



Loving Boldly, Living Simply, Belonging Deeply

The Franciscan Clarean Way

Sister Abigail Hester, OFC



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✨ Introduction: A New Monasticism for a New World

The world is weary. We live in a time of ecological collapse, widening economic inequality, political violence, and spiritual disillusionment. Many have left traditional churches, not because they lost faith in God, but because they lost faith in institutions that failed to reflect Christ's love, justice, and joy.

And yet—something holy is stirring.

Across the world, new communities are forming: small gatherings of faithful souls who long for depth, authenticity, and purpose. These aren't megachurches or rule-bound convents. They are living experiments in love. They are queer households lighting candles and saying prayers. They are justice-seekers who fast and feast in sacred rhythm. They are digital abbeys, activist cells, forest chapels, and intentional families.

The **Order of Franciscan Clareans (OFC)** was born into this holy chaos.

We are not an ancient order with papal recognition, nor are we a splinter sect retreating from the world. We are a small, prayerful movement of progressive Christians who look to Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi as guides for living in resistance to empire and in harmony with God's creation. We gather around a shared Rule of Life, daily practices, and sacred vows—not to escape the world, but to re-enter it with deeper courage and sacred tenderness.

Our monasticism is not bound by walls. It is woven into the lives we already live.

We are queer and straight, trans and cisgender, disabled and able-bodied, poor and working class, clergy and laypeople. We are contemplatives and activists, mystics and skeptics, artists and organizers. What unites us is not uniformity but a shared call to **live simply, love boldly, and belong deeply.**

This book is an invitation.

Not into a rigid institution or hierarchical order, but into a path—a rhythm of life—that has guided pilgrims for centuries. It is a Franciscan rhythm, yes. But it is also unapologetically queer, unapologetically liberationist, and grounded in the unique needs of our time. Here you will find reflections, practices, and commitments that can be lived by anyone, anywhere—from a small apartment in a city to a cabin in the woods to a heart weary from church hurt and longing for home.

You don't need to be a nun or monk to walk this way. You only need to be willing to live your life as a prayer.

Saint Clare once said: “*What you hold, may you always hold. What you do, may you always do and never abandon.*” This is our beginning. This is our holding.

Welcome to the Franciscan Clarean Way.



Chapter 2: Sacred Belonging in a Fragmented World

The deepest hunger of the human soul is not for answers but for belonging.

In a world fractured by systemic injustice, individualism, and religious exclusion, the longing to be known, seen, and loved runs deeper than ever. For many of us—especially queer people, transgender folks, the disabled, the neurodivergent, the poor, and the spiritually exiled—belonging has often felt conditional. We've been asked to edit ourselves in order to be welcomed. We've been told to silence our truth for the sake of “unity.” We've been invited to the table, only to find the chairs chained down.

The Franciscan Clarean Way begins with a radical reversal: **You already belong.**

Not because you've conformed. Not because you've “healed.” Not because you've proven yourself.

You belong because you are.

You belong because the Spirit that made the stars and swirled galaxies into being also chose to inhabit your skin, your gender, your laughter, your scars. You belong because Christ lives not just in the polished saints of stained-glass windows, but in every queer body, every immigrant child, every autistic genius, every Black trans woman walking through this world like a holy revelation.

The Franciscan tradition has always been a theology of presence. Francis belonged not because he withdrew from the world, but because he entered into it more deeply—into the leper’s wound, into the weeping forest, into the poverty of Christ. Clare found belonging not by submitting to domination, but by forming a community where women were free to choose lives of sacred simplicity, mutual care, and spiritual resistance.

We draw from their lives to declare boldly: **Belonging is not earned. It is sacred.**

A Vow of Sacred Belonging

In the OFC, we hold belonging as one of our core spiritual vows. This vow is not a passive feeling or a warm emotion. It is an active, deliberate practice. It is a commitment to:

- **Welcome the excluded.** Especially those harmed by religious institutions.
- **Unlearn superiority.** Including the subtle hierarchies of whiteness, cisnormativity, ableism, class, and theological elitism.

- **Practice presence.** Being with people not to fix them, but to love them as they are.
- **Build spiritual kinship.** Rooted not in sameness, but in shared commitment to justice, tenderness, and joy.

In a culture that prizes productivity, the vow of belonging calls us back to communion. In a society that rewards perfection, it calls us back to grace. In churches that confuse unity with uniformity, it calls us back to the wide-open arms of Jesus who ate with outcasts and formed family with those the world deemed unworthy.



Communities of Deep Welcome

Belonging in the Franciscan Clarean tradition is not just spiritual. It is embodied. It is real.

That's why we cultivate spaces—both online and in-person—where everyone is affirmed in their full, complex identities. Our gatherings may be small, our platforms modest, but our hospitality is expansive. A Franciscan Clarean community might look like:

- A trans woman saying her morning prayers with a candle and cup of tea in her one-bedroom apartment.
- A disabled couple livestreaming vespers and sharing reflections from bed.
- A chosen family of queer friends meeting weekly to pray, eat, laugh, and grieve.
- A solitary follower who reads this Rule with tears in their eyes, feeling God draw near at last.

Wherever you are on your journey, you are not alone. You belong—not after you finish healing, but even in the midst of your wounds. You are a living sanctuary.



A Practice: The Prayer of Being

Take a few minutes to rest in the truth of your belonging. Sit quietly. Breathe slowly. Place one hand on your heart and one on your belly.

Whisper aloud:

“I belong. I am beloved. I am enough.”

Repeat it again. Let the words become a song in your bones.

You are not praying to earn God’s love.

You are praying to remember it.

In a fragmented world, sacred belonging is revolutionary. It says: You are not a mistake. You are not disposable. You are a vital part of this living, breathing Body of Christ.

Welcome home.



Chapter 3: The Rhythm of Prayer in a Noisy World

Noise is the language of empire.

It fills our timelines with distractions.
It floods our minds with comparisons.
It keeps us too busy, too anxious, too tired to hear the still, small voice that whispers:
“You are loved. You are called. You are mine.”

In a world saturated with chaos, prayer is not a retreat—it is resistance. It is the gentle, stubborn refusal to let capitalism or fear dictate the rhythm of our lives. It is the soul’s insistence that there is more to life than survival. Prayer slows us down. Prayer softens our defenses. Prayer draws us into the sacred rhythm of God’s breath.

The Franciscan Clarean Way is built upon a simple truth: **Your life is a prayer.**

You don’t need fancy words or a perfect mood to pray.
You don’t need stained glass or silence (though they can be lovely).
You just need to turn your attention—to God, to your breath, to the sacred presence already dwelling in your very being.



Franciscan Simplicity, Clarean Stillness

Saint Francis often retreated to the forest, caves, and mountains—not to escape the world, but to reconnect with the heartbeat of God. His prayers were not sophisticated theological discourses. They were love songs, spontaneous poems, cries of grief and praise. He prayed with animals, with wind and water, with his tears and with his whole body.

Saint Clare, confined to the convent, found a deeper silence. Her prayer was less dramatic, more steady. She spent long hours in contemplation, gazing upon Christ crucified and risen, letting that gaze transform her.

From Francis, we learn to pray with our bodies.

From Clare, we learn to pray with stillness.

From both, we learn that prayer is not performance—it is **presence**.

Prayer as Rhythm, Not Rule

In the OFC, we do not impose rigid schedules or required devotions. Instead, we embrace a **rhythm of prayer**—a flexible pattern that can be adapted to many life situations. The rhythm might include:

- **Morning Prayer** (upon waking): A psalm, a breath, a candle lit.
- **Midday Pause**: A moment of silence, gratitude, or re-centering.
- **Evening Prayer**: Reflection on the day, confession, blessing, release.
- **Night Watch**: When possible, a short prayer before sleep to rest in God's peace.

For those who live with disability, chronic pain, neurodivergence, or the unpredictability of survival—this rhythm is not meant to be a burden. It is a scaffold. A song you can hum when words fail. A rope to hold onto when the world feels too loud.

What Counts as Prayer?

In the Franciscan Clarean Way, we recognize that **everything can be prayer** when done with intention. Prayer can be:

- A whispered blessing over your tea.
- A song sung in the shower.
- The lighting of incense or a candle.
- A walk among trees with no headphones.
- A journal entry addressed to God.
- A sigh too deep for words.
- A moment of weeping when you can't hold it together anymore.

God is not impressed by eloquence. God is drawn to honesty. And honesty, no matter how messy, is the truest prayer there is.

A Practice: Breath Prayer

Try this simple prayer. Breathe in slowly and say in your mind:
“Beloved One...”

Breathe out slowly and say:
“...hold me now.”

Repeat this for a few minutes.
Let your breath become your connection.
Let your body pray even when your heart feels tired.



Why Prayer Matters in This World

In the noise of injustice, prayer helps us listen.
In the rush of capitalism, prayer helps us pause.
In the despair of oppression, prayer helps us hope.
And in the face of transphobia, racism, ecological collapse, and religious trauma, prayer reminds us:

You are not alone. God is with us. And we are still worthy of wonder.

Prayer, then, is not the opposite of action—it is the source of it. When we pray, we do not escape the world; we fall in love with it again. And that love will move us to act, to protest, to bless, to serve.

So pray boldly.
Pray simply.
Pray like your life is holy—because it is.



Chapter 4: Holy Rebellion — Following Christ with Franciscan Courage

To follow Jesus is to become a holy troublemaker.

It is to walk the line between tender love and bold resistance. It is to say, with your life, that no empire—whether political, religious, or cultural—gets the final word. Not when love is still rising. Not when the Spirit still burns in the hearts of the outcast and the exiled.

Francis of Assisi was no tame monk.
He was a revolutionary wrapped in rags.
He stripped naked in front of the bishop, renouncing the wealth of his family.
He kissed the leper when everyone else turned away.
He walked into war zones without armor, preaching peace.
He challenged the Church not with swords, but with simplicity.

Clare of Assisi was no passive contemplative.
She was a spiritual general, a woman of steel cloaked in softness.
She refused marriage and privilege.
She held the line against papal pressure to conform.
She wrote her own Rule—one of the first women in Christian history to do so.
She founded a community where women could live freely, in radical poverty, mutual love, and daily prayer.

They weren't rebels for rebellion's sake.
They were lovers of Christ who could not remain silent in the face of greed, hierarchy, and violence.

And neither can we.

🔥 Christ the Rebel

The Jesus we follow was executed as an enemy of the state.
He was not killed for being nice. He was killed for being dangerous.
He fed the poor. He broke Sabbath laws. He touched the

unclean.

He stormed the Temple, flipped tables, and called out religious elites.

He spoke of a Kingdom—not of domination, but of mercy.
A Kingdom that welcomed the last, the least, and the forgotten.

To follow this Jesus is to risk something.

To love in public.

To disrupt injustice.

To side with the vulnerable even when it costs you social standing, reputation, or comfort.

Holy Rebellion in the OFC

In the Order of Franciscan Clareans, we embrace **holy rebellion** not as rage without purpose, but as sacred disobedience. We pledge to resist systems of oppression—within the world, within the church, and within ourselves.

This rebellion includes:

- **Opposing white supremacy** through education, action, and reparative justice.
- **Confronting cisgender normativity** by affirming all gender identities and sexual orientations as sacred.
- **Rejecting capitalism's idols** of greed, competition, and extraction.
- **Challenging Christian nationalism** and reclaiming Jesus from empire.
- **Disrupting ableism** and making sacred space accessible for all bodies.

- **Denouncing religious trauma** while reclaiming the beauty of faith.

But we do not rebel alone. We rebel in community. We rebel with songs on our lips and candles in our hands. We rebel with poetry, protest, and prayer. We rebel by building the world we believe in—one meal, one ritual, one welcome at a time.

A Practice: Naming Your Resistance

Take a moment and reflect:

- What systems do you feel called to resist?
- What injustice grieves your spirit the most?
- Where does your holy fire burn?

Now, name one act of resistance—small or large—you can do this week. Maybe it's writing a letter.

Maybe it's calling a senator.

Maybe it's lighting a candle for a trans teen who was taken too soon.

Maybe it's saying “no more” to a voice in your head that still speaks with the cruelty of old theology.

Write it down.

Pray over it.

Do it with love.

Courage Looks Like This

Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the decision to love anyway.

It is what Clare had when she stood before soldiers with only a cross in her hands.

It is what Francis had when he spoke peace to a sultan in the middle of war.

It is what queer kids have when they come out in unsafe homes.

It is what poor people have when they choose joy in a system built to break them.

Holy rebellion is not loud for the sake of noise. It is the sacred noise of heaven interrupting empire.

So rise, beloved.

Flip your tables.

Kiss the leper.

Write your Rule.

Walk barefoot through the world, carrying nothing but love and courage and your whole beautiful, messy, queer self.

This, too, is following Christ.

Chapter 5: Beloved, Be Bold — The Gospel of Queer Love

The world told us we didn't belong.

They said we were too much, too different, too broken, too queer.
They said God could not love people like us.
And for too long, we believed them.

But here's the truth:

God delights in queer love.
God celebrates trans bodies.

God is not afraid of difference—God is difference.

The Trinity itself is a divine dance of multiplicity and unity, fluidity and communion. Queerness is not outside of God's design; it reveals God's creativity, tenderness, and expansive love.

When we say that we are beloved, we are not speaking wishfully. We are echoing the voice that thundered over the Jordan River when Jesus rose from the water:

“This is my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.”

That voice echoes over every LGBTQ+ soul—especially those who've been told they were abominations.

God does not just tolerate us. God **blesses** us. God **calls** us. God **inhabits** us.

The Gospel Is Queer

To say “the Gospel is queer” is not a gimmick. It is theology.

Jesus broke every norm of gender, purity, and power.
He traveled with women. He cried in public. He refused toxic masculinity.
He fed the hungry on the Sabbath and healed with a spit-soaked touch.

He was born to an unwed teenage girl and executed like a criminal.

His resurrection defied every expectation, every system, every binary.

The Gospel is queer because it queers the world—it flips power structures, redefines kinship, and centers love over law.

To live queerly is to live truthfully, prophetically, vulnerably.

It is to love in ways the world doesn't always understand—but that heaven recognizes as holy.

Pride as Sacred Witness

Pride Month is more than a parade or a flag.

Pride is a **sacrament of survival**.

It is holy to have survived a world that wanted you erased.

It is holy to kiss your beloved without shame.

It is holy to exist in your body—even if it's been demonized or denied.

It is holy to tell your story, to wear glitter like war paint, to show up with your full self when others would rather you disappear.

In the Order of Franciscan Clareans, we celebrate Pride not just in June, but as a lifelong vow: the vow to live **boldly**, to love **fiercely**, and to show up for one another as sacred family.

A Prayer of Queer Blessing

Take a moment. Place your hand on your heart or your chest.
Say this prayer aloud, or in your spirit:

**God of rainbows and revolution,
Bless my queer heart.
Bless my trans becoming.
Bless my body, my love, my truth.
Let no lie spoken about me
Ever silence the truth of who I am in You.
I am beloved. I am free.
I am enough.
Amen.**

Repeat this whenever the world tries to make you smaller.

A Community That Affirms

In the OFC, we don't ask you to tone it down.
We don't ask you to compromise your identity for belonging.
We ask you to bring your whole self—your glitter, your grief, your drag, your dysphoria, your joy.
You don't have to "become someone else" to be holy.
You already are.

Our community celebrates:

- Queer elders and baby gays.
- Trans folks at every stage of transition.
- Asexual and aromantic sacredness.
- Nonbinary beauty and genderfluid wisdom.

- Intersectional wholeness: Black, brown, disabled, neurodivergent, poor, femme, and fabulous.

If the world doesn't know what to do with you, **welcome**. You are exactly who we've been praying for.

Be Bold, Beloved

There is no shame in being who God made you to be.

There is no shame in your name, your pronouns, your identity.

There is no shame in choosing joy, in embracing desire, in living your truth even when others walk away.

Be bold—not because it's easy, but because it's true.

Be bold because the world needs the kind of love that only you can give.

You are not too much.

You are not alone.

You are not a mistake.

You are the Gospel walking.

You are beloved.

Be bold.

Chapter 6: What Would Francis and Clare Say About America Today?

If Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi were to walk the streets of America today, they would not be invited to speak at most churches.

They would be called radicals.

They would be dismissed as naïve idealists.

They would be accused of being “too political,” “too poor,” “too queer-adjacent,” and “too soft on sinners.”

And they would not care.

Because Francis and Clare didn’t care about maintaining comfort. They cared about following Christ.

And Christ was never cozy with empire.

Empire in a New Form

In the time of Francis and Clare, empire came in the form of feudal hierarchies, crusades, and wealth hoarded by bishops. Today, empire wears new clothes. It flies flags and quotes Scripture. It builds billion-dollar churches while people sleep outside. It praises “religious liberty” while attacking queer kids and banning books. It baptizes capitalism and calls it blessing.

If Francis and Clare were here, they would see through the false sanctity.

- They would see billionaires hoarding resources while children go hungry.
- They would see politicians using the name of Christ to pass laws that criminalize Blackness, queerness, transness, and poverty.

- They would see the planet suffocating beneath our greed.
- They would see churches protecting abusers and shaming survivors.
- And they would weep.

But they wouldn't stop at weeping.

Prophets with Bare Feet

Francis would preach in the streets, barefoot, singing of Lady Poverty.

He would join labor movements, care for the unhoused, and call for the Church to give away its riches.

He would speak out against Christian nationalism. He would likely be arrested.

Clare would open her doors to queer youth fleeing unsafe homes.

She would write letters of comfort to trans women in prison.

She would teach that true holiness is not about control, but about compassion.

She would find God in silence, but her silence would be anything but passive.

Their message would be simple but dangerous:

Follow Jesus, not Caesar. Love people, not profit. Preach peace, not power.

What They Would Condemn

Francis and Clare would not be neutral about:

- **Racism.** They would lament the legacy of white supremacy and work to dismantle it.
- **Anti-trans legislation.** They would stand beside transgender and nonbinary people and call such laws evil.
- **Climate destruction.** They would call it a sin against creation and a betrayal of the Gospel.
- **Colonial Christianity.** They would remind us that Jesus was not white, and the Gospel cannot be owned.
- **Christian nationalism.** They would reject the fusion of church and empire as idolatry.
- **Religious cruelty.** They would challenge theologies that dehumanize the vulnerable.

What They Would Bless

But their vision would not only be critique. It would be healing.

- They would bless the drag queens and street preachers.
- They would bless mutual aid networks and unhoused neighbors.
- They would bless queer lovers and chosen families.
- They would bless climate activists and water protectors.
- They would bless children who ask deep questions and elders who admit they don't have all the answers.
- They would bless every ordinary person who dares to love in a world full of fear.

A Practice: Prophetic Reflection

Sit with this question:

If Francis or Clare visited your town today, where would they go? Who would they spend time with? What would they challenge? What would they bless?

Write it down.

Pray over it.

Then ask: *What would it look like for me to live like that?*

The Church We Long For

The American church doesn't need more branding. It needs more bravery.

It doesn't need more programs. It needs more prophets.

It doesn't need bigger buildings. It needs smaller egos and open doors.

The Franciscan Clarean Way is one small attempt to be that kind of church:

a scattered order of rebels and saints, mystics and misfits, queer kids and tired elders, all doing their best to live simply, love boldly, and belong deeply.

We are not perfect.

But we are listening.

And we are trying—one prayer, one protest, one pot of soup at a time.

If Francis and Clare were alive today, they would not ask you to escape the world.

They would invite you to **fall in love with it**—and then set it on fire with justice, mercy, and joy.

And if you're reading this:

They would bless you.

Exactly as you are.



Chapter 7: Our Rule of Life and Vows

Every path worth walking needs rhythm.

Every community needs intention.

Every sacred movement needs a heartbeat.

For the Order of Franciscan Clareans, that heartbeat is our **Rule of Life**.

It is not a list of laws or burdens.

It is not a checklist for spiritual performance.

It is a rhythm of grace—a path that helps us stay rooted in love, justice, and community as we follow Jesus in the spirit of Francis and Clare.

The word “rule” comes from the Latin *regula*, meaning “trellis.” A trellis doesn’t make the plant grow—it simply supports it. In the same way, our Rule supports the flowering of our faith. It gives shape to our days and direction to our longings.

It is our anchor in a world of chaos.
It is our compass when we feel lost.
It is our sacred yes.

A Rule That Grows With You

The Franciscan Clarean Rule is not one-size-fits-all. It can be lived by:

- A queer teen in a red state seeking hope.
- A disabled elder who prays from bed.
- A family committed to compassion and simplicity.
- A solitary soul rebuilding their faith after church trauma.

You do not need to live in a monastery to live this Rule.
You only need a willing heart.

The Core Vows

The OFC is founded on **three central vows**, each with specific expressions. These vows are not exclusive to us—they echo the deep commitments of many religious traditions—but we live them in a way that reflects our unique identity as Franciscan, Clarean, queer-affirming, justice-centered followers of Jesus.

1. Loving Boldly

This is our vow to walk in the radical compassion of Christ.

- We love without condition or fear.

- We affirm the sacredness of LGBTQ+ lives, bodies, and relationships.
- We seek reconciliation, not domination.
- We show up for those who are excluded, oppressed, or forgotten.
- We reject cruelty disguised as theology.

2. Living Simply

This is our vow to resist the greed and speed of empire.

- We embrace minimalism and generosity.
- We refuse to measure our worth by what we own.
- We care for the earth and reject extractive capitalism.
- We prioritize presence over productivity.
- We slow down. We breathe. We live deliberately.

3. Belonging Deeply

This is our vow to build beloved community.

- We practice inclusion, mutuality, and sacred kinship.
- We unlearn patterns of domination, white supremacy, and isolation.
- We seek belonging that is not based on agreement, but on shared commitment to love and liberation.
- We show up—messy, real, unfinished—and welcome others to do the same.

Additional Commitments

In addition to these core vows, many Franciscan Clareans commit to:

- **Daily prayer** (in whatever form they can manage)
- **Acts of service** (especially to those on the margins)
- **Eco-conscious living**
- **Nonviolence in word and deed**
- **Radical hospitality**
- **Continual learning and unlearning**
- **Art as prayer and resistance**

These are not requirements but invitations. You are encouraged to adapt them to your context, capacity, and calling.



A Practice: Writing Your Own Personal Rule

Take a quiet moment. Light a candle. Breathe deeply.

Ask yourself:

- What grounds me in love?
- What helps me resist injustice?
- What makes me feel truly alive?
- What practices keep me close to God?

Now write a simple version of your own personal Rule of Life—maybe just three or four intentions. Keep it somewhere sacred. Let it grow with you.



Making Vows in the OFC

When someone feels called to formally join the Order, they may take public or private vows in a ritual of commitment. But vows in

the OFC aren't meant to elevate someone above others. They are declarations of love, not performance.

A person might vow:

"I promise, by the grace of God, to love boldly, live simply, and belong deeply.

I vow to walk the Franciscan Clarean path
In joy and in struggle, in solitude and in community,
As long as Christ shall call me."

And that's it.

No gatekeeping. No spiritual achievement test.

Just a heart turned toward Christ and a life rooted in compassion.

A Way, Not a Weight

We carry this Rule not as a burden but as a blessing.

It does not make us perfect. It keeps us honest.

It reminds us of who we are and whose we are.

In a loud, violent, anxious world, this Rule is our quiet resistance.

We return to it not because we have to,

But because it brings us home.

Chapter 8: Daily Rhythms and Sacred Practices

Holiness is not hidden in far-off temples.
It lives in the rhythm of your days.
In the breath between tasks.
In the ordinary moments when you remember that love is your true vocation.

The Franciscan Clarean path is not built on spiritual grandstanding.
It is built on daily choices—humble, joyful, intentional acts that reconnect us to the Divine, to the earth, and to one another.

We do not pray in order to escape the world.
We pray to love it better.
We do not fast to punish our bodies.
We fast to remember our neighbors.
We do not keep rhythm to earn grace.
We do it because we were made for music—and God is our pulse.

⌚ Why Rhythm Matters

We live in a culture of **disconnection**.
Our time is colonized by screens, deadlines, distractions, and demands.
We eat without tasting.
We scroll without thinking.
We live without landing.

Sacred rhythm is a form of healing.

Like Francis singing the hours in the forest, or Clare gazing silently upon Christ, we return again and again to the sacred flow. Not because we have to. But because we need to.

A rhythm gives our spirit breath.

It makes space for the holy to rise within our lives like yeast in dough.

And it helps us resist the empire of urgency that says, “You are what you produce.”

A Day in the Life (Flexible, Not Fixed)

There is no strict daily schedule in the OFC. Our rhythm is **adaptable**, rooted in intention, not rigidity. Here is a simple suggested flow—easily customized for your life, body, or situation:

Morning Prayer (Waking)

- Light a candle.
- Offer a breath of thanks.
- Read a short Scripture or sacred poem.
- Whisper: “Beloved, I am awake in Your love.”

Midday Pause (Centering)

- Step outside if possible.
- Say a one-sentence prayer.
- Stretch. Drink water. Breathe.
- Whisper: “Be still, and know...”

Evening Reflection (Releasing)

- Review your day: What brought joy? What brought pain?

- Confess what weighs on you.
- Give thanks for grace.
- Whisper: “Into Your hands, I release it all.”

Night Watch (Resting)

- Pray a psalm or blessing before sleep.
- If you are struggling with fear, anxiety, or trauma, wrap yourself in a blanket and say aloud: “I am safe. I am held. I am not alone.”

Sacred Practices for Daily Life

Here are additional practices you can incorporate regularly, according to your needs:

- **Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading):** Slowly read a short passage. Sit with a word or phrase. Let it speak to your spirit.
- **Franciscan Walking Prayer:** Walk slowly, mindfully. With each step say, “God is here. God is love.”
- **Clarean Gaze:** Sit quietly and gaze at a candle or icon of Christ. Allow your spirit to rest in his presence.
- **Art as Prayer:** Paint, draw, sing, dance, write poetry. Let your creativity be communion.
- **Kitchen Liturgy:** Cook with reverence. Chop vegetables like sacraments. Share meals as Eucharist.
- **Blessing Rituals:** Speak blessings over yourself, others, or the earth. Especially in moments of struggle or transition.



A Practice: Grounding in the Present

Try this prayer posture:

- Place both feet on the ground.
- Rest your hands on your lap.
- Close your eyes.
- Breathe deeply and say:
 - Inhale: "Here."
 - Exhale: "Now."
 - Inhale: "God."
 - Exhale: "Is."

Repeat slowly, letting the words anchor you in sacred presence.



Making Rhythm Accessible

For those living with disability, chronic illness, neurodivergence, trauma, or unpredictable schedules:

Your rhythm does not need to match anyone else's.

You may pray lying down. You may skip days. You may forget and begin again.

There is no shame in a rhythm that breathes with your body.

You do not fail God by being human.

The Franciscan Clarean way is not about perfect spiritual performance—it is about showing up with your whole, beloved self.

Your Life Is a Liturgy

Every time you breathe with intention—

Every time you light a candle, or speak a kind word, or rest when you are weary—

You are praying.

You are building a life of holy rhythm.

Not for show. Not for reward.

But because you were created to live in tune with the sacred pulse of love.

Return to it, again and again.

It will hold you.

Chapter 9: Symbols of the Franciscan Clarean Path

Symbols are more than decorations.

They are language for the soul.

They hold the wisdom of generations, distill sacred truths into form, and remind us—when words fail—of what is most holy.

The Franciscan Clarean Way is full of symbols that speak across centuries, across traditions, and into the bodies and hearts of the present moment. These are not empty tokens. They are living icons. They are invitations.

Some are drawn directly from the lives of Saints Francis and Clare.

Others are reimagined through queer eyes, liberationist hearts, and the bodies of those too often erased from sacred stories.

In the OFC, we treat symbols with reverence and creativity. We use them to deepen devotion, not to enforce uniformity. There is room here for tattoos and embroidery, ritual art and homemade candles, crosses and rainbows, rosaries and rocks.

The Tau Cross

The Tau (T-shaped) Cross was a beloved symbol of Saint Francis. It resembled the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *tav*, and was a mark of faithfulness and protection in the Book of Ezekiel.

Francis saw the Tau as a symbol of humility, simplicity, and being marked by God—not with pride, but with surrender.

In the OFC, the Tau Cross represents:

- Our commitment to follow Christ humbly.
- Our solidarity with the marginalized.
- Our willingness to be marked not by power, but by peace.

We often wear or draw the Tau Cross as a sign of our vow to love boldly and live simply.

The Rainbow Halo

We envision the halo not as a gold-only, elitist aura, but as a rainbow—encircling all who reflect divine love through queerness, courage, and compassion.

The **Rainbow Halo** symbolizes:

- The sanctity of LGBTQ+ lives.
- The wisdom and beauty of queer saints, named and unnamed.
- The joy of survival and the radiance of Pride.

We use rainbow halos in icons, art, and digital presence as a way of visually proclaiming: **God's glory is not limited to cis, straight, or binary people. Holiness is gender-expansive.**

Bread and Wildflowers

Francis saw the Gospel in every creature. Clare saw Christ in the bread broken and the garden blooming.

Bread and wildflowers are central symbols for us:

- **Bread:** The simplicity of sustenance, community, and Eucharist. Bread reminds us that Christ is present in what nourishes and sustains. We bless bread not only on altars, but at kitchen tables and in food pantries.
- **Wildflowers:** Fragile, beautiful, and free. Wildflowers grow without permission, resist pruning, and remind us that creation flourishes beyond control.

Together, these symbols say:

God feeds the body and delights in beauty.

Sacredness grows where it's least expected.

◆ The Mirror of Clare

Clare often spoke of "*the mirror of the soul.*" She saw Christ as a mirror in whom we recognize our truest selves—not through shame, but through love.

In the OFC, we use the **mirror** as a spiritual tool:

- To reflect on who we are becoming.
- To reject toxic theology that distorts our image.
- To remember that we are made in the image of a God who is love.

A mirror placed in your prayer space can become a holy portal—reminding you daily: *This face, this body, this person is sacred.*

🔥 Candles, Smoke, and Ash

We embrace **candlelight** as a central spiritual practice—invoking the presence of the Divine, honoring the memory of ancestors, and blessing our bodies and spaces.

Smoke from incense or herbs (such as lavender, sage, or rosemary) is used in OFC rituals for purification, grounding, and beauty.

Ash is used for:

- Remembering mortality and humility.
- Honoring grief, especially communal mourning for trans siblings taken by violence.
- Marking moments of release and rebirth.

These earthy symbols draw us into deeper embodiment—connecting heaven and flesh, spirit and soil.



Reimagining the Icon

In traditional Christian iconography, saints are often portrayed in rigid, Eurocentric, cisgender forms.

In the OFC, we bless and create **queer icons**:

- Trans Jesus with wounds that affirm trans bodies.
- Clare holding a rainbow monstrance.
- Francis surrounded by gender-nonconforming animals.
- Black and brown saints in the style of their own cultures.

Icons are not idols—they are *windows* into the holy.

We reclaim them to reflect the true diversity of God's image.



A Practice: Create Your Own Sacred Symbol

Take a moment. Reflect on your life, your journey, your body, your prayer.

- Is there a shape, color, or object that speaks to your spirit?
- What would it look like to draw, sculpt, or carry a symbol of your sacred path?

You might:

- Paint a mandala.
- Stitch a rainbow onto a stole.

- Keep a smooth stone on your altar.
- Light a candle for your name, your ancestors, or your transition.

Let the symbol speak. Let it teach you.

Symbols That Hold Us

These signs and symbols are not magic tricks. They are **threads** in the fabric of our faith. They give our theology texture. They remind us, when we forget, that holiness lives in the body, the breath, the flame, the flower.

They are not static. They evolve.
Just like us.

May these symbols hold you.
May they become companions on your sacred path.
And may they always whisper: *You are part of something beautiful, beloved, and true.*

Chapter 10: Marked by Love — A Queer and Franciscan Commentary on the Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark is the shortest, sharpest, and most urgent of the four Gospels.
It doesn't waste time.

It opens with a shout: “*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.*”

There are no birth stories. No genealogies. Just a radical invitation to follow a wandering healer, a holy troublemaker, a queer Christ who challenges empire and walks with outcasts.

Mark’s Gospel is not polished.

It is raw.

It is full of conflict and interruption.

It speaks to those of us who are always on the edge of things—on the edge of faith, the edge of society, the edge of our own endurance.

And for us Franciscan Clareans—queer, poor, exiled, hungry for a Gospel that sets captives free—Mark feels like home.

Reading Mark Through Queer and Franciscan Eyes

When we read Scripture, we do not pretend to be neutral.

We read from our context: queer bodies, trans lives, marginalized faith.

We read with Francis’s love for the poor and Clare’s longing for Christ’s face.

We read with suspicion of empire and tenderness for those religion forgets.

The Gospel of Mark shows us a Christ who:

- **Heals with touch**—even when others say, “Don’t touch them.”
- **Casts out demons**—from people, systems, and structures.

- **Breaks rules**—when those rules serve domination.
- **Centers nobodies**—especially women, foreigners, the sick, and the shamed.
- **Refuses empire**—offering instead a kin-dom of radical love.

This is the Jesus we follow.

This is the Gospel we preach.

This is the story we see ourselves inside.

Highlights from the Gospel of Mark

Let's briefly walk through some key themes, reading them not as scholars from ivory towers, but as seekers from the margins.

1. Jesus's Baptism (Mark 1:9–11)

As Jesus emerges from the waters, a voice declares:

“You are my beloved child. With you I am well pleased.”

We hear this as the affirmation of every queer person rejected by their family.

We hear it as a trans baptism. A coming out. A naming.

Before Jesus does anything, God affirms his identity.

You do not earn your belovedness. You begin with it.

2. The Exorcisms

In Mark, Jesus is constantly casting out demons. But these are not horror movie specters—they are systems, stigmas, traumas.

To us, exorcism means:

- Liberating people from shame-based religion.

- Casting out transphobia from pulpits.
- Naming white supremacy as unclean.
- Resisting internalized oppression.

Jesus's exorcisms are acts of solidarity and spiritual defiance.

3. The Woman with the Flow of Blood (Mark 5:25–34)

A bleeding woman, unclean by religious law, dares to touch Jesus. And instead of scolding her, Jesus **calls her “Daughter.”**

This is a story for anyone whose body has been shamed.
For trans women misgendered in public.
For disabled people made to feel like burdens.
Jesus not only heals her—he affirms her identity.

4. Feeding the Multitudes

Francis fed the poor with what little he had. Clare organized her sisters to provide bread in famine.

Jesus, in Mark, feeds crowds not by magic—but through **shared abundance.**

He blesses what is given, breaks it, and multiplies it.

We see this in mutual aid, in food justice, in trans folks caring for one another when the system won't.

This is not charity. It's Gospel.

5. The Transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8)

Jesus is transformed on the mountaintop—shining, radiant, beyond recognition.

Queer and trans readers might see this moment as a holy echo of **gender euphoria**—the glory of being seen as you truly are.

Not just tolerated, but dazzling.

The transfigured Christ reminds us:
Your true self is not a sin. It is a light.

6. The Cross (Mark 15)

Mark's Jesus is not a triumphant conqueror.
He is abandoned, mocked, bleeding.
And yet—this is where God is.

Not in the palaces.
Not in the temples.
But on the margins. In the dark. In the body of the crucified.

To the OFC, this means we see Christ:

- In trans teens enduring violence.
- In immigrants in detention.
- In disabled folks denied care.
- In ourselves, when we feel forgotten.

And in the resurrection—yes, even in Mark's mysterious ending—we believe the story doesn't end in death.
Love always rises.

A Practice: Queer Gospel Meditation

Take a story from the Gospel of Mark. Read it slowly.

Ask:

- Who do I identify with?
- Where is the Spirit moving in this scene?
- What does this say to me as a queer or trans person?

Then rewrite the story in your own words, from your perspective.
Make it a prayer. Make it your own Gospel.

Why Mark Matters

Mark is the Gospel for people who've been cut off, cast out, and left without answers.

It is fast, messy, honest.

It is a story that doesn't tie up every loose end—because life rarely does.

And yet: it is good news.

Not because it makes everything easy, but because it tells the truth.

The truth that love is stronger than shame.

That community is greater than power.

That Christ walks with us still—on the road, in the kitchen, in the drag show, in the protest, in our broken hearts.

You are marked by love.

Not by doctrine, not by performance, not by shame.

You are marked by the One who healed, fed, wept, resisted, and rose.

That is the Gospel.

That is Mark's story.

And it is yours.



Chapter 11: Conclusion — Walking Forward Together

The path ahead is not paved in gold.
It is not lined with certainty, comfort, or applause.
It is winding, often hidden, occasionally steep.

But it is holy.

Because you are not walking it alone.

You walk with Francis, who kissed the leper and preached to the birds.

You walk with Clare, who held the light through the night.
You walk with Jesus, who was born poor, lived wild, and rose queerly from the tomb of empire.

And you walk with us—the scattered community of Franciscan Clareans, bound not by buildings, but by love.



The Journey Is Ongoing

This book is not the end. It is only a beginning.

The Rule of Life you carry is not a final answer—it is a living question.

Your vows are not chains—they are wings.
Your rhythm is not a prison—it is a path that leads you home.

And “home” isn’t just heaven or some far-off mystical place.
It’s here.
It’s in your breath, your belonging, your becoming.
It’s in the community of saints and sinners and sacred rebels
walking alongside you.

A Blessing for the Road

Beloved child of God,
You were never meant to walk this path alone.
You carry the fire of Clare, the peace of Francis,
And the fierce love of Christ who walks with the broken.

May your prayers be honest.
May your rage be righteous.
May your joy be contagious.
May your love be revolutionary.

And when the road gets rough—
May you hear the Spirit whisper:
“Keep going. I am with you. Always.”

Go, then.
Love boldly.
Live simply.
Belong deeply.

You are already enough.

What Comes Next?

If this book has spoken to your soul, you are warmly invited to continue walking this path with us. There is no test, no threshold, no spiritual credit score.

There is only the open door.

You can:

- **Live the Rule** in your own way, wherever you are.
- **Pray with us**—in solitude, online, or in shared rhythm.
- **Support one another** with tenderness and truth.
- **Start a small OFC gathering**, if the Spirit leads you.
- **Reach out** if you need support, ritual, or guidance.

Visit our blog and ongoing reflections at

 SisterAbigailHester.com

 **A Final Word**

The world is hungry for justice, aching for belonging, and desperate for a faith that is brave enough to love without fear.

Let us be that faith.

Let us be that community.

Let us be that quiet rebellion,

Rooted in joy, watered with tears, blooming with grace.

You, dear reader, are part of this story now.

Go gently. Go boldly.

We are with you.

 **Dedication**

To the queer kids who were told God couldn't love them—
To the trans women who found holiness in their reflection—
To the poor, the sick, the seekers, the lonely—
To the misfits who walked away from church but never stopped
longing for God—
To every soul who still dares to believe that love is stronger than
fear—

This book is for you.

You are the temple.
You are the testimony.
You are the revolution that empire cannot erase.

May you never forget:
You are not too much.
You are not alone.
You are beloved.

 **Appendices****Appendix A: Daily Prayer Template****Morning (Upon Waking)**

- Light a candle
- Say: “I am beloved. I awaken in love.”
- Psalm or breath prayer
- Intention for the day

Midday Pause

- Step away from work or devices
- Say: “Be still and know...”
- Stretch or breathe
- Offer a silent prayer for someone in need

Evening Prayer

- Reflect on your day: What brought joy? What needs release?
- Name gratitudes and griefs
- Prayer of confession and blessing
- Say: “Into your hands, I release it all.”

Before Sleep

- Rest hand on heart
- Say: “God of peace, I am held.”

Appendix B: Create-Your-Own Rule of Life

Use this simple framework:

I vow to...

- Love _____
- Live _____
- Belong _____

Examples:

- “I vow to love boldly in my queer family.”

- “I vow to live simply through generosity and eco-consciousness.”
- “I vow to belong deeply by building accessible spiritual spaces.”

Review and revise your Rule as your life unfolds.
Your faith is alive—let it evolve with grace.

Appendix C: Recommended Resources

- *The Gospel According to Jesus* – by Stephen J. Patterson (Westar Institute)
- *Clare of Assisi: A Heart Full of Love* – by Ilia Delio
- *Franciscan Theology of the Environment* – by Daniel P. Horan
- *Transfaith.org* – Transgender spiritual resources and support
- *Enfleshed.com* – Queer liturgies and justice-rooted worship materials
- *The Queer Bible Commentary* – ed. Deryn Guest et al.
- *Living Resistance* – by Kaitlin B. Curtice

Final Blessing Prayer

Holy One of the open fields and secret closets,
Of the loud street and the quiet breath,

Bless the reader of this book—
Not because they are perfect,
But because they are trying.

Bless them with sacred stubbornness
To keep choosing love in a cruel world.

Bless their queerness, their softness,
Their questions, their courage.

May their hands be instruments of peace.
May their heart be a tabernacle of tenderness.
May their voice rise with the prophets
Who cry out against injustice and sing in resistance.

May they know, in every storm and silence,
That You, O God, are with them—

Not as judge.
But as friend.

Not as gatekeeper.
But as midwife.

Not as oppressor.
But as co-struggler,
Crucified and risen in love.

Let it be so.
Amen.
