



CONTEMPLATIVE
NETWORK

The Carceri

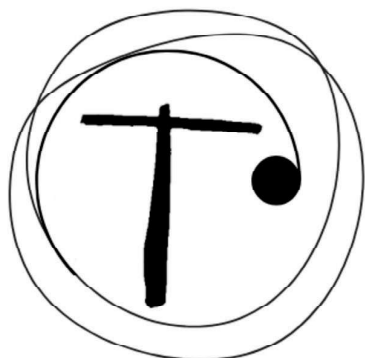
To deepen prayer life through contemplation



St Francis outside the Convent of San Damiano
"What is the sculptor saying about St Francis?"

Contemplation and Art

'Contemplation is not only a means to reach out to something beyond itself. It also actualises the hidden powers of the whole person in such a way that nothing beyond itself is necessary or desirable. This is because contemplation is, precisely, a departure from self-centred selfhood into a zone of self-forgetfulness brought about by absorption in the other. Like a child absorbed for some moments in the flight of a butterfly, so, for the contemplative, the real world temporarily ceases to exist. A person captivated by God's self-revelation briefly steps over the threshold into another world, where the priorities are different and a deep peace holds sway.' (Michael Casey, *The Longest Psalm*, Liturgical Press, 2023, p. 212)



CONTEMPLATIVE
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The **Contemplative Network** was formed in 1999 (it was originally named the 'Solitaries Network'). The object of the Network is to provide support for those tertiaries who felt called to a more contemplative way of following Francis. As followers of St Francis and St Clare we are called to be both contemplative and active, but the Third Order acknowledges that some will be more drawn to the contemplative way, and others to a more active way.

To support those called to a more contemplative way, the Network publishes a magazine, recently re-named 'THE CARCERI', twice a year. The CARCERI contains articles about contemplation, contributions by members of the Network, e.g. poetry and photographs, and book recommendations.

Members of the Network also receive an Intercession List and are asked to pray for five or six members every day of the month. This also gives members the opportunity to link up with those who live in their Area, if they wish.

Contemplative Network Resource Information - ONLINE CONTEMPLATIVE OFFICES

If you are a member of the Contemplative Network, you might be interested in joining our online contemplative offices taking place every day. The link for joining is distributed with the intercession list.

We gather in silence at:

7:30 am - 8:00 am The Morning Office - online room opens at 7.20 am pictures are displayed.

1.00 pm - 1.30 pm for the Mid-Day Office

6.00 pm - 6.30 pm for the Evening Office

8 pm - Compline starts - For Compline are videos and pictures kept open, and people lead the liturgy.

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The CARCERI and the Intercession List are produced by the Steering Group.

The members of the Steering Group are:

Paul Alexander, Chairman and Co-editor

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Tony Ross, Membership Secretary

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Carceri No 4 - Autumn 2024

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EDITORIAL

Reading the contributions we received for this edition of The Carceri's 'Contemplation and Art' two themes emerged which stand out as being of particular interest. The first is the number of poems which people sent in and the second is the intimate content of some of the articles. On reflection I'm beginning to see that poetry is a composition of pictures formed in the mind. Just as a picture benefits us by the time we spend gazing at it, so poetry does by the time we spend unravelling the pictures it forms in our mind's eye. This edition of 'Contemplation and Art' is a combination of paintings and words we can look at in front of us, and poetic pictures we form in our mind, both of which provide riches for the patient viewer.

The second theme involves the intimate content of some of the articles and poems. It is brave to reveal one's most dearly held thoughts and feelings. Some might say it is foolish but all great art does this whether it be in painting, poetry, prose or any of the other arts such as ballet, music and drama. It is the means by which we share our humanity so that we do not feel alone in the universe. This for me shone through strongly in the picture of Francis gazing on the Christ child and John's painting of the blind man. There is a similarity in comparing the bravery of revealing our dearly held thoughts and feelings with Francis following Christ and Christ being prepared to die on a cross. They are actions we should cherish with respect and admiration.

I hope the contents of this edition of The Carceri enrich your contemplative life and lead you to renewed energy in helping to create a Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Paul Alexander TSSF

Chairperson of the Contemplative Network Steering Group

THE SEWIN

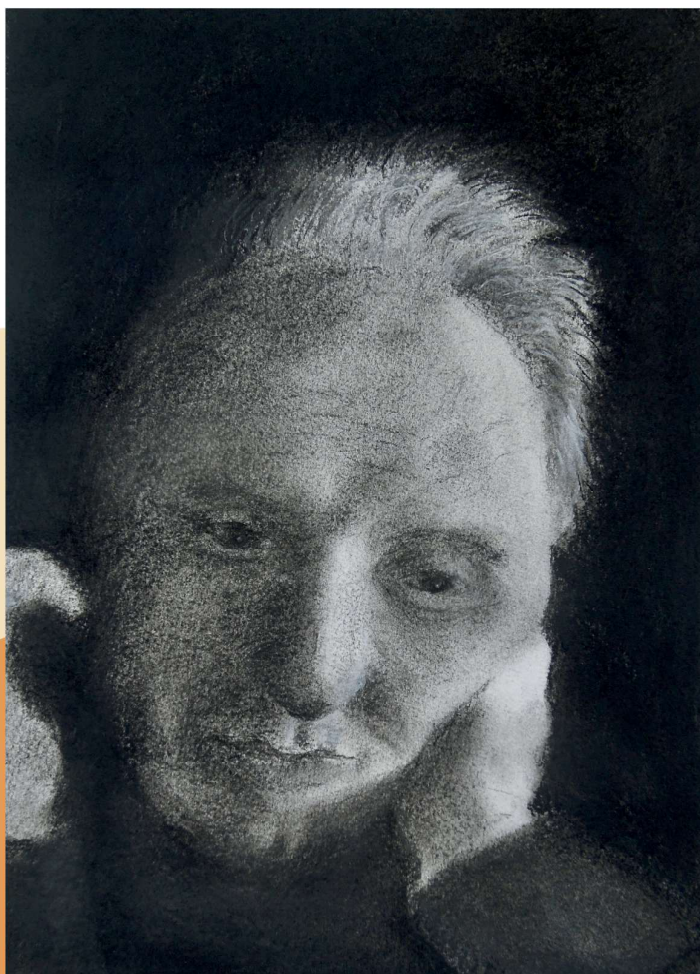
by Jonathan Morgan

*The night was dark and the fish swam
no-one knew from whence they came
they were big and silver and shy
and were very afraid of man*

*The darkness was full of haunting
the trees of strange shape and sound
the water shrilled like fairies calling
and the rocks were like graves flaunting*

*Electricity was in the air
would the great fish be caught
would their death presage
another nail in the Celtic coffin*

*That darkness Vaughan called dazzling
surrounded the lonely fisherman
the Western shore was calling
and the depths were impenetrable*



John Wiltshire

ART AS A PORTAL

by Mandy Archer

Pursuing art leads us into areas of amazement and wonder and shows us glimpses of the splendour of the Creator, which we otherwise might not see.

The arts lead us into a closer relationship with the world around us and this deeper appreciation and understanding hopefully helps us to value all life in a richer way. Every blade of grass is an expression of creative love.

I paint, draw and write poetry.

I worked for several years as an art therapist in a unit for disabled people.

Many, understandably, had stress, anger and anxiety issues relating to their situation.

Most of them rejected the idea as impossible when approached with the idea of painting or drawing. "I can't draw a straight line."

When I laughingly explained that there were no straight lines in nature and playing around with a few colours might be fun, adding that as I would be setting it up and clearing away afterwards, they could give up the moment they wanted to, most of them had a go!

It was fascinating to see the tension drain away, faces and shoulders relax, and eyes brighten as they experimented.

The person behind the disability blossomed.

They became more conscious of the shape of things, repeating patterns, shades of colour, and how changes in the light affected the mood of a scene. Painting gave us all a deeper relationship with the natural world.

A few years after this, there was, for me, a shift in that I found a greater sense of closeness to the world and the Creator in writing poetry. Wonder or awareness would build in my head and then explode onto paper.

I used to always have a notebook and pen in the car after a walk in the woods or along the beach with the dogs. This was the time when I was deeply at peace and closer to God than at any other time in the day and on some very special walks I would realise that I was having an experience which just had to be written down and on occasion shared.

Whether creative energy is released in music, painting or words isn't important. Expressing ourselves in a creative way opens doors for us that we otherwise would have just passed by in the hectic turmoil of everyday life and hardly known they were there.

When we get lost in wonder and admiration at the beauty, symmetry, detail, and connectedness of things, we are truly standing in the shadow of love.

BLUE SKY

by Mandy Archer

"The sky is looking blue this morning"

She said in passing.

*I was standing close to the cliff edge contemplating
this blue of all blues, all skys, all seas,
this magical interweave of wave and cloud,
a cauldron of all the blues.*

*I saw creation's global boat afloat
in a blueberry smoothie
with a dash of whipped sunshine and a hint of
Spring.*

*A cauldron of all the blues, I thought,
a potion of wonder.*

A stupid sound scratched obediently in my throat.

"Yes," I said "Very blue.

I smiled and walked on.

Quotation from the Patristic Breviary - 28th March

***It is easy to Pass from Contemplation to Action
but not vice versa.***

"The person who is used to spiritual activity does not find any difficulty in following the divine commandments also on the physical plane. Indeed, he finds it easier. The person who, instead, burns up all his energy in external activities, if he interrupts them, is not able to carry out internal activities. He is like someone who holds in his hands tools and materials to build something but does not know how to go about it."

Simeon the New Theologian

Rest for Beloved

by Mandy Patterson

Sometimes, when we read a passage or verse in the bible, it seems almost called out aloud, and afterwards, it never seems quite the same. When this happens, I can only assume that my soul, especially, needs to hear it. This was the case when I heard Jesus saying "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (Luke 9:58) That day, I heard it as if He was saying it particularly to me, I was troubled to consider that I had not been enough of a giver to my precious Lord. So, in my quiet times with Him, I imagined a place of rest for God. A place where He could take time out, be allowed to rest and be left alone. It was a place of comfort, beauty, and silence. I would invite Him with a song and then leave Him to it. He did not have to listen to my prayers or wonder at my thoughts. He could just be.

Having heard the call in Songs of Songs to "Come away My beloved" I hoped to find a way to return the invitation.

Come Lord God
And rest here your sweet head
Come and lie on the comfort of my praise.
See I lay for you
Fragrant petals on a pillow,
Come and breathe in the perfume of my love.
I weep tears of love
Upon your dreadful wounds
Feel the touch of my sorrowful caress.
Come Lord God
And rest here your sweet head
Come and lie on the comfort of my praise.
Here's devotion
to gently smooth your brow,
A cloak of praise to cover you with joy.
I spread perfume on
Your dearest hands and feet
Please delight in the fragrance of my love.
Rest your darling head
Have a laugh with me
Lay your glory here
I will adore you.
Come O Lord, come here and enjoy
Come now Lord - just come here and enjoy.
At these times He can just close His eyes and drift
while I watch and wait. At times I save up jokes to
tell him. Of course I realise He already knows the
punchlines, but a shared joke is always fun, and I
know he loves to tease and laugh.



More recently, I came across what St THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX (1873-1897) wrote about her little boat in her autobiography The Story of a Soul.

"I suffered complete dryness, almost as if I were quite forsaken.
"As usual, Jesus slept in my little boat. I know that other souls rarely let him sleep peacefully, and he is so wearied by the advances he is always making that he hastens to take advantage of the rest I offer him.
"It is likely that as far as I am concerned he will stay asleep until the great final retreat of eternity. But that does not upset me. It fills me with great joy..."
and she invited her sister to accept Jesus to ride in her own boat...

... "He is so Fatigued!... His divine feet are tired from going after sinners, and in her boat Jesus is sleeping so peacefully. The apostles gave him a pillow. The gospel gives us this detail. But in His dear spouses little boat Our Lord finds another pillow, much softer. Her heart. There He forgets all. He is at home....It is not a stone that supports His divine head (that stone for which he longed during His mortal life), it is the heart of a child, the heart of a spouse. Oh how happy Jesus is! His beloved is a bundle of myrrh and He rests on her heart. Myrrh is suffering and He rests on her heart in this way. He is happy to receive all from her." (Letter to her sister Celine. July 23, 1893) Nowadays I love to watch Jesus sleeping in 'my boat' where he rests whatever the weather.

All this may be simple fancy, but for me, it is a deep and consoling place to travel, rest and watch sweet Jesus. There are hints in Verdi's Requiem that he also considered the weariness of the Lord: "in that day seeking me Thou sittest tired...."

Dear Lord, exhausted by salvation's work, weary and worn by incarnation's endeavour, sit please dear Lord and take rest, but only to revive your sweet strength and not to lose me in the fatigue. Sit and slumber. But even if You then cannot find me, yet I will love You and hope You misplace me not.

THE PETALS ARE FALLING

by Mandy Archer

*The petals are falling
in ever fading colours.
Fading and falling as I walk
the tightrope of years.
The petals are falling
as I stand amongst the snowdrops
soon failing and falling.*

*Time never stops walking,
shedding the petals of
daffodils, bluebells, roses,
apple and rowan tree.
Feather of blackbird, hair of dog
Lost in the wind.
The petals are falling for us all*



The Virgin and Child Appearing to St. Francis of Assisi (Luca Giordano, (1634–1705)

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AND THE IMAGE OF CHRIST

by John-Francis Friendship TSSF

It might seem odd to consider the place of Mary in relation to art, but Francis gazed on her to see how to respond to God. Marian images often show this, and it was that gaze which drew Francis, as we see in so many paintings in Franciscan settings.

During the summer months we celebrate three of our Lady's significant feast days - her Assumption (August 15th), Nativity (September 8th) and St Mary at the Cross - or our Lady of Sorrows - (September 15th) two days before the Stigmata. Yet she, the Theotokos - the God-bearer - hardly figures in Anglican devotion, so Tertiaries need to realise just how devoted to her was the Poor Man of Assisi, something realised whenever praying his *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* in the

Hail, holy Lady, most holy Queen,
Mary, Mother of God, ever Virgin;
chosen by the most holy Father in heaven,
consecrated by him, with his most holy beloved Son
and the Holy Spirit, the Comforter:
on you descended and in you still remains
all the fullness of grace and every good.
Hail, his Palace; hail, his Tabernacle;
hail, his Robe, hail, his Handmaid;
hail, his Mother;
and hail, all holy Virtues, who,
by the grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit,
are poured into the hearts of the faithful.
So that, faithless no longer,
they may be made faithful servants of God
through you.

Francis's love for Mary

In the *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, Part II of Thomas of Celano's trilogy concerning Francis, he writes: '(Francis) embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love, since she made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us. He honoured her with His own Praises, poured out prayers to her, and offered her his love in a way that no human tongue can express. But what gives us greatest joy is that he appointed her the Advocate of the Order, and placed under her wings the sons to be left behind, that she might protect and cherish them to the end.' (198).

Francis, of course, has been called God's troubadour, a description which may have been informed by the romantic tradition of the times, and his lyrical *Salutation* expressed his delight in Mary as 'Queen' dwelling in 'God's palace', the one associated with all Lady Wisdom's virtues. So it was to the Chapel of St Mary of the Angels (the Portiuncula) that Francis took his first brothers after they found it impossible to live at Rivo Torto and there, later, received St Clare and her sisters. Thomas of Celano tells us he took the brothers there 'because he burned with devotion toward the mother of all good' (1 Celano 21), and this association with the Mother of God-incarnate lay at the heart of his vocation, as St Bonaventure (1221-1274, Seventh Minister General OFM) describes in his *Legenda Maior*.

It was the fact that Mary was the Mother of him whom she delivered to the world, as Sr Angela CSCJ graphically expressed through her statue in the chapel at Freeland, that touched Francis. Just as he longed to imitate Jesus, so he wanted to imitate Mary in her obedience to God - her "*Let it be to me according to your word*" echoes throughout his life; she was his Queen as Jesus was his King. He wanted Jesus to be formed in his 'womb' so that he might deliver him to the world; this was the basis of Francis' contemplative practice, for he wanted to both nurture Jesus in his heart *and* prayerfully contemplate him, born of a Virgin, hidden in the heart (womb) of all creation. He loved the Mother of Jesus, the *imago dei*, and gazed upon - contemplated - both in his desire to be an *imago christi*. She was the Mirror of what the Church is called to be.

Hail, most holy Queen

Francis could have composed his *Salutation* to defend Catholic doctrine concerning the Incarnation against heretical movements, but his love for both the Body of Christ (as we see in his *Admonitions*) and she who bore that body was real. Bonaventure wrote that he placed himself and his whole Order under her protection and guidance for all time (thus are all three Orders of the Society of St Francis), writing in his *Legenda Maior*: 'He loved with an unspeakable affection the Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, forasmuch as that She had made the Lord of glory our Brother, and that through Her we have obtained mercy' (IX,3). 'For who can make the Lord our Brother, if She not also be our Mother', going on to say 'In Her, after Christ, he put his chief trust, making Her his own patron and that of his Brethren ...'.

Holy Virgin Mary

Finally, there is an antiphon Francis composed to be recited throughout his Little Office of the Passion and often sung in Franciscan communities. It paints a picture of the way he contemplated his heavenly Patroness:

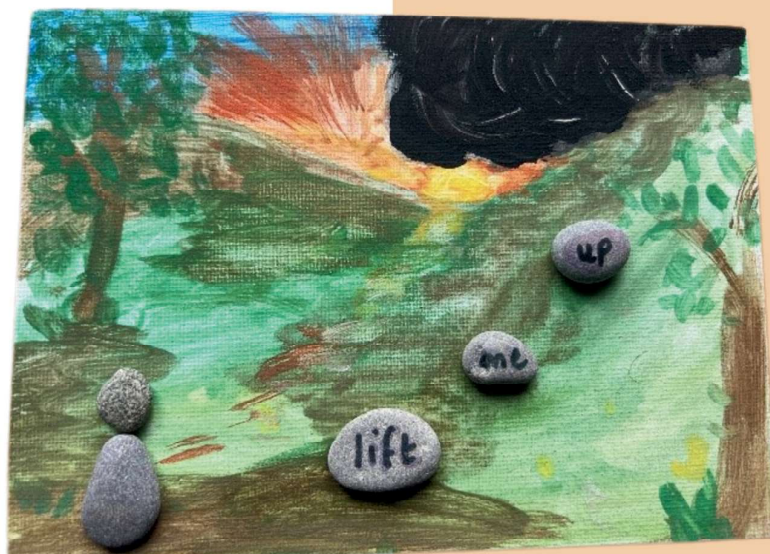
Holy Virgin Mary,
among all women in the world
there is no-one like you:
daughter and handmaid
of the Most High King and heavenly Father;
Mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ;
Spouse of the Holy Spirit,
pray for us
with Michael the Archangel,
all the powers of heaven
and all the saints,
to your most holy and beloved Son,
our Lord and Master. Amen.

Praying the Psalms

by Pauline A. Godfrey
(aka Charles-Rogers)

Imagine a person engaged in contemplative prayer, what do you visualise? Often our images of prayer are full of still waters and green pastures – especially contemplation. Our heart's desire is to be at one with God and at peace with the world. Prayer becomes the soothing blanket which restores order to the chaos of life. Yet green pastures come after the rocky mountain paths, still waters may gather at the end of the valley of the shadow of death.

Might meditation be more like Jesus' praying in the garden of Gethsemane or Jacob wrestling with God on the edge of the river Jabbok.



Most of us have learned that we need to be in control of our emotions: expressing anger is fine – but appropriately, getting excited is understandable – but in moderation. Very often, even unintentionally, we censor our emotional responses. If we 'lose it' we get embarrassed or apologetic. The psalms offer us whole new depths of praying. Whereas usually, when we meditate, we are listening for God's voice, in the Psalms, we often hear the voice of God's people. They cry out in praise and worship, but they also reflect despair, loss, anger, and even hatred. The psalmists reveal their darkest emotions in prayer – knowing that the God of justice and truth will receive this raw emotion and neither condemn them nor act inappropriately.

What would it be like to meditate on Psalm 88 and allow God to acknowledge any experiences of rejection, illness or hopelessness? *'For my soul is full of troubles,..... You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep.'*

Or perhaps Psalm 69 *'Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck..... My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.'*

I can pray these prayers for others: imagining what it is like to pray from Gaza in despair and real fear – 'I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come?' Ps.121 But my own prayers are more anodyne. Recently, in exploring the Psalms more deeply, I recognised that when emotions are offered a pathway, other than words, it is easier to acknowledge some of these deep emotions. Sitting for an hour or more with a psalm and expressing it in paint or craft – allowing the words to open the feelings and then the creative process to unlock those hidden places. It is never about a piece of art – it is always about seeking to open ourselves up to God.

Prayer is 'a genuinely two-party enterprise'. Our intercessions may often leave God no room to reply – but might our contemplative practice expect everything of God. In meditating on Psalm 121 using paint and stones my prayer changed from 'I lift my eyes' to the plea 'Lift me up'. Might meditating on a psalm enable us to wrestle first and then be blessed.

Paintings on a medieval church ceiling

by Paul Alexander

If a definition of contemplation is the act of stilling the mind and sitting still in the presence of reality, how can art contribute to this state of being?

Imagine you are sitting in a quiet church on your own. You are in the countryside, it is summer, the sun is shining, it is very peaceful, you are enjoying a moment's respite. But the church you are sitting in is unusual, it is unique, it has a painted ceiling. There is only one other painted ceiling in the British Isles, a replica of the Sistine Chapel in the English Martyr's Church at Goring-on-Sea in West Sussex. This quiet country church is unique because its ceiling is painted with stories from the Bible. The south aisle ceiling is painted with stories from the Old Testament, starting with paintings of the Creation and ending with Moses looking across to the Promised Land which he couldn't enter.



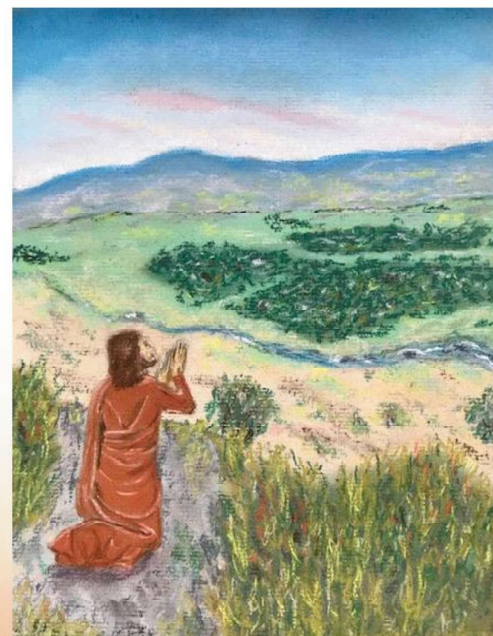
I have a vivid memory of sitting in the Rothko Chapel in Houston and being brought to a standstill, overwhelmed by the power of the space. It wasn't so much the building it was the paintings that created such a powerful effect. It is a place where art becomes a medium for spiritual growth and development; a place for spiritual questing where religion, art and architecture intermingle. It is a sacred space, an intimate sanctuary inspired by the presence of art.

My dream, my vision, if you like, is that such places might exist, where church ceilings could tell the stories of the bible painted by different artists so that their art might encourage meditation leading to the contemplation of God that enriches the soul. That peace of God that passes all human understanding.



Over the altar in the north aisle, the ceiling starts with the Birth of Jesus and ends at the west end of the church with a picture of the Promised Land as described in the first two verses of the last chapter of Revelation.

You are looking at the story of the Bible encompassed in seventy-six paintings that describe the creation of the world, the creation of humanity, the loss of paradise, the repeated resurrections and downfalls of humankind, until the birth of a Saviour who shows you the way back in to the Promised Land. You have spent time looking at all these paintings, you have meditated on their message and their relevance to your own life, and you are now sitting below the picture of the Promised Land moving from a state of meditation to one of contemplation as you move into the reality of where you are. You are in the house of God, in the presence of God, surrounded by the story of God's creation. Art has brought you to a standstill in the Promised Land, in Heaven.



Paradise and Landscapes of the Soul

by Nicola Hunt

I want to offer 3 paintings by 2 artists.

There is a huge connection between the creative artist, painter, sculptor, musician and poet, exploring, looking, gazing, understanding and becoming one with the creation they give birth to and the contemplation of those viewing or hearing the finished article which may have a revelation and spiritual blessing for them. A connection too in the way we contemplate our Lord and our faith.

Several years ago, I was introduced to the idea of Landscapes of the Soul when I went on a retreat to Los Olivos in The Sierra Nevada, Spain. That particular retreat was a one-off led by Danni Munoz, an Anglican priest, and Abdullah Trevathan who was seen in the BBC programme The Retreat, a Muslim scholar and Mullah, who is the son of a friend of mine.

We were looking at St John of the Cross C16 and the Sufi poet Ibn Arabi C12 both mystics, and the inner landscape of the Soul and outer Landscape of Andalucia.

The Landscapes of the Soul are unique as each individual is unique, each moment or season is different. The landscape of the soul reflects the landscape around us. Visiting the Generalife at the Alhambra, a Paradise garden with Muslim and Christian influences, you find a captivating oasis of fountains and rhyls of water, scented plants and fruit trees, mosaics, presenting a riot of colour, bird song, perfume and the sound and sight of living water which involves all senses, a place of order and beauty and of joy and peace, encouraging contemplation and born out of contemplation.

Alex le Rossignol

I met Alex le Rossignol on the retreat, a maker of beautiful stained glass windows, and I asked her to make a small window above the front door of the house I had just bought. I had been so moved by some of the concepts and symbolism I had experienced in the Sierra Nevada that I wanted to include them in a window. I told Alex the things I wanted, and as she had been on the retreat also, her own reflections were part of the result. The only problem was we realised the light was not coming from the direction which would light up the window. The Light was what it was all about! I asked her if she would do a painting instead based on the window, and she was up for the challenge.

A few things in this painting are worthy of contemplation: the Light, the solitary bird, the pomegranate, the fountains water. John of the Cross was kidnapped and incarcerated in a cell in his monastery by members of his own order who did not want the reforms that he had permission to make. He was lashed regularly,

could not wash there was no light in the room. However a chink of light managed to get into his cell. Through his dark night he was able to experience rebirth and be reunited with the Light.

*O, guiding night;
O, night more lovely than the dawn;
O, night that hast united
The lover with His beloved,
And changed her into her love.
Her being the soul*

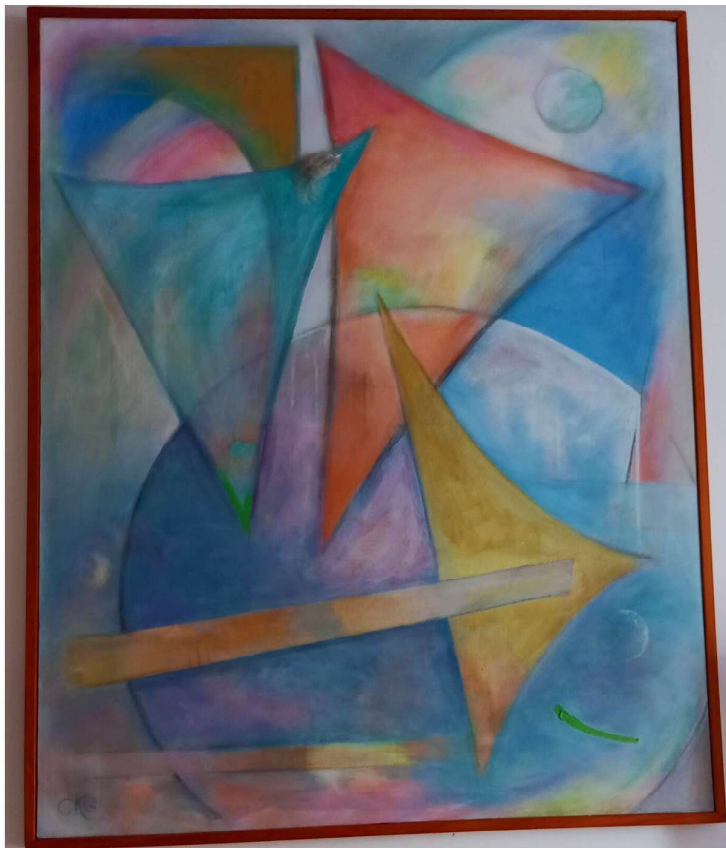


The solitary bird is a poem about the traits of the contemplative soul. The pomegranate represents fecundity, birth and eternal life. Thinking about Contemplation. We believe in or are looking for union with or in the Divine which requires surrender of self, emptying of self. This may be very painful. Letting go so we may look at, gaze at, be aware of the Divine and ultimately be one with the Divine. Lovers of God may experience ecstasy. This often begins with a meditation on the Bible, *Lectio Divina*, a sentence or one word at a time that occupies our mind so that our soul soars.

Hildegard of Bingen

The first bible was Creation, the greatest work of art, many feel closer to God in a garden, outdoors on the hills, woods or at sea. There are endless possibilities. Here we may find an understanding that we are part of the web of life and not conquerors. We remember that we are made in the image of the Greatest Artist who loves and cares for all things Created.

I was looking online for an illustration for a talk I was doing on Hildegard of Bingen, I particularly wanted something representing Feather on the Breath of God, I found an abstract painting which for some reason captivated me, I am not usually moved by abstract art. The painting has a white feather glued to it and most people who see it want to pull it off.



The artist lived in Ngaruawahia NZ an important place for Maori's. She shipped it over for me, and I subsequently stayed with her when I went on Sabbatical. I quizzed her about the work and it was done during a difficult time in her life, she said she was trying to square the circle. It has what looks like earth, sun and moon as well as a lot of triangles and the feather though she said they represented whatever the viewer wanted them to represent. She painted it in an art class, a piece of music called 'feather on the breath of God' was being played, words and music by Hildegard. (Hyperion Gothic Voices Feather on the breath of God.) Chris is not a Christian. However she used to lend the painting to friends and they all felt it had a quality of peace about it which I also have found.

"Listen: there was once a king sitting on his throne. Around Him stood great and wonderfully beautiful columns ornamented with ivory, bearing the banners of the king with great honour. Then it pleased the king to raise a small feather from the ground, and he commanded it to fly. The feather flew, not because of anything in itself but because the air bore it along. Thus am I, a feather on the breath of God."

It seemed in some mysterious way Hildegard and her music touched many people.

In his book *Into the Silent Land* Martin Laird says "God is our Homeland, life of our life, God is always giving." and we long to find the life giving Spirit dwelling within us transforming us. It is difficult to receive this gift when there are obstacles in the way. He talks about the fact that our attention can be rivetted by the interior soap opera that goes on in our heads. There is a suggestion that salvation is about silence, the silencing of our distractions, the surrendering of deeply embedded resistances through stillness, watchfulness and awareness and being in the present moment. This work was created through trying to find peace and it also reflects peace to those who gaze upon it.

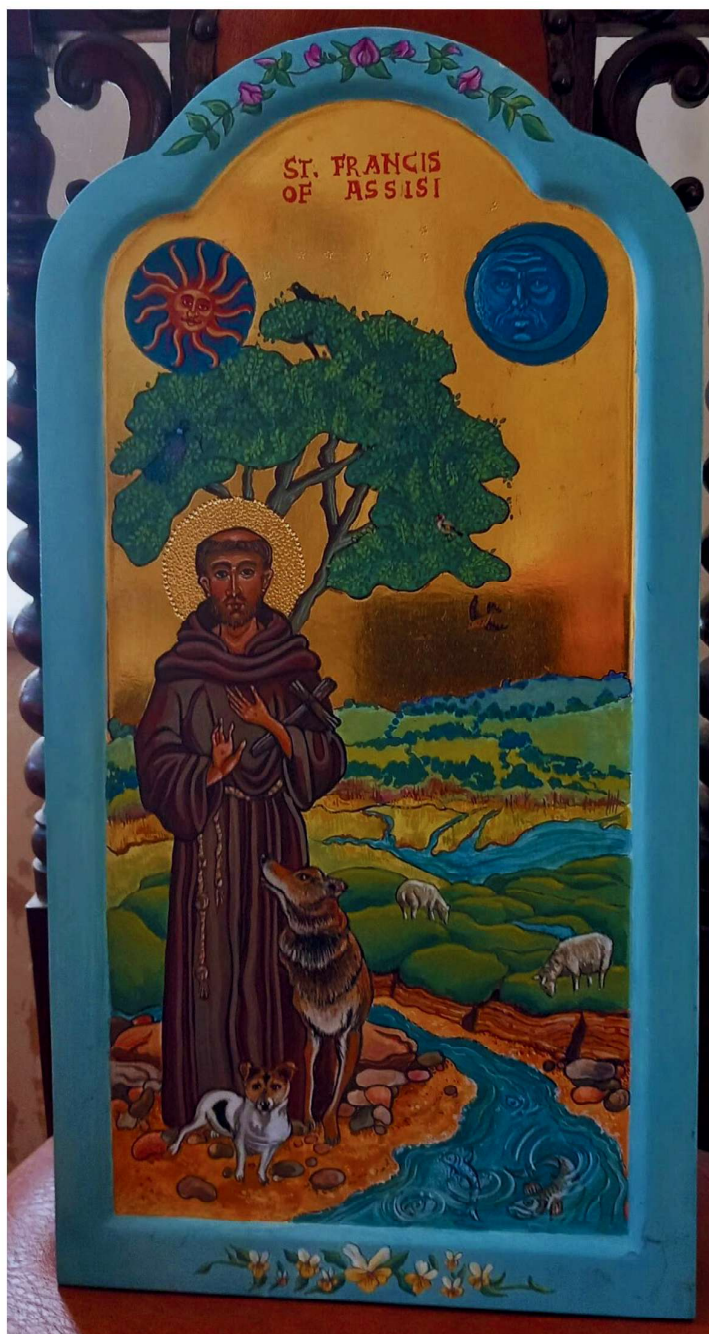
My final picture is an Icon of St Francis I call **St Francis of the Skern** (Northam Burrows) by Alex le Rossignol

Here is St Francis on my home turf together with my dear Jack Russell Phoebe, whose ashes are now buried just behind St Francis in what I like to think of as a rabbit hole!

The Wolf, one of the images I reflect on often, thinking of the wolf within, wanting it to be transformed as the Wolf of Gubbio was. Sister Moon, Brother Sun and Sister Water are all there reminding me that we are all members of God's family to be cherished. The flowers are all found growing on the Burrows. The Salt marsh is an endless source of fascination with their shapes and the sudden way they appear.

I am so grateful to Alex for creating this prayer for me a source of delight, and gratitude to St Francis. Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.

This has been a very personal reflection on Contemplation and art, and there are many more things I could say. In the end, I have concentrated mostly on paintings. I wanted to mention **Maggi Hambling**. I have been fascinated by her paintings of the North Sea and have watched a programme of her painting it, she went out every day early in the morning to paint it. There was absolute ferocious passion in her and an urgency in her concentration and looking. Her head was constantly looking up at the sea and down at the canvas in an effort to see clearly and get it down in paint, to me it seemed like single minded contemplation and that she was one with the sea as we seek to be one with our Lord.



THE PEREGRINE

by Jonathan Morgan

*He looks down from the craggy heights,
And laughs at creatures of so small a size
His view is one of most remarkable sight
He sees where everything lies*

*The angular beak and curved talons
Strike fear into those of no defence
Not for him the comfort of roomy salons
He is certainly of raw presence*

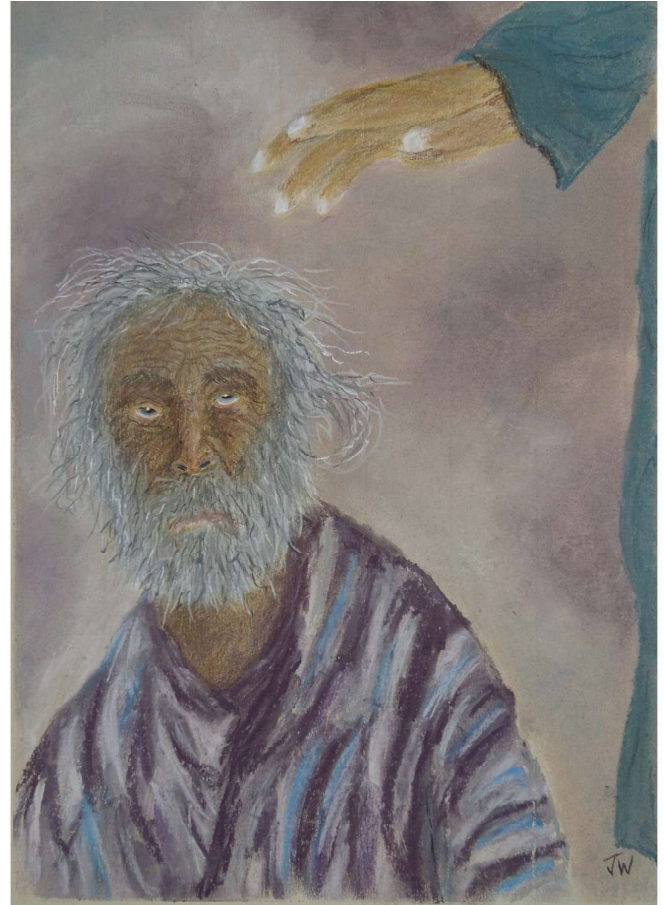
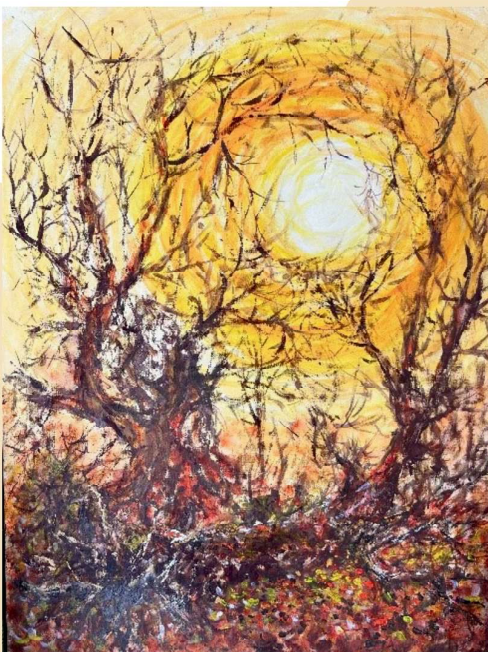
*A minute movement affects his eye
And all is spring and tremor
He knows where all do lie
And through his swoop are soon to die*

*Like a chieftain of old he surveys his land
And trains the chicks into his band
Look out the quarry he espies
No mercy will he grant their cry.*

Compline Art

Paul Alexander, John Withshire, Rina Miles, James Read

Four years ago, when we started Zoom nightly Compline services, we realised that if the service was to stay fresh we needed to provide a greater range of psalms and different biblical readings on a nightly basis rather than the three alternatives offered by the standard SSF Daily Office book. The Office of Compline aims to soothe the soul into a state of peaceful restfulness to take us through the dark hours of the night, 'for our adversary the devil prowls round like a roaring lion, seeking for someone to devour'. Compline doesn't try to send us to sleep with nightly repetition of the same words. Rather, it alerts us to the dangers of being unguarded while we sleep and resisting steadfastly any approaches of evil. Repetition is invaluable, but so is variety, if we are to stay on guard while at rest. Zoom gave us the opportunity to vary the biblical readings and to include art as a way of helping to illuminate the readings. We found that we had two artists in our group and at least one other person interested in supplying pictures and biblical commentaries. Together with the inclusion of different psalms every night, it has given that degree of variety that has kept the nightly service of compline from becoming a service of rote. It has also provided a way into contemplation. John, Rina and James have provided us with examples of their contributions.



JOHN WILTSHIRE

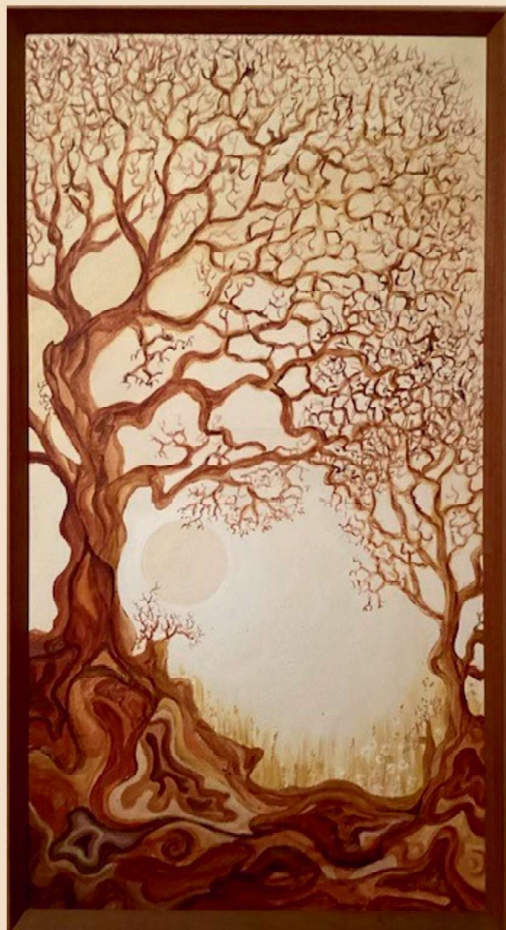
In John's gospel we read about Jesus healing a blind man. Afterwards the Pharisees interrogated him, then said to him:

"You were born entirely in sin, and you are trying to teach us? And they drove him out." (John 9: 34).

Compared to their blaming, the man's transformation had come about by grace, not merited, an unexpected outpouring of generosity. He had done nothing to deserve blindness from birth, nor does he now do anything in particular to deserve healing. It just comes to him, and it tells us something about God's nature.

This is the final painting that I provided at Paul Alexander's request for his latest project, "A Summer in Devon". I tried to convey the blind man's powerlessness, his inability to do other than accept attention from someone who might, just, help him.

Little does he know that within seconds he is to be made whole, purely by grace.



A Day before November in Norfolk
by Mandy Archer

*It's a pretty morning at Sandringham,
As autumn as pheasants' feathers.
Bright as a toad's eye
and the sun, not sure of itself,
dancing in shapes
through half-dressed trees.
A morning for the fun of it
before November*

*It's a flat-mud afternoon
at Brancaster Staithe.
The tide's away,
undecided about returning.*

*The sun glides on water in blushing pools,
backdrops an egret pluming around
for its photo-call.
The clouds shake out a thousand
homeward starlings
into an afternoon for ever
before November.*

*It's an evening ahead of its time at Titchwell
brought on by a slip-back of the clock.
Two swans on the mere are dancing
the darkness,
trailing sparkle on the still water
that soaks up the drowning sun
thrashing its last light.
14 An evening of sudden endings before
November.*

RINA MILES

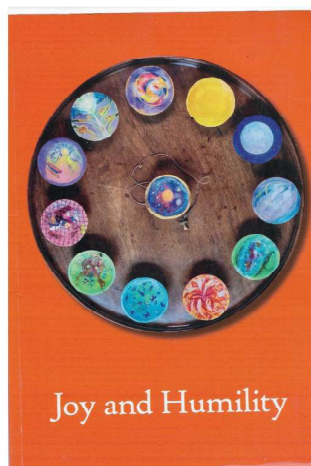
My first introduction to the practice of Visio Divina was on a retreat at Hilfield. I have been painting pictures from my mind, coupled with Bible verses and personal visual and spiritual experiences, for many years and have come to understand how increasingly they have become part of my prayer life as conversations with God, often taking unexpected turns as the painting develops.

An example of this process is 'Let the Trees of the Forest Sing for Joy'. I walk every day through ancient woodland, and trees have always spoken to me. This painting began as a dark, confused image reflecting the feelings of being overwhelmed by a major change in my life. But one day, a few months later, when life was more settled, the painting was still unfinished on the easel, waiting for tangled branches to be added, increasingly excluding the light, and I was looking at it while I read Psalm 49 and came to the words about the trees singing for joy, suddenly I said out loud, "Those trees are dancing!". And I said thank you to God. The painting was completed.

When I look back at my artwork done over many years ago, I see how spiritual they have been even, when I didn't realise. I see that theme of my journey from darkness to light many times over. And so the use of images linked with Bible verses in our daily TSSF zoom Compline has been food for my soul. Choosing images from my work and from other sources via the Internet and contemplating the ones selected by others has helped deepen and strengthen my faith. Having an image on the screen, not just during the reading and commentary but also during silence and during prayers, provides a kind of peaceful opportunity for listening to God speak to each one of us through what we see. This practice can continue into all our experiences of the sights and sounds around us as we go through each day.

Paintings can speak to us just as words can. In Lectio Divina, sitting with a Bible passage, even just a word or phrase, can speak to us personally. Similarly in Visio Divina, God can speak to us, not necessarily about the artist's own inspiration. Art speaks to us in a way that words cannot. It speaks into our souls and into our prayers. It touches the mystery beyond ourselves.





JOY AND HUMILITY

An alternative look at Meditation and Exploration" by
Liz Meynell, TSSF

This slim volume of 40 pages contains a wealth of quotations on Joy and Humility from a great variety of authors from St Francis to Aquinas and from Thomas Merton to Lao Tse, to mention just a few. There is much food for thought. In addition there is Artwork by Liz Meynell alongside the quotations on almost every page.

The booklet costs £5.00 plus postage and may be ordered from Liz Meynell by e-mail: <lizmeynell@gmail.com> Proceeds to Franciscan Aid.

JAMES READ

I was introduced to visiting art galleries as a child on stays with an aunt who was a domestic servant in London; thus a life long interest in art. For the last 30+ years I have used paintings for my own prayer and also for sermons, leading retreats, quiet evenings, etc. So, when I look at a picture I try to be open to God, ready to receive what God is saying to me through this work of the artist.

My interest has further developed with the use of pictures in Compline and, more recently, with me finding a picture to show twice a week. Now, when I look at pictures, any work of art, I always have in the back of my mind: might this be a picture for Compline? I have various questions in mind for a Compline picture, such as: is it relevant to Franciscans, eg our Principles; will it help people to wind down for the day; does it tie in with the season; or are the themes that run through that day's Compline, is it relevant to a theme that we have been discussing? Those thoughts might well inform my choice, but there is much else in my mind, e.g.: something I am passionate about to share, a sermon I am preparing, or a passage I recently read.

As I look through pictures, perhaps having googled one of the above themes, I react: does the picture interest or attract me; what feelings arise in me as I look; what might God be saying to me through the picture and my reaction to it; is the picture saying something about God's nature and activity; does it contain a message to me in my life, or to the church/world?

Often that is enough. Occasionally I go on to ask 'Ignation's' style questions: is there a visual representation of Jesus; how do I feel about that figure; what do any characters in the picture feel towards Jesus; do any of them resonate with me, or might do with the Compline congregation? I go on, though probably don't share in Compline: what would I like to say to Jesus; what is Jesus' reply; which one of the people depicted is like me; how does that thought feel; what happens next in this story? And finally, what might God be saying to me?

I will add that I have a desire to find a picture from time to time from cultures other than European; people and the world over are full of diverse insights and expressions of our Christian Faith. Influenced by locally available art it is so easy to think of Jesus and Biblical scenes as set in Europe, with natives to that continent and its diaspora as the portrayed characters.

Finally, thanks to Paul for asking me to write this article, which has helped me think more deeply about what is going on in me in my choosing and in that, further developing that process.

WALKING ALONGSIDE

by David Bagott

Hold the gaze,
For there is only comfort,
For those who share the pain.

Hold the hands,
For there is only blessing,
For those who walk along aside.

In the forsaken we are found,
When forsaken to all we are bound.

In the night, we are held,
By the mercy we have given.
Eyes that show compassion,
With clear sight behold.
Hearts that are hardened,
And hear not those who cry,
Taste only the vestige,
Of the feast we are given.

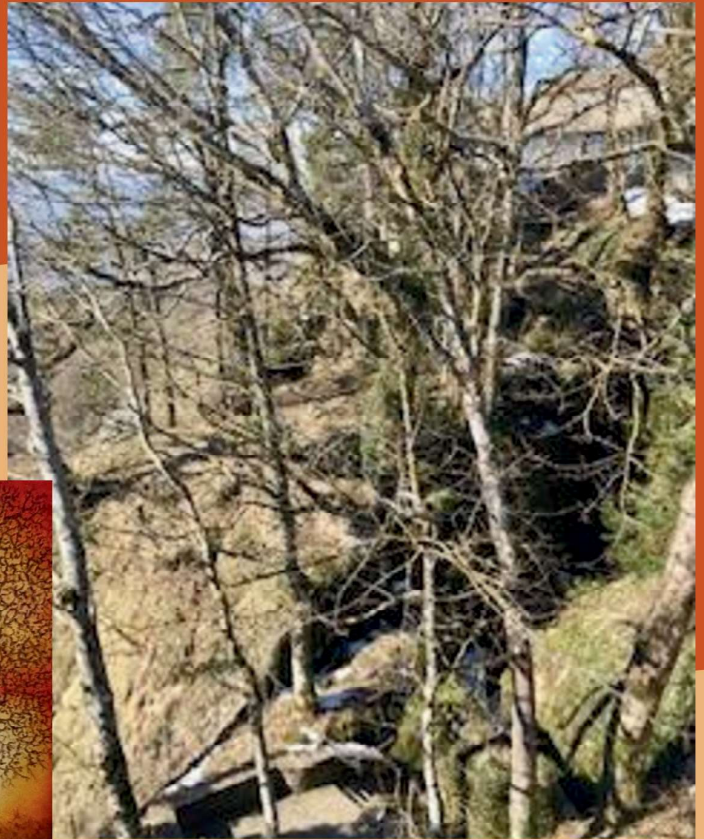
In the byways and the hedgerows,
True life does spring.
Those who accompany,
Never will arrive alone.
For the journey we take,
Needs narrow ways and stony paths,
And a sharing in the pain.

In the forsaken we are found,
When forsaken to all we are bound.

Hold the reins with softness,
Gently walk the land.
All is connected thus our compassion is revealed,
In every breath we take,
In every task we complete.
And how we are revealed,
On the odyssey we are given.



Rina Miles



September 2024 is the 800th anniversary of the Stigmata. This is a photograph of La Verna as Francis might have seen it.



CONTEMPLATIVE
NETWORK

Theme of next edition:

"CONTEMPLATION AND MUSIC"

If you would like to contribute to the magazine with an article, poetry, photographs or art, please send your entry to the Chairman, Paul Alexander, at plalexander@yahoo.com before 1st December 2024