sacrament,
help us to lead Eucharistic lives!**

**St. Clare of Assisi,
ardent lover of the Blessed Sacrament,
lead us, through the Eucharist,
to true contemplative prayer!**