

Foundation - Clara (Theresia)

When I said "yes" to doing the reflection for this date - I had no notion what would happen. But as I lived day to day, FOUNDATION became how I saw life. Many instances meant foundation. I will share some of those.

Foundation is going to the beginning. Going to the center. It is meditation. Going to the stillness. Being there. Being Quiet. Silent... Being at the still point...

T.S. Eliot wrote:

"Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
Where past and future are gathered...
Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance."

Maybe our experience of this still point of foundation is story. I had a lovely foundation experience with Sisters Virginia Ruth, Julie and Kenneth (oldest members of our province) after the reflection given by Sister Glenna (youngest member of our province) on the feast of St. Clare of Assisi (13th c. Saint). Glenna asked us to remember a story about St. Clare. When I went to St. Patrick's we spent a half hour talking about Clare, her prayer and the mystical life. Virginia thought about St. Clare's community in Assisi and wondered if each of the sisters was a mystic. I thought how this was a beautiful wondering. We went on and talked about our community and its experience of the prayer life and how our living together brings forth a mystic life. For me this was an experience of time and foundation - from Glenna back to St. Clare, forward to our Sisters at St. Patrick's.

For us, we want the mind of Clara Pfaender and the mind she brought to her Foundation, to be our mind so that the Spirit - the charism of our congregation - can be known by us, practiced by us, released in our lives for the good of the church and the good of our world.

Georgene gave us this foundation in her reflection on Oct. 5 - she said Clara remained true to her vocation - her goal to become holy. The virtues of this holiness were given to us in the reading from Colossians today. And as the plaque on the last of Clara's dwellings states: "We enter an everlasting house that we have built with our own hands." This is the strong foundation Mother Clara gives us. We build an everlasting house with our own hands...our hearts...our lives...our prayer...our relationships...our service...our times of contemplation...our days of suffering. We build from the foundation given to us by Mother Clara.

I loved Father Tony's enthusiasm when the commission was meeting here. He brought to us the call for holiness of following our foundation from Mother Clara by his enthusiasm for the whole of the congregation.

Here is another inspiration. I got this from listening to public radio. The conversation was about differences in family and that some families allow for parents arguing in front of the children. The thought was given that this allows for possibilities in children - opens them to creativity. I thought of Clara (Theresia at this point in her life) and her parents. I wondered if there were discussions of religion between her Mother and Father when Clara was present and if that opened possibilities in her. We certainly know she had loads of possibilities that she created in her life.

And in a book by Dairmuid O'Murchu, the book is Ancestral Grace, he says that "Mothers pass on the crucial information that connects us with deep time." Again, I thought about Mother Clara, her mother (though she had her for only a short time in her life) and the deep connection with Catholicism. I thought about us and our Mother, Clara, and the connection with deep time.

This quotation from Pablo Neruda helped me again to realize the foundation that Mother Clare gives to us. "Our original guiding stars are struggle and hope. But there is no such thing as a lone struggle, no such thing as a lone hope. We are Mother Clara's daughters in struggle and hope.

I was at General Chapter 1991, when Father Donal O'Mahony, OFM.cap. Rhapsodized on the written part of our foundation, our constitution from Mother Clara. Father Donal loved her thoughts and her words. He was referring particularly to the final section of the Constitution reading, which was read this morning. Father Donal practically danced in exultation and made us dance in response in our hearts, our discussions. He took different sections that are familiar to us and just relished them. He suggested that the great theologian writers of Vatican II, like Rahner and Schillebeekx would pay us to use the simplicity of Mother Clara's integration of prayer and action. She is our mother!

The foundation of contemplation in action is the essential of our Charism. Here is a description of this essential from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Jack Shea describes this as a tension. Here is the quote from Bonhoeffer "has it (daily prayer) transported her for short moments into a spiritual ecstasy that vanishes when everyday life returns, or has daily prayer lodged the word of God so soberly and so deeply in her heart that it holds and strengthens her all day, impelling her to active love, to obedience, to good works? Only the day can decide." One wonders how the spirit of Clara got into the soul and words of Bonhoeffer.

The poignancy of this poem by Emily Dickinson reveals a truth about Mother Clara that we feel and know.

"Either the Darkness alters
Or something in the sight
Adjusts itself to Midnight
And Life steps almost straight."

Our heritage and foundation is every place! The MarySouthard calendar for this year has this Message for October 5. "The word listen and the word silent have the same letters in them." The foundational experience of Mother Clara got into Mary Southard for the quote on Oct. 5

And this had no particular connection when I heard it, except that I loved what was said. This was an interview with an Ojibway woman. She said that for the Ojibway water is not a resource. That struck me as odd. But then she said that water is the source of life, of life for the Ojibway". Then in the last week I read Sr. Bea's congregational JPIC newsletter. And this exact thought was given by our Sisters in Romania. Now I know why I made a connection. Mother Clara is our congregational source of life.

And throughout today, we can recall the light and salt of Mother Clara's person. And together in conversation, we remember the foundational words we each shared about her in our gathering time on Oct. 5. That was such a rich day of foundational experience. Let's share again!

Pace e Bene.

