



# Seeking the Face of God with a Praying Heart

Reflections on *Vultum Dei  
Quaerere* and *Cor Orans*

## The Experience of Federation

By Mother M. Teresita, P.C.C.

It is a privilege and joy to participate in this series of articles on *Vultum Dei Quaerere* and *Cor Orans* offered by the INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE. After the initial response by Rev. Thomas Nelson, O.PRAEM., we were delighted to read the presentations by Mother John Mary and Sister Gabriela, expressing some of the very points we would have wanted to share. So we were grateful to receive this invitation to communicate our own experience within the Poor Clare Federation of Mary Immaculate. Since I always enjoy reading personal sharings, I thought I would go back to that as a starting place.

My first introduction to the cloistered contemplative life was gleaned from the autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, which my grandmother gave me as a confirmation gift since my middle name in Baptism was Thérèse. I was captivated by her desire to be a missionary to the whole world from her cloistered life at the heart of the Church. Unlike her, I had no thought of trying to enter before I was fifteen, but was delighted to discover in our high school library, the book *A Right to be Merry* by then Sister M. Francis.

Recognizing the expression of all my desires in our Clarian Franciscan ideal, I did apply to enter the Roswell, New Mexico, Poor Clare Colettine monastery soon after high school. I was still a postulant when I had my first contact with federation from the visitation from the Federal abbess, Mother M. Francis of our Cleveland monastery, a beautiful experience of our sisterhood and shared ideal. I was also one of the postulants mentioned in the next book by Mother



M. Francis, the sequel to *A Right to be Merry*, titled *Strange Gods Before Me*.

It was that book which included the story of the beginning of Federation and the initial dismay of the community when the Franciscan Friar deputed by the Order brought this proposal from Rome. Then as now, the deciding factor was that “Rome wants it.” That principle has continued to guide us throughout the years as we experienced many times the benefits of Federation. Mother had written in *A Right to be Merry* that she had had her first and last train ride coming to Roswell, only to discover herself on a train to Cleveland

for the initial meeting of the federation. When I entered, I thought I had had my first and last plane ride, but was blessed to accompany Mother M. Francis on her visitations to each of our federated communities when she became federal abbess, as her federal secretary. It even brought the surprise of visiting two other communities who petitioned her to make a stop-over visit to their communities, one to a Passionist community and another to a Dominican community, when she was able to encourage them in their efforts of renewal.

Those were also the years when we worked together as a federation on the revision of our Constitu-

tions which were approved by the Holy See by the good offices of Archbishop Paul Augustin Mayer, O.S.B., on March 5, 1981 who continued to be a great friend of our community and our federation. He received the *Pro Fidelitate et Virtute* award in 1988 from the INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE.



We likewise received a special blessing from Archbishop Mayer, for our journey to Chicago for the re-foundation of our Poor Clare life here in response to the invitation by His Eminence, Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I. It was at the temporary monastery before our permanent monastery was built that Michael Wick brought the *Pro Fidelitate et Virtute* award for that year, 2002, to present to Mother M. Francis. It is hard to believe that was now twenty years ago!

So it was not surprising to receive the questionnaire which was sent to all contemplative monasteries as Mother John Mary described in her article in the recent issue of *Religious Life*. We think that the Congregation was heartened by the full responses from the contemplative communities, as we likewise responded. When we received our Holy Father's document, *Vultum Dei Quaerere*, we studied it carefully and also used it for our weekly chapter reflections in the many inspiring articles. Our regular Federation assembly was scheduled before the publication of *Cor Orans*, but was able to reflect on the themes in *Vultum Dei Quaerere*. We were grateful, as Mother John Mary commented, when commentaries and conferences, some by Archbishop Carballo himself, began to clarify various points of *Cor Orans*.

As he made clear, the Congregation had no desire to interfere with the autonomy of the monasteries, but rather of ascertaining that all the communities were able to exercise that autonomy. We knew that some points of our Constitutions would need to be adjusted to be in accord with the newly mandated length of time for the stages of formation as well as the addition of the period for aspirancy. When we inquired of the Congregation, they suggested that we begin with the process needed to modify our federation statutes.

Because of the recent pandemic shutdown, our regularly scheduled federation chapter had to be post-

poned, so we made good use of the time to do a federation study of the statutes and to determine what adjustments would be needed. We hope to complete that in time to present to the federation chapter to be scheduled this coming spring. It is significant that we had in our present text, that Federation "is a vibrant agent to serve the proper autonomy of each monastery." Not just that

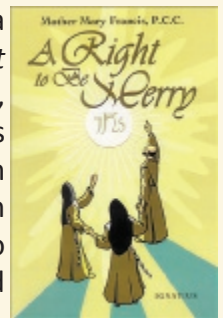
it should not interfere, but should serve each of its member monasteries. That has been our experience.

Mother M. Francis describes in the aforementioned book, the reunion at the first federation meeting at the conclusion of that historic train ride. She also wrote a new preface for the most recent printing of *A Right to Be Merry*, which has seen many editions since its first publication. She describes the plane ride which brought us back to Chicago for the re-foundation of our Poor Clare life here in the Holy Year 2000. It was very moving to disembark in the Chicago O'Hare airport to be greeted by many friends, both new and old, including representatives of the INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE. So, Mother concludes, "Poor Clare life resumed in Chicago, as we came full circle back whence we came, merry in the remembrance that we are all en-route to our final destination, the arms of God." Thanks be to God and to His Holy Church! ☩

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