

BASILICA S.CHIARA – ASSISI

PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS BEFORE THE CRUCIFIX OF SAN DAMIANO

**O Most High and glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me right faith,
certain hope,
perfect love
and deep humility.
O Lord, give me sense and discernment
in order to carry out your true and holy will.
Amen.**

This is a prayer that is born in a time of crisis, of darkness, both internal and external. These are the years in which God forms and transforms Francis. It is a tough experience of the desert and of faith, of darkness and of light. One does not arrive at the light of faith except by passing through darkness and by becoming aware of one's own interior shadows. *"It is you who light my lamp; the Lord, my God lights up my darkness"* (Psalms 18, 29).

Darkness

- a. Darkness does not exist, it is not measurable, only light can be measured. The darkness is nothing, it is the absence of light, the absence of the Word of God, absence of God and of communion with Him. It is the emptiness, the void. To experience darkness as the absence of God and suffer from the lack of Light.... is already a grace. It is not the cynics who suffer from the absence of God but the mystics.
- b. It is **Fear**, because you have no reference point, no friends who are close to you, it is loneliness. It is the fear of an enemy who ambushes you.
- c. It is **lack of direction**, not knowing and not being able to move. Not knowing where to go, not knowing what to do.
- d. It is **ambiguous love**, a disordered love which does not have clear priorities which Jesus summed up in this sentence: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and....you shall love your neighbour as yourself."* (Matt 22,37.39). A strange, disordered emotional attachment can distance God from our life, who passes then into second place.
- d. It is **not obeying anyone**. It is having only oneself as a reference point. To listen and to obey are almost the same thing (the same Latin roots). Obedience has a logic, a structure which facilitates trust and faith in God. It accustoms us to do not what we want, nor only that which we understand or feel like doing, but sometimes that which we do not wish to do, do not understand or do not feel like doing. Is all that God reveals to us immediately comprehensible? To believe is to seek a deeper meaning of things, and not to rest on a superficial level. Faith is nourished by listening to the Word of God and through reflection.
- f. **Sin is interior darkness, the absence of grace, the absence of love.**

Light

“Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path” (Psalms 118,105). God came to meet us, and he still does so today, with the light of his Word. It does not light up all of the path, but only the necessary for the steps we need to take today, so that we may learn to trust him, and stop pretending that we have everything under control and can dominate reality.

The light of God has become intense in Jesus, who said of himself: *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life”* (John 8,12). The lamp that lights up the world is the Lamb (Rev. 21,23), that is Christ crucified, the love of God for us right to the end. Beware the temptation of wanting to have less of it, because you risk remaining blind, of not seeing and not understanding the meaning of life and everything else (see John 9, 39-41).

“Lord, what do you want me to do?”

“Francis, go and rebuild my Church which as you see is falling into ruin”.

Francis, before this Crucifix, prayed and understood his vocation, that of giving witness to the Gospel and rebuilding the Church, the beautiful Spouse of Jesus Christ, loving her and taking responsibility for her by becoming an active part of her.

Clare remained for all of her life before the same Crucifix, in prayer and contemplation thus collaborating with the rebuilding of the church, desiring together with her sisters to be united to Jesus as He united Himself to us. She writes this contemplative observation in a letter to Agnes of Prague, which we can also make our own:

“¹⁹You see that for you He made himself an object of scorn, so you may follow his example, making yourself, for his love, contemptible in this world. ²⁰Admire, most noble Queen, your Spouse, the most handsome of men (Psalms 44,3), who became for your salvation the vilest of men, despised, stricken (Is. 53,3.4) and had his body repeatedly whipped (Matt. 27,26), dying finally amidst heart-rending sufferings on the cross. Meditate, contemplate, and yearn to imitate Him.

²¹If you suffer with Him, you will also reign with Him (cfr. Rm 8,17; 2Tim 2,12); if you weep with Him, you will also rejoice with Him, if you die with Him (2Tim 2,11) on the cross of suffering, you will possess with Him a heavenly dwelling in the splendour of the saints (Psalms 109,3), ²² and your name will be written in the Book of Life (Phill. 4,3; Rev. 14,22) and will be famous among men. ²³Thus you will possess for all eternity and forever in the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven in place of the passing worldly honours, and will share in eternal goods, not perishing ones, and you will live forever ” (2nd Letter to St. Agnes of Prague, 19-23).

It is as if Clare wished to transmit to Agnes a “photograph” of this icon which was so important in her life and that of St. Francis. It is almost as if she wished to say: “This is the Christ we contemplated, alive because he is risen, but with the signs of His passion over all of his body”, an icon that translates the words of the Revelation of St. John, the disciple that contemplated Jesus on the cross and then saw him alive: “I saw....a Lamb, standing, as if it had been slaughtered” (Rev. 5,6).

This image which Francis and Clare contemplated is now before your eyes...

... are you aware that He is looking at you?

... do you notice that it is He who is suffering and not you? Or at least He with you and you with Him?

... do you notice that He is alive, but the signs of his passion of love, of his passionate love for you, remain?

... do you not feel that He wants to tell you something for your life, for the present moment that you are living?

... are you asking Him what He wants from you, or for you?

You can recite the prayer that Francis made before this Crucifix, **O Most High and glorious God ...** asking for:

- **right faith**, that is complete, without reductions, i.e. that transmitted by the Church and lived by many simple men and women and by the saints; faith-trust in God the Father who loves us.

- **certain hope**, based on the faith and the promises of Jesus in the Gospel: *"and this is what he has promised us: eternal life"* (1 Jn. 2,25).

- **perfect love**, that love, gift of the Holy Spirit, which is unique but which is incarnated in a multitude of ways, but which reaches perfection only if it resembles the love that the Lord Jesus has for us: *"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another"* (Jn. 13,34).

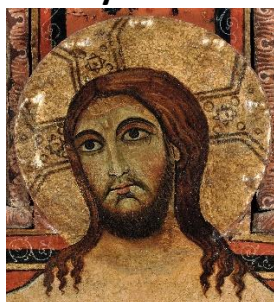
- **deep humility**, which is God's style and the truth in respect of humanity. Francis wanted to find his true self, stripping himself of appearances, coming off false pedestals, renouncing even the minimum of appearance of power and riches. Humility is liberty and a sign of intelligence.

- **sense**, intelligence to be able to understand the sense, the meaning of things. God is pleased if we use our intelligence.

- **discernment**: not everything is true, and not everything is good. Christians who are adult in the faith are *"those whose faculties have been trained to distinguish good from evil"* (Heb. 5,14). St. Paul also reminds us of this: *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds , so that you may discern what is the will of God, - what is good and acceptable and perfect"* (Rom 12,2).

- **to carry out your true and holy will**: when Francis stopped doing what he alone wanted and began to seek out and do the will of God, then he found the right way. To know so that one may love, to know that one is loved by God, in order to love. The knowledge which does not bring us to love is sterile. Science which does not discover the meaning of life as love, falls short of its purpose.

Lord, what do you want me to do?



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