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LESSONS FROM THE LIFE [AND DEATH] OF FRANCIS
AND CLARE: THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST
IN FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

Saints Francis and Clare sought to imitate Christ in so far as possible by renouncing all things for His sake, by entering fully into his poverty and suffering. This meant that they were deeply devoted to Christ's Incarnation and Crucifixion as the most explicit signs of Christ's self-denial, those two saving events at which the self-abandoning love of God was most clearly demonstrated. While the devotion of Francis and Clare to Christ's Crib and Cross is well known, the devotion that these two saints had to the Resurrection has not always been expressed adequately within the context of Franciscan spirituality. Perhaps is easier to see Christ's great kenotic love in His Incarnation and Crucifixion than it is in His Resurrection. Yet, Francis and Clare realized that the imitation of Christ, following in his footsteps requires that one unite with Christ in his resurrection. They realized that the Franciscan desire to be like Christ is only accomplished when one becomes like Christ as he is now. Thus, we must strive to recognize that the same love that led Christ to become like us in our humanity, allows us to become like Him in His divinity.

The connection between the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ appears at the very beginning of the Gospel lives of Francis and Clare through their connection to the Cross of San Damiano. This Byzantine image of the crucified and resurrected Christ served as the means by which Francis

¹ TOR.

learned God's will for him to go and rebuild "my house"². It is this same image that hung in the founding monastery of Clare and her sisters for the last forty years of Clare's life.

Francis also connects the Passion of Christ to His Resurrection in the words that Francis prays before the Cross of San Damiano. Even though Christ is on the Cross, Francis addresses Him as "Most High" and "glorious", as He is in the Resurrection. At the very moment of Christ's passion and death, Francis is already looking toward Easter.

Furthermore, the connection of the image of the Cross with the reality of the Resurrection is also present in Saint Francis' devotion to the *Tau*, which Francis and Clare saw as "a symbol of life and a special mark of health"³. As Celano asserts, Francis "favored the sign of the Tau above all others. With it he signed letters he sent and painted it on the walls of cells everywhere"⁴.

Francis and Clare, thus, had a deep devotion to the Resurrection of Christ. They made Easter and the Easter Octave a time free from the obligation for fasting⁵. Thomas of Celano described the devotion of the brothers to Easter in the practice of preparing the Easter table "more carefully than usual, with white cloths and glassware"⁶.

As for Clare, her devotion to the resurrected Christ included the practice of drinking wine only on Sundays, the day of the Risen Christ, and requiring all the sisters to receive the Eucharist on Easter⁷. Moreover, Cardinal Hugolino wrote of "that glorious joy, with which I discussed the Body of Christ with you [Clare] while celebrating Easter with you and the other servants of Christ..."⁸. Sister Angeluccia described:

² L3C 13. All Francis citations come from *Francis of Assisi: The Early Documents*, eds. Regis J. Armstrong, Wayne J. Hellman and William Short, 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1999-2001). All Clare citations come from *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, trans. and ed. Regis J. Armstrong (New York: Paulist Press, 1988). All scripture citations from New American Bible. Italics in original unless otherwise stated.

³ A. Schebler cited in Octavian Schmucki, O.F.M. Cap., "The Passion of Christ in the Life of St. Francis of Assisi: A Comparative Study of the Sources in the Light of Devotion to the Passion Practiced in His Time," *Greyfriars Review*, trans. Ignatius McCormick, O.F.M. Cap., vol. 4, supplement (1990): 14.

⁴ 3C 3.

⁵ LR 3:7, 3LAg 36.

⁶ 2C 61.

⁷ LegCl 18, RCl 3:14.

⁸ LHug 2.

when holy mother Lady Clare heard the *Vidi Aquam* being sung after Easter, she was so overjoyed and kept it in her mind. After eating and after Compline she had the blessed water given to her and her sisters and would say to the sisters, «My sisters and daughters, you must always remember and recall this blessed water that came from the right side of our Lord Jesus Christ as He hung upon the cross»⁹.

Francis, Clare and the Resurrection in their Christology

Francis' and Clare's understanding of the Cross as reflective of the reality of the Resurrection came out of their understanding of Jesus Christ, that the Passion was intrinsically connected to the Resurrection. As Leonard Lehmann noted, for Francis, "The Passion is the work of salvation which includes Christ's death, Resurrection, Ascension and second coming"¹⁰.

We see in Francis' *Office of the Passion*, which was "recited with a similar affection" by both Francis and Clare, a profound expression of this Passion/Resurrection Christology¹¹. The *Office of the Passion* includes fifteen psalms prayed throughout the year in a similar way to the daily Liturgy of the Hours; seven of these psalms have some connection to the Resurrection.

For example, Psalm III is prayed throughout the year at Prime, the hour of the rising sun – thus, symbolizing the resurrection of Christ [the risen Son] as a victory over darkness¹². Moreover, verse six of the psalm "*They prepared a trap for my feet/and bowed down my soul*" containing an image of the Passion is paired with verse nine "*Arise, my glory, arise psalter and harp, /I will arise at dawn*" containing an image of the Resurrection¹³.

Psalm VI links the Passion and the Resurrection using the theology of St. John¹⁴. In this psalm, the Passion, "*They led me to the dust of death/and*

⁹ Proc 14:8. The *Vidi aquam* was sung during the Asperges/Sprinkling Rite of the Tridentine Liturgy during Easter and includes the following verses: "I saw water coming forth from the right side of the temple, alleluia./All who came to the water were saved and they will say: Alleluia, Alleluia".

¹⁰ Leonard Lehmann, O.F.M. Cap., "Francis's 'Office of the Passion'," *Greyfriars Review*, trans. Paul Barrett, O.F.M. Cap., vol. 12, no. 2 (1998): 145.

¹¹ LegCl 30.

¹² Laurent Gallant, OFM and André Cirino, OFM, *The Geste of the Great King: Office of the Passion of Francis of Assisi* (St. Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, 2001), 245.

¹³ OtP 3:6, 9.

¹⁴ Gallant and Cirino 281. This psalm is prayed at None on weekdays of Ordinary time, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.