

The Third Letter to Agnes of Prague

Translation by Frances Teresa Downing OSC

1. To the lady whom she most greatly respects in Christ; to the sister Agnes whom she loves more than any other mortal; to blood-sister of the illustrious King of Bohemia but now the sister and bride of the most high King of heaven: (cf. Mt 12:50; 2 Cor 11:2) 2. from Clare, the most lowly and unworthy handmaid of Christ and the slave of the Poor Ladies: the joy of salvation in the author of salvation (Hebr 2:10; cf. Phil 4:8-9) and whatever better thing can be desired.

3. I am the more filled with delight that you are safe and sound, happy, and achieving a good outcome to the race which you began so vigorously in order to gain the heavenly prize, (cf. Phil 3:14; 1 Cor 9,24) 4. and I breathe a greater sigh of exultation in the Lord the more I know and am convinced that you are wonderfully making up what is wanting, as much in me as in the other sisters, in following the footprints of the poor and humble Jesus Christ.

5. Truly I can rejoice, nor can anyone make be a stranger to such joy, 6. since that which, under heaven, I had desired, I am already holding. For I see that you, sustained by the wonderful privilege of wisdom from the mouth of God himself, have overthrown in a terrible and unexpected way, the shrewdness of an astute enemy, the pride that destroys human nature and the vanity which infatuates the human heart. (cf. Cant 3:4; Gn 3:1) 7. A treasure beyond compare is hidden in the field of the world and in human hearts, with it that by which everything was made from nothing (cf. Jo 1:3) has been bought. (cf. Mt 13:44; Lk 1:5) 1) You have embraced it by humility, the power of faith and the arms of poverty. 8. And, to use the very words of the Apostle himself, I judge you a co-worker of God himself (1 Cor 3,9; Rm 16:3) and one who holds up the members of his ineffable Body who are giving way.

9. Who could tell me not to rejoice at such wonderful joys? 10. Therefore, you too, my dearest, rejoice in the Lord always, (cf. Phil 4:4) 11. and, O Lady most beloved in Christ, joy of the angels and crown of the sisters (cf. Phil 4:1), may neither bitterness nor cloud overwhelm you.

12. Place your mind in the mirror of eternity;
place your soul in the splendour of glory, (cf. Hebr 1:3)

13. place your heart in the icon of the divine substance (cf. Hebr 1:3)
and transform your whole self through contemplation into an image of his
Godhead. (cf. 2 Cor 3:18)

14. Do this in order that you yourself may feel what his friends feel on
tasting the hidden sweetness, that which God himself has kept from the
beginning for those who love Him (cf. 1 Cor 2:9).

15. And completely passing by all those things with which an untrustworthy and perturbed world entangles its blind lovers, love totally the one who gave his whole self for your love, 16. the one at whose beauty sun and moon wonder, whose rewards, with their value and greatness, have no end. 17. I am speaking of the one who is Son of the Most High, whom the Virgin brought to birth and after whose birth remained a virgin. 18. Cleave to his most sweet Mother who begot such a Son as the heavens could not contain, (cf. 1 Reg 8:27; 2 Chr 2:5) 19. and yet received him within the narrow bounds of her holy womb and held him on her young girl's lap.

20. Who would not shrink from the ambush of humanity's enemy, who through the pride of a fleeting and deceptive glory, schemes to reduce to nothing that which is greater than the heavens? 21. It is quite obvious now that, by the grace of God, the faithful human soul, that most worthy creation, is far greater than the heavens; 22. while the heavens, while all other creatures, cannot contain the Creator, and only the faithful soul itself could be his mansion and throne, and this only through love - which the ungodly lack. 23. The saying of Truth itself: anyone who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him (Jo 14:21; 14:23).

24. So as the glorious Virgin of virgins materially, 25. so you will certainly always be able to carry him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body, by following in her footprints, particularly the prints of humility and poverty (cf. 1 Pet 2:21), 26. containing him by whom you and everything are contained, (Wis 1:7) possessing that which, in comparison with the other transitory possessions of this world, you will possess more completely. 27. In this indeed, certain kings and certain queens of the world are mistaken. 28. Even though their pride may have been allowed to climb right to the sky and their heads have touched the clouds, in the end they will be thrown out like manure (Jb 20:6-7).

29. Now about those things you asked me to open up for you: 30. which would obviously be those feasts which our most glorious Father Saint Francis urged us to celebrate especially, having some variation in the food. Although I would think you already know this, I am prompted to respond because of your love. 31. Apart from the weak and infirm for whom he counseled us and commanded us that in the matter of food we use our judgment as far as possible, in your prudence you should know that 32. we who are healthy and strong should only eat Lenten fare, whether on ferial or feast days, thus fasting every day 33. except Sundays and the Birth of the Lord. Then we should eat twice in the day. 34. On the Thursdays of ordinary time, each one may choose, so that she who clearly does not want to, is not obliged to fast. 35. However, we who are healthy fast every day except Sundays and Christmas. 36. For the whole of Easter, as the writing of Blessed Francis says; and on the feasts of holy Mary and of the holy Apostles we are not obliged to fast unless these feasts should fall on a Friday. 37. And, as has already been said, we who are healthy and who are strong shall always eat Lenten fare.

38. It is true that our flesh is not a flesh of bronze nor is our strength

the strength of stone (Jb 6:12). 39. On the contrary, we are fragile and prone to every bodily weakness, 40. and for that reason, hold yourself back wisely and discretely, I beg you, my dearest, from that indiscreet and impossible austerity of abstinence which I know you have undertaken. And in the Lord, I ask 41. that, living, you praise the Lord, that you pay back your reasonable homage to the Lord and that your sacrifice (Rnl 12:1) always be seasoned with salt.(Jb 6:6; Lv 2:13; Col 4:6)

42. May you always have strength in the Lord, as I very much hope I shall have strength and in your holy prayers recommend both me and my sisters.