

MENDICANT

gratitude
gratitude

Gratitude in a Time of Change:

🌿 A THANKSGIVING SPECIAL EDITION 🌿

A Song of Gratitude

JEAN-FRANÇOIS GODET-CALOGERAS

A few years before he died, Francis of Assisi composed the beautiful and globally famous *Canticle of Brother Sun*, an exquisite piece of poetry. Lyrical and musical, it is the oldest extant Italian poetry (unfortunately, the accompanying music has been lost).

What gave Francis such inspiration, such enthusiasm, such joy? He was then in his mid-forties and had been through a lot. Working as a young adult in his father's business, he had experienced the damage money can do to the soul and relationships. He had taken part in armed conflict and tasted the bitter fruit of violence. He had turned to the church for support in living the Gospel of Jesus, but struggled with ecclesiastical structures and regulations. Tension was growing within his own movement between early followers and an increas-

ing number of new members who were more concerned with expansion than service to lepers. On top of it all, he was dealing with illness—suffering in body as well as spirit.

All that could lead anyone into depression, anger, or bitterness. So, what prompted Francis to sing such a loving and grateful song?

The first words of the Canticle are “Most high” (or in the Italian *Altissimu*). The poem is addressed to the only real highness. Francis uses only this title and “Lord.” To name is to define, to limit. Francis wants to praise, not define.

The last word of the Canticle is “humility” (or in the Italian *humilitate*), which has the same root as “human” and “humus,” which relates to what is on the surface of the earth.

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Canticle of Brother Sun

*Most high, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention your name.*

*Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially **Brother Sun**,
who is the day and through whom you give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
of you, Most High, he bears significance.*

*Praised be you, my Lord, through **Sister Moon** and the stars;
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.*

*Praised be you, my Lord, through **Brother Wind**,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather
through which you give sustenance to your creatures.*

*Praised be you, my Lord, through **Sister Water**,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.*

*Praised be you, my Lord, through **Brother Fire**,
through whom you light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.*

*Praised be you, my Lord, through our **Sister Mother Earth**,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces varied fruits
with colored flowers and herbs.*

*Praised be you, my Lord, through those who give **pardon**
for your love
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who will endure them in peace
for by you, Most High, they shall be crowned.*

*Praised be you, my Lord, through our **Sister Bodily Death**,
from whom no living human can escape....
Blessed are those whom death will find
in your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.*

*Praise and bless my Lord and give him thanks
and serve him with great humility.*

Gratitude in a Time of Change

YAHNIA T. RODRÍGUEZ

I have been in the midst of change for the last two and a half years. In February 2019, my then nine-year-old daughter and I moved across the country to Albuquerque so I could begin my new position at the CAC. Before our move, we had spent all nine years of my daughter's life near family. Being so far away from them was a struggle. I didn't know anyone in New Mexico, and I wasn't sure how to parent without a strong, trustworthy network. However, I quickly found out that God had not only moved us completely out of our comfort zone, but also provided a group of people who were ready to welcome, love, and support us.

A little over a year after our move, the world came to a standstill as we realized we were in the middle of a pandemic. Being so far away from my family during the pandemic has been difficult, but we've experienced so many gifts during this time. The most significant of these gifts has been the sustained, dedicated time that my daughter and I have had with each other. While we have always been close, the pandemic gave us an opportunity to create our own traditions (our first Christmas by ourselves!), to learn more about each other, and to know that our family of two has more than enough love between us.

The last eighteen months have been challenging and yet my heart overflows with gratitude:

- for the dedicated and invaluable time that I have spent with my daughter;
- for the leaders at CAC as they strive to keep the staff safe while balancing our demanding, important work with the reality that many staff are parenting and working from home;



"The art of letting go is really the art of survival."

- for the tribe of people in Albuquerque who love and care for us like we're family;
- for my own family as we have adapted to being far away from each other and yet have found meaningful ways to celebrate holidays and milestones, like my brother's wedding; and
- for the constant lesson of "both/and"—life is both beautiful and hard.

Most importantly, I am grateful that God inspired me to move even when I didn't think I wanted to move. Never in a million years did I think I would be living in New Mexico. And yet, here I am, being present to my daughter, working for an organization that believes in the transforming power of Love, and learning to accept reality as it is—to let go, be present, and be grateful for this moment. As Fr. Richard shared in a daily meditation last year,

The art of letting go is really the art of survival. We have to let go so that as we age, we can be happy. Yes, we've been hurt. Yes, we've been talked about and betrayed by friends. Yes, our lives didn't work out the way we thought they would. Letting go helps us fall into a deeper and broader level at which we can always say "Yes."¹

¹ Adapted from Richard Rohr, *The Art of Letting Go: Living the Wisdom of Saint Francis* (Louisville, CO: Sounds True, 2010), CD discs 3 and 6.

YAHNIA T. RODRÍGUEZ serves as the executive assistant to both the CAC's Executive Director and its Chief Operating Officer. She enjoys cooking and podcasts. Of the many roles she has held, personally and professionally, parenting her daughter is the most significant for her.

the Mendicant

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Build a Financial LOVE Life

DOUG LYNAM

I lived as a Benedictine monk for twenty years, hoping that I could learn to love others more freely by renouncing all material goods and worldly ambitions. Monks are supposed to be “free agents” of mercy and kindness, serving the Divine all day, in all things—without ulterior motives.

However, after surviving the bankruptcy of our community and witnessing my fellow monks not being able to afford essential healthcare for many years, I’ve learned there is a more non-dualistic way forward, a path without financial self-flagellation.

What if, instead, we each had a little bit of wealth and used it to cultivate a life of gratitude, love, and service? Could that path allow us to achieve the same objective of being “free agents” of love and kindness, beholden to no one—with no strings attached?

We don’t need any money to make that happen; however, having adequate savings makes this life much more manageable. Otherwise, we will likely live a precarious existence. A little bit of wealth allows us to live our values more fully rather than being stuck working paycheck to paycheck—a grind that leaves many of us frustrated and exhausted. Too much of that, and we LOSE at life—we Live Only Sad Experiences.

A life where our most profound spiritual values shape each day is what I call a LOVE life—Live Only Value-based Experiences.

We know that material goods will not make us happy, and the capitalistic obsession with stuff is destroying the planet. However, meaningful, value-based experiences *do* make us happy. We may value working in an animal shelter, raising foster children, or running aid missions around the world. These experiences also make the world a better place—and having a little bit of wealth can help us incorporate more valuable experiences into our lives. Wealth, when used mindfully, can help make life *lovely*.



A life where our most profound spiritual values shape each day is what I call a LOVE life—Live Only Value-based Experiences.

Is a LOVE life always pleasant and happy? Not at all. For example, someone who needs cancer treatment will value that treatment highly, even though it may devastate their body. But they need to focus on their health and quality time with family instead of wasting precious energy worrying about medical bills, earning an income, or even cleaning the house. Money can remove the non-value-generating experiences from our lives, allowing us to focus on those things that bring us deeper meaning.

One of my favorite LOVE stories occurred when a group of students from a private school where I once worked chose to bake a cake and throw a party for a seven-year-old girl whose family moved into a homeless shelter on her birthday. That was lovely to witness, and I value every moment of that day. I often think about that little girl’s surprise and the joy it gave to every guest in the shelter that night.

That particular LOVE story required a little money, but mostly time and energy. It can be hard to find the money or time when all our energy is devoted to making ends meet. We are all required to undertake unpleasant tasks at times, but money

used wisely can drastically reduce our suffering and provide us with the time and resources to help others more effectively.

I believe that the Divine works through our hands. The monastic tradition holds the belief that the Divine unconditionally loves us, and we are responsible for transmitting the Divine love that eternally surrounds us. With gratitude in our hearts, we can make our money a force for good and be a powerful tool for change in the world—and, as God knows, our world certainly needs it.

DOUG LYNAM is a partner at LongView Asset Management in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He specializes in environmentally and socially responsible investments and is the author of *From Monk to Money Manager: A Former Monk’s Financial Guide to Becoming a Little Bit Wealthy—and Why That’s Okay*. You may contact Doug Lynam at douglas@longviewasset.com.

On Gratitude

HEIDI FRANKLIN

Gratitude is something I have come to experience and appreciate late in life. Gratitude flows when I'm intentional about receiving it and nurturing it within me.

Politeness, on the other hand, was not only expected of me, but required when I was growing up. I learned to say “thank you” whether I felt gratitude or not. My feelings were irrelevant. Doing and saying the right thing was what mattered.

Although I could thank someone for a gift, a compliment, a favor, or even time spent with them, internally, I seldom felt genuine gratitude. When good things came my way, I thought I deserved them. I considered them my reward for good behavior. I felt entitled and proud. In my defense, I was indoctrinated in the merits of hard work by my German parents. This message was reinforced by the fundamentalist evangelical church I attended. Doing good and being obedient would earn God's favor and I would “have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Hell loomed if ever I was to stray.

This reward-and-punishment system did not foster gratitude in me, nor did it make me a particularly nice person. As an adult, I was harshly critical of myself and overly judgmental of others. I looked with disdain on those less fortunate than me, and believed they got what they deserved.

Then I got married—and later divorced. I plunged into the world of the working poor, trying to make ends meet while raising three children under the age of six. Life became harder and harder. Where had I gone wrong? What had I done to deserve this?

When a friend introduced me to the teachings of Fr. Richard Rohr, I came to understand that what was limiting me



I practiced letting go of my thoughts during daily contemplative sittings. Gradually, the effects of this practice spilled over into my everyday life, allowing me to let go of my expectations, my judgmentalism, and my constant striving for perfection.

was my own perfectionistic, dualistic—either/or, all-or-nothing—thinking. Once I realized that my life was not all about me, filtered through my narrow, self-referential focus, I redirected my efforts.

I tried to see reality as it is. I tried to be more loving, forgiving, and accepting. I tried to develop a spirit of joy and gratitude. I.... I.... I.... Even my pursuit of the spiritual journey became one of striving. I failed. *I could not make this inner transformation happen.* I was helpless.

Eventually, I was inspired to begin practicing Centering Prayer. I read Cynthia Bourgeault's books. I attended the CAC's Living School. I practiced letting go of my thoughts during daily contemplative sittings. Gradually, the effects of this practice spilled over into my everyday life, allowing me to let go of my expectations, my judgmentalism, and my constant striving for perfection.

Steadily, I experienced more spaciousness. There was now room for compassion, for inclusion, for hope, and for joy. And, to my surprise, gratitude welled up like a geyser, spraying thankfulness everywhere. Gratitude rose from deep inside me, where it had always been, where God is. Who knew? The abundant life was there inside me all along. As Fr. Richard says in different ways, life is both/and—abundant sorrow and abundant joy. For this, I am truly grateful.

HEIDI FRANKLIN, a retired CPA and MBA, serves on the board of directors of the CAC. As the board treasurer and chair of the finance committee, she is dedicated to helping the organization find congruence in what the CAC teaches and how it conducts business. As part of the 2019 Living School cohort, she is passionate about the CAC's role as a “front door” to the Christian contemplative movement.

“Choosing Gratitude Until We Are Grateful”

An inspiration for the theme of this edition of *the Mendicant* was this quote from Richard Rohr:

Prayer is sitting in the silence until it silences us, choosing gratitude until we are grateful, and praising God until we ourselves are an act of praise. Mature prayer always breaks into gratitude.

“Mature prayer,” or contemplative prayer, allows us to move out of our problem-solving mind and gives us an opportunity to develop the virtue of gratitude as we sit faithfully in the contemplative presence of Presence.

We at CAC have much for which to be grateful. Despite all the challenges brought on by the pandemic, CAC has been able to support our community with an expanding set of programs and teaching content this past year. I have had the opportunity to summarize and document this work in CAC’s first-ever digital *2020 Annual Report*, which you can view at CAC.org/2020AnnualReport.

In the report, you will have a glimpse of CAC’s “greatest hits” from 2020—comprising the most read and shared content from our different program areas. You can also see video talks from our leadership team and read messages of gratitude about



This work is only possible because of the faithful support and partnership of people like you.

the impact of our work on our global community of friends. CAC is not sustained by any large institution or foundation. This work is only possible because of the faithful support and partnership of people like you.

On a separate note, since the Summer 2021 edition of *the Mendicant* was released, it has been rewarding to share information with so many of you on how to give in non-traditional ways. Many CAC supporters have given gifts of stock, qualified distributions from their IRA, or planned an estate gift for their philanthropic support of this work. These non-traditional donation options provide smart win-win opportunities for both you and the CAC.

Please reach out to me if you have questions about CAC’s *2020 Annual Report* or want to learn more about supporting this mission going forward. You can send me an email and I’ll happily follow up with a step-by-step document that lists the information you need to consider these donation options. Visit cac.org/support or send me an email at development@cac.org.

In gratitude,
Ben Keeseey, Development Director

A Song of Gratitude [continued from page 1]

In contrast to “most high,” what is humble is most low—which does not mean submissive. Human beings are by nature humble, belonging to earth, precisely the essence of humility.

In using these two terms, *Altissimu* and *humilitate*, Francis sets the distinction between God and us.

The Italian *lodare* (or in the Latin *laudare*) means to praise, exalt, think and speak highly of, admire, appreciate. It expresses warm and respectful esteem, and heartfelt gratitude. Francis appreciates all elements of creation: sun, moon and stars, wind, water, fire, earth, and all they bring. Rather than taking things for granted, Francis expresses gratitude to their source. He says “grace.” He is truly eucharistic, thankful.

In composing *Canticle of Brother Sun*, Francis must have realized that everything is present and everything we need is given. He became grateful and truly embraced life as a gift, finding true happiness and joy.

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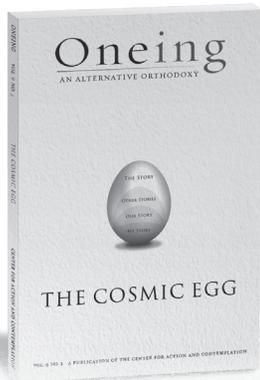
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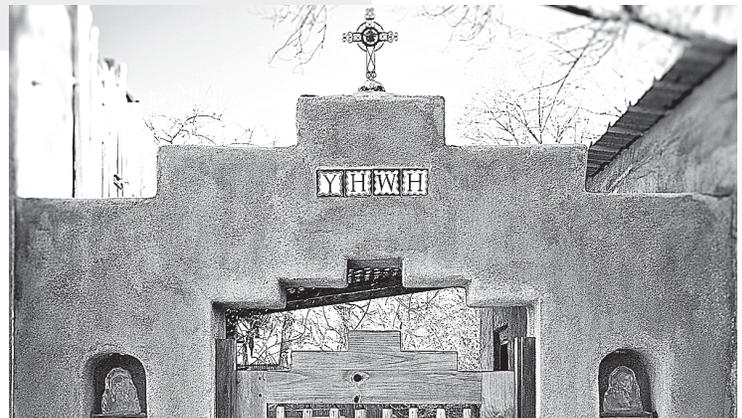
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