

Visio Divinia

Each week in the Lenten season DaySpring staff members will share an icon that relates with the coming Sunday's Gospel reading. We offer these icons as invitation to meditation in personal devotional prayer and as preparation for Sunday's worship. Ultimately, the hope is that our lives are transformed in the way of Christ by intimate encounter with God through Christ.

St. Clare of Assisi, who spent a life of prayer before the famous Cross of San Damiano (or St. Francis Cross), teaches a four-phase rhythm of prayer with an icon: Gaze, Consider, Contemplate, Imitate. These steps guide a person toward transformation and intimate union with God

Gaze: Gazing calls for quiet attentiveness, simply being open to the presence of God without words. In the process of gazing, God awakens a hunger, a desire that yearns for more of the mystery of God. We suggest that each week, you either print the icon or find a way to clear your screen of other clutter to allow your focus to remain on the image. A daily practice of doing this would be rich. Begin by simply taking it in, resting in the image, let God speak to your heart.

Consider: In the process of gazing one must center on the one essential thing. As they say, you are trusting the art to be a way God meets you in prayer even if you don't understand at first how that may be possible. As your mind is quieted, you will find yourself drawn to one aspect of the image – a hand, a gesture, a detail perhaps. To Consider is to maintain single mindedness, a clear and straight-forward focus. This focused attention is a means of prayer. Let God draw you in and draw you toward his love through the gift of focus.

Contemplate: Contemplative prayer is becoming aware of the one who is contemplating us. It is not what I do, or what I do to God. It is what God does to me through an invitation to intimacy and union. We come to see how God's focused loving attention is on us just as, and far exceeding, the focused attention we give to God. From a contemplative spirit, God's spirit may draw out confession, or praise, or petition. Let the Spirit guide your prayer, or dwell with you in the silence.

Imitate: To imitate does not mean to mimic the behavior or another. We become the image of God on whom we gaze. Gaze upon, Consider, and contemplate Christ incarnate and crucified in and through the icon. This leads to transformation. What God has wanted me to be from all eternity, who I am in my inmost self, is imaged in God's son hanging on the cross. Even when the image is not literally a cross, we still see Jesus crucified and resurrected before us. Imitation is Christ coming alive in my life.

We offer these icons as guides and invitations to prayer and as preparation for Sunday's worship. As we do, we pray for you.

May the words of our mouths, the meditations of our hearts, and the images before our eyes guide our steps on the journey to Christ's cross.