

Clare of Assisi

To Agnes of Prague (1)

1 To the esteemed and most holy virgin, the Lady Agnes, daughter of the most excellent and illustrious King of Bohemia,

2 Clare, an unworthy servant of Jesus Christ and useless handmaid of the Cloistered Ladies of the Monastery of San Damiano, her subject and servant in all things, presents herself totally with a special reverent prayer that she attain the glory of everlasting happiness.

3 As I hear of the fame of Your holy conduct and irreproachable life, which is known not only to me but to the entire world as well.

4 I greatly rejoice and exult in the Lord. I am not alone in rejoicing at such great news, but I am joined by all who serve and seek to serve Jesus Christ.

5 For, though You, more than others, could have enjoyed the magnificence and honour and dignity of the world, and could have been married to the illustrious Caesar with splendour befitting You and His Excellency,

6 You have rejected all these things and have chosen with Your whole heart and soul a life of holy poverty and destitution.

7 Thus You took a spouse of a more noble lineage, Who will keep Your virginity ever unspotted and unsullied, the Lord Jesus Christ.

8 When You have loved Him, You shall be chaste; when You have touched Him, You shall become pure; when You have accepted Him, You shall be a virgin.

9 Whose power is stronger, Whose generosity is more abundant, Whose appearance more beautiful, Whose love more tender, Whose courtesy more gracious.

10 In Whose embrace You are already caught up; Who has adorned Your breast with precious stones. And has placed priceless pearls in Your ears,

11 and has surrounded You with sparkling gems as though blossoms of springtime and placed on Your head a golden crown as a sign to all of Your holiness.

12 Therefore, most beloved sister, or should I say, Lady worthy of great respect: because You are the spouse and the mother and the sister of my Lord Jesus Christ,

13 and have been adorned resplendently with the sign of inviolable virginity and most holy poverty: Be strengthened in the holy service which You have undertaken out of an ardent desire for the Poor Crucified,

14 Who for the sake of all of us took upon Himself the Passion of the Cross and delivered us from the power of the Prince of Darkness to whom we were enslaved because of the disobedience of our first parents, and so reconciled us to God the Father.

15 O blessed poverty, who bestows eternal riches on those who love and embrace her!

16 O holy poverty, to those who possess and desire you God promises the kingdom of heaven and offers, indeed, eternal glory and blessed life!

17 O God-centred poverty, whom the Lord Jesus Christ Who ruled and now rules heaven and earth Who spoke and things were made, condescended to embrace before all else!

18 The foxes have dens, He says, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man, Christ, has nowhere to lay His head, but bowing His head gave up His spirit.

19 If so great and good a Lord, then, on coming into the Virgin's womb, chose to appear despised, needy, and poor in this world,

20 so that people who were in utter poverty and want and in absolute need of heavenly nourishment might become rich in Him by possessing the kingdom of heaven,

21 then rejoice and be glad! Be filled with a remarkable happiness and a spiritual joy!

22 Contempt of the world has pleased You more than [its] honours, poverty more than earthly riches,

23 Contempt of the world has pleased You more than [its] honours, poverty more than earthly riches,

23 and You have sought to store up greater treasures in heaven rather than on earth, where rust does not consume nor moth destroy nor thieves break in and steal.

24 Your reward, then, is very great in heaven! And You have truly merited to be called a sister, spouse, and mother of the Son of the

Father of the Most High and of the glorious Virgin.

25 You know, I am sure, that the kingdom of heaven is promised and given by the Lord only to the poor: for he who loves temporal things loses the fruit of love.

26 Such a person cannot serve God and Mammon, for either the one is loved and the other is hated, or the one is served and the other despised.

27 You also know that one who is clothed cannot fight with another who is naked, because he is more quickly thrown who gives his adversary a chance to get hold of him; and that one who lives in the glory of earth cannot rule with Christ in heaven.

28 Again, you know that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

29 Therefore, you have cast aside Your garments, that is, earthly riches, so that You might not be overcome by the one fighting against You, and that You might enter the kingdom of heaven through the straight path and narrow gate.

30 What a great laudable exchange: to leave the things of time for those of eternity, to choose the things of heaven for the goods of earth, to receive the hundred-fold in place of one, and to possess a blessed and eternal life.

31 Because of this I have resolved, as best I can, to beg Your Excellency and Your holiness by my humble prayers in the mercy of Christ, to be strengthened in His holy service,

32 and to progress from good to better, from virtue to virtue, so that He Whom You serve with the total desire of Your soul may bestow on You the reward for which You long.

33 I also beg You in the Lord, as much as I can, to include in Your holy prayers me, Your servant, though unworthy, and the other sisters with me in the monastery, who are all devoted to You,

34 so that by their help we may merit the mercy of Jesus Christ, and together with You may merit to enjoy the everlasting vision.

35 Farewell in the Lord. And pray for me.

To Agnes of Prague (2)

1 To the daughter of the King of kings, handmaid of the Lord of lords, most worthy spouse of Jesus Christ and therefore, very distinguished queen, the Lady Agnes,

2 Clare, useless and unworthy handmaid of the Poor Ladies, sends her greetings and the prayer that Agnes may always live in the utmost poverty.

3 I thank the one who liberally bestows grace, from whom every best and perfect gift is believed to come, because he has adorned you with such a good reputation founded upon your virtues and has made you shine with the honours of so much perfection.

4 He did this so that once you have been made a diligent imitator of the Father who is perfect, you may deserve to be made perfect, so that his eyes may not see anything imperfect in you.

5 This is that perfection with which the King will unite you to himself in marriage in heaven's bridal chamber where he sits in glory upon his starry throne,

6 because despising the heights of an earthly kingdom and the less than worthy offers of an imperial marriage,

7 you have been made an imitator of the holiest poverty, and in a spirit of great humility and the most ardent charity, you have clung to the footsteps of him with whom you have been worthy to be united in marriage.

8 Moreover, since I know that you are laden with virtues, I shall refrain from saying too much as I do not wish to laden you with superfluous words,

9 even though to you no word seems superfluous of those that could be the source of some consolation for you.

10 But because one thing is necessary, I invoke this one thing and advise you, by the love of him to whom you have offered yourself as a holy and pleasing sacrifice,

11 to be mindful, like a second Rachel, of your founding purpose always seeing your beginning. What you hold, may you continue to hold, what you do, may you keep doing and not stop,

12 but with swift pace, nible step, and feet that do not stumble so that even your walking does not raise any dust,

13 may you go forward tranquilly, joyfully, briskly, and cautiously along the path of happiness,

14 trusting in no one and agreeing with no one insofar as he might want to dissuade you from pursuing your founding purpose or

might place a stumbling block in your way, preventing you, in that perfection with which the Spirit of the Lord has called you, from fulfilling your vows to the Most High.

15 No concerning this, so that you may walk more tranquilly along the way of the Lord's commands, follow the advice of our venerable father, our Brother Elias, minister general.

16 Prefer his advice to the advice of others and consider it more precious to you than any gift.

17 Indeed, if someone tells you something else or suggests anything to you that may hinder your perfection and that seems contrary to your divine vocation, even though you must respect him, still, do not follow his advice;

18 instead, poor virgin, embrace the Poor Christ.

19 Now that you have made yourself contemptible in this world for his sake, look upon and follow the one who made himself contemptible for your sake.

20 Gaze upon, examine, contemplate, most noble queen, desiring to follow your spouse, who is more beautiful than the sons of humankind, and who for your salvation became the vilest of men, despised, struck, and flogged repeatedly over his entire body, dying while suffering the excruciating torments of the cross.

21 If you suffer with him, with him you will reign, grieving with him, with him you will rejoice, dying with him on the cross of tribulation, with him you will possess mansions in heaven among the splendours of the saints,

22 and your name will be recorded in the Book of Life and will bring you glory among men and women.

23 This is why you may forever in eternity share the glory of the heavenly kingdom rather than what is earthly and transitory, eternal goods instead of those that perish, and why you will live forever and ever.

24 Farewell, dearest sister and lady, for the sake of the Lord, your spouse;

25 and constantly remember me, as well as my sisters-for we rejoice in the good things of the Lord that he is accomplishing in you through his grace-in your devout prayers to the Lord.

Also, as often as possible, please remind your sisters to pray for us.

To Agnes of Prague (3)

1 To Agnes, most venerable lady and sister in Christ, deserving of love before all other mortals, blood-sister of the illustrious king of Bohemia, but now sister and spouse of the most high King of the heavens,

2 To Agnes, most venerable lady and sister in Christ, deserving of love before all other mortals, blood-sister of the illustrious king of Bohemia, but now sister and spouse of the most high King of the heavens,

3 I am filled with such great joy about your well-being, your happiness, and your favourable successes through which, I understand, you are thriving on the journey you have begun to obtain the reward of heaven;

4 and I breathe again in the Lord with elation equal to my knowledge and belief that you are supplying in wonderful ways what is lacking both in me and in the other sisters who are following in the footsteps of the poor and humble Jesus Christ.

5 I am indeed able to rejoice, and there is no one who could separate me from such great joy,

6 since I already possess what under heaven I have yearned for, and I see that you, supported by some kind of wonderful claim on the wisdom that comes from God's own mouth,

7 dare formidably and extraordinarily undermining the stratagems of the cunning enemy, the pride that destroys human nature, and the vanity that beguiles human hearts, where it is purchased by the One by whom all things were made from nothing.

8 And, to use as my own the words of the apostle himself, I consider you someone who is God's own helper and who supports the drooping limbs of his ineffable body.

9 Who, then, would tell me not to rejoice about such great and marvellous joys?

10 That is why you, too, dearest, must always rejoice in the Lord,

11 and not let bitterness and confusion envelop you, O Lady most beloved in Christ, joy of the angels, and crown of your sisters.

12 Place your mind in the mirror of eternity; Place your soul in the splendour of glory;

13 Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance; And, through contemplation, transform your entire being into the image of the Divine One himself,

14 So that you, yourself, may also experience what his friends experience when they taste the hidden sweetness that God alone has kept from the beginning

15 And completely ignoring all those who in this deceitful and turbulent world ensnare their blind lovers, you might totally love him who gave himself totally out of love for you,

16 whose beauty the sun and moon admire, and whose rewards, in both their preciousness and magnitude, are without end.

17 I am speaking about the Son of the Most High, to whom the Virgin gave birth and, after whose birth, she remained a virgin.

18 May you cling to his most sweet Mother, who gave birth to the kind of Son whom the heavens could not contain,

19 and yet, she carried him in the tiny enclosure of her sacred womb, and held him on her young girl's lap.

20 Who would not abhor the treachery of the enemy of humanity who, by means of the pride that results from fleeting and false glories, compels that which is greater than heaven to return to nothingness?

21 See, it is already clear that the soul of a faithful person, the most worthy of God's creations through the grace of God, is greater than heaven,

22 since the heavens and the rest of creation together cannot contain their Creator and only the soul of a faithful person is his dwelling place and throne and this is possible only through the charity that the wicked lack.

23 For the Truth says: The one who loves me, will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and we shall come to him and make our dwelling place with him.

24 So, just as the glorious Virgin of virgins carried him physically,

25 so, you too, following in her footsteps especially those of humility and poverty, can without any doubt, always carry him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body,

26 containing him by whom both you and all things are contained, and possessing that which, even when compared with the other transitory possessions of this world, you will possess more securely.

27 Regarding this, some kings and queens of this world are deceived; even though in their pride they have climbed all the way up to the sky, and their heads have touched the clouds,

28 in the end they are destroyed like a pile of dung.

29 Now, I thought that I should respond to your charity about the things that you have asked me to clarify for you;

30 namely, what were the feasts-and I imagine, that you have perhaps figured this out to some extent-that our most glorious father, Saint Francis, urged us to celebrate in a special way with different kinds of foods.

31 Indeed, your prudence knows that, with the exception of the weak and the sick, for whom he advised and authorized to use every possible discretion with respect to any foods whatsoever,

32 none of us who are healthy and strong ought to eat anything other than Lenten fare, on both ordinary days and feast days,

33 fasting every day except on Sundays and on the Lord's Nativity, when we ought to eat twice a day.

34 And, on Thursdays in Ordinary Time, fasting should reflect the personal decision of each sister, so that whoever might not wish to fast would not be obligated to do so.

35 All the same, those of us who are healthy fast every day except Sundays and Christmas.

36 Certainly, during the entire Easter week, as Blessed Francis states in what he has written, and on the feasts of holy Mary and the holy apostles, we are also not obliged to fast, unless these feasts should fall on a Friday;

37 and, as has already been said, we who are healthy and strong always eat Lenten fare.

38 But because neither is our flesh the flesh of bronze, nor our strength the strength of stone,

39 but instead, we are frail and prone to every bodily weakness,

40 I am asking and begging in the Lord that you be restrained wisely, dearest one, and discreetly from the indiscreet and impossibly severe fasting that I know you have imposed upon yourself,

41 so that living, you might profess the Lord, and might return to the Lord your reasonable worship and your sacrifice always seasoned with salt.

42 Stay well, always in the Lord, just as I very much desire to stay well, and be sure to remember both me and my sisters in your holy prayers.

To Agnes of Prague (4)

- 1 To the other half of her soul and repository of the special love of her deepest heart, illustrious queen, spouse of the Lamb of the eternal King, the Lady Agnes, her own dearest mother and, among all the others, her special daughter,
- 2 Clare, unworthy servant of Christ and useless handmaid of his handmaids who live in the Monastery of San Damiano in Assisi,
- 3 sends greetings and her prayer that Agnes, together with the other most holy virgins, will sing a new song before the throne of God and of the Lamb, and will follow the Lamb wherever he goes.
- 4 O mother and daughter, spouse of the King and all ages, even if I have not written to you as frequently as both your soul and mine would have desired and longed for,
- 5 do not for a moment wonder or believe in any way that the fire of my love for you burns any less sweetly in the deepest heart of your mother.
- 6 The truth is that a shortage of messengers and the obvious perils of travel have hindered me.
- 7 But now, as I write to your love, I rejoice and exult for you in the joy of the Spirit, spouse of Christ,
- 8 because like that other most holy virgin, Saint Agnes, you have been in an astonishing way espoused to the immaculate Lamb, who, having assumed responsibility for all the vanities of this world, takes away the sins of the world.
- 9 Happy, indeed, is the one permitted to share in this sacred banquet so as to be joined with all the feelings of her heart to him
- 10 Whose beauty all the blessed hosts of the heavens unceasingly admire,
- 11 Whose affection moves, whose contemplation invigorates,
- 12 Whose generosity fills, whose sweetness replenishes, whose remembrance pleasantly brings light,
- 13 Whose fragrance will revive the dead, and whose glorious vision will bless all the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem,
- 14 Because the vision of him is the splendour of everlasting glory, the radiance of everlasting light, and a mirror without tarnish.
- 15 Look into this mirror every day, O queen, spouse of Jesus Christ, and continually examine your face in it,
- 16 so that in this way you may adorn yourself completely, inwardly and outwardly, clothed and covered in multicoloured apparel,
- 17 adorned in the same manner with flowers and garments made of all the virtues as is proper, dearest daughter and spouse of the most high King.
- 18 Moreover, in this mirror shine blessed poverty, holy humility, and charity beyond words, as you will be able, with God's grace, to contemplate throughout the entire mirror.
- 19 Look closely, I say, to the beginning of the life of this admired one, indeed at the poverty of him who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger.
- 20 O marvellous humility! O astonishing poverty!
- 21 The King of the angels, the Lord of heaven and earth is laid to rest in a manger!
- 22 Consider also the midst of his life, his humility, or at least his blessed poverty, the countless hardships, and the punishments that he endured for the redemption of the human race.
- 23 Indeed, ponder the final days of this mirrored one, contemplate the ineffable love with which he was willing to suffer on the tree of the cross and to die there a kind of death that is more shameful than any other.
- 24 That mirror suspended upon the wood of the cross from there kept urging those passing by of what must be considered, saying:
- 25 O all you who pass by this way, look and see if there is any suffering like my suffering.
- 26 In response let us with one voice and in one spirit answer him who is crying out and lamenting: I will remember this over and over and my soul will sink within me.
- 27 Therefore, seeing this, O queen of the heavenly King, you must burn ever more strongly with the fervour of charity!
- 28 Furthermore, as you contemplate his indescribable delights, riches, and everlasting honours,
- 29 and heaving a sigh because of your heart's immeasurable desire and love may you exclaim:
- 30 Draw me after you, Heavenly Spouse, we shall run in the fragrance of your perfumes!

31 I shall run and not grow weary until you bring me into the wine cellar,

32 until your left hand is under my head and your right arm blissfully embraces me; and you kiss me with the most blissful kiss of your mouth.

33 As you are placed in this contemplation, may you remember your poor little mother,

34 knowing that I have inseparably inscribed the happy memory of you on the tablets of my heart, for I regard you as dearer than all others.

35 Why say more? Let my physical tongue be silent, as it is said, and let the tongue of the Spirit speak.

36 O blessed daughter, since in no way at all could my bodily tongue express more fully the love that I have for you, that which I have written is certainly inadequate.

37 I beg you to receive these words with kindness and devotion, seeing in them at least the motherly affection, by which every day I am stirred by the fire of love for you and your daughters; please ask them to pray for me and my daughters in Christ.

38 Indeed, inasmuch as they are able, my own daughters, and especially the most prudent virgin, Agnes, our sister, beg you and your daughters to pray for them in the Lord.

39 Farewell, dearest daughter, together with your own daughters, until we meet at the throne of glory of the great God, and pray for us.

40 I must now commend to your charity, as fully as possible, our dearest bearers of this letter, Brother Amato, beloved by God and human beings, and Brother Bonaugura. Amen.

To Ermentrude

1 To Ermentrude, dearest sister, Clare of Assisi, humble handmaid of Jesus Christ, greetings and peace.

2 I know that you, o dearest sister, have fled the filth of the world, with the help of God's grace;

3 for which I rejoice and give thanks with you and again rejoice that you tread the paths of virtue strenuously with your daughters.

4 Be faithful, dearest, to him to whom you are promised until death, and you will be crowned by him with the laurel of life.

5 This labour of ours is brief, but the reward is eternal; let the noises of the fleeting world and its shadow not confound you;

6 let the empty spectres of the deceiving world not drive you mad; shut your ears to the whispers of hell and, strong, break down its attempts against you;

7 willingly bear adverse evils and let provident goods not puff you up; for the one requires faith, the other demands it;

8 what you promised God, faithfully render, and he will repay you.

9 O dearest, look on heaven that invites us, and bear the cross and follow Christ who preceded us;

10 indeed, after various and many tribulations we shall enter through him into his glory.

11 Love with your whole heart God and Jesus, his son, crucified for our sins, and never let his memory escape your mind;

12 make yourself mediate continually on the mysteries of the cross and the anguish of the mother standing beneath the cross.

13 Pray and be always vigilant.

14 And the work that you began well, finish and the ministry you assumed, fulfil in holy poverty and sincere humility.

15 Do not fear, daughter, God is faithful in all his words and holy in all his works, he will pour out his blessing on you and your daughters;

16 and he will be your helper and your best consoler; he is our redeemer and our eternal reward.

17 Let us pray God for each other, for in bearing each other's burden of charity we shall fulfil the law of Christ. Amen.

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