

(English translation)

Castelgandolfo, 27 June 2002

A Great Little Idea

... We don't always live in a radical way the will of God in the present moment. Every once in a while, and then always more often, the desires and preferences of our own will take over, to the detriment – we are convinced of this – of our perfection. This negative consequence is recognized not only by us Christians, but also by others, like Buddhists, for example, who, in order to attain peace and happiness, learn to turn off all human desires. In fact, their symbol is an unlit candle.

... Unlike the faithful of Eastern religions – our symbol would be a lighted candle. In fact, the Holy Spirit infused in our hearts the fire of supernatural love which, if kept alive, inspires us with heavenly desires, thus cancelling by extinguishing those that are earthly, too human.

But what should we do if these desires crop up again? And if our love for the will of God in the present moment begins to fade, how can we realign ourselves with it?

Turning around our ego in the right direction wouldn't be a bad idea. We are always poor sinners in need of correction, of something decisive that can help us, perhaps some little thing, maybe banal, but useful.

The saints say this too.

One day I received an illustrated book with beautiful, colourful drawings on the life of Clare of Assisi. They related important moments, episodes of the saint's life, depicted with simplicity and candour, but in a very gracious and attractive way. I don't remember all of them. There was undoubtedly her encounter with St. Francis and the gift of herself to God at Portiuncula; her life with the other sisters, filled with charity, that "halt" when she had the Blessed Sacrament placed in a monstrance above the gate of the monastery facing the Saracen invaders; the Pope's visit to St. Damian with the miracle of the cross on the loaves of bread, Clare's most edifying death in the midst of the anguished weeping of her sisters – all generally well-known events reproduced by a very talented artist.

And then, in the midst of these episodes, there was one that surprised me: the saint counting her acts of love every day by collecting little stones in a vase.

"What?", I said to myself. "Wasn't Clare of Assisi a person with immense, far-reaching horizons, a beacon of Wisdom for the world of her times? Wasn't she that *'praeclara'*, that radiant brilliance which no adjective of light could describe?"

And yet, there she is using little stones to make sure that on that day she loved more than on the previous day; to verify that her love for God and neighbour had grown.

It was a surprise for me, but also an encouragement: that painting explained and highlighted a need we feel every now and then in my focolare: to count by some means, in some way, our acts of love for God, for his will or for our neighbour, no more, no less than what the gen 4 do.

... Why don't we find a way to count the times in which our living the present moment each day was a conquest for us, a death to our ego, and therefore, an act of love for Jesus forsaken?

Couldn't this be a way to help us keep the candle burning? ... I'm convinced that it is. This is why I am beginning to do so and I hope that I won't be the only one.