

# Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation

By Pat Brandwein-Ball SFO, JPIC Transition Chair  
patball76@yahoo.com

## Praying with Eyes Open

My Ordinary Time reading and meditations bring me into the heart of Lent. In the book, *Praying with Icons* by Jim Forest, he speaks of the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox tradition of gazing at an icon and keeping one's eyes open while praying. Through this practice, relationship develops and deepens with the "subject" of the icon. It is nothing new, using an icon or Western depiction of Jesus, Mary, saints, or an event as a focus of meditation. Keeping my eyes open the entire time is new. One begins to see with the eyes of Jesus—you become what you gaze upon.

St. Clare outlines a prayer tradition in a similar manner, a Franciscan prayer tradition: \*

- *Gaze... to look at with loving attention*
- *Meditate... thoughtfully consider*
- *Contemplate... oneness with, listening/openness*
- *Imitate... become what you contemplate*

With eyes open, one's gaze is intermixed - Christ with the surrounding world. We often close our eyes in prayer to rid ourselves of distractions. Yet, the distraction begs for our prayer and attention. I don't mean the idle wandering of the mind when I speak of distraction, rather that a particular person or situation coming to mind. This compels listening for how to respond. Praying with my eyes open broadens my view of the world around me. Everything is more vibrant, more alive, perhaps more real than I have previously experienced.

The icon, "Virgin of the Sign" is quite ancient. Mary faces forward, her hands open and raised in prayer. On her breast is a medallion bearing the image of the Christ Child with His right hand raised in blessing. Mary represents the entire Church raising her hands in prayer to God. Christ, born of the Virgin, is borne by the Church, carried into the world. May we be the Christ-blessing to others. May our eyes be opened to those in need. May we be courageous and generous in our response.

Recall that intellect and will are faculties of the soul in considering our response. Therefore every decision to

respond to the needs of others is sacred and filled with all that is holy. Every decision not to respond is empty of sacredness. Praying with our eyes open transforms us and aids in making present the Kingdom of God.

Consider Matthew 25: 34-46:

*Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him and say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?" And the king will say to them in reply, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."*

*Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me." Then they will answer and say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?" He will answer them, "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me."*

*And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.*

## Being and Doing:

Pray with your special holy image, with your eyes open. Ask for the grace to see with the eyes of Christ and to respond with a transformed heart.

Throughout the day, interiorly return to the image. Allow your prayer time to slow down the hurry of life and awaken a sense of the sacred in you towards everyone and all of creation.

Be blessing to others and receive blessing from those you bless. Pope John Paul II says this returned blessing is the other half of our conversion.\*\*

\*See *Franciscan Prayer*, by Ilia Delio, OSF, p 67

\*\* Encyclical *Rich in Mercy*, John Paul II