

The Canticle

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Voice of
The Community
of St. Francis,
Province of
The Americas

WINTER



Winter is the time of letting go, releasing, dying. However, this is not death as in ending, but death as transition. Like a baby in the womb, life goes underground into silence and seclusion.

The cave is a womb image: passage graves, goddess-shaped Neolithic shrines on Malta, Paleolithic caves, the Gothic apse, kivas, Neolithic long barrows, Islamic Mosque domes. The womb-cave has attracted countless seekers, pilgrims, heroes, ascetics, mystics, prophets and sages in their quest to reunite with the origins in the primal darkness. The womb-cave is the archetype of every holy-of-holies. "It is as though architecture has recorded for eternity the forgotten goal of religion—to reunite with the feminine principle in order to transcend duality and attain wholeness, openness and enlightenment. The feminine principle includes not only the physical power of fertility, birth, nurturance and sexuality, but also the

spiritual and intellectual power of prophecy, divination, death, transformation and resurrection." (Mimi Lobell "The Buried Treasure" in *Woman of Power* magazine).

To journey into this interior world within
Love must be awakened.
For love to awaken in us:
Let go, let be.
Be still in gentle peace,
Be aware of opposites,
Learn mindfulness and forgetfulness.
(Camille Campbell *Meditations with Teresa of Avila*)

The natural world around us makes its way daily deeper into the darkness and death of winter. Winter is a barren time. We can see around us the increasing number of barren trees, with bare branches above and rotting leaves below. But perhaps barren is a misnomer,

because what we are really talking about is fallow time. Jesus told us that the seed must die and go into the earth in order to produce new life. The fallow winter is about waiting in hopeful expectation. We know from experience that the bare branches around us will in time produce new growth. The time of fallowness, of dormancy, of death is essential for life. The rotting leaves underfoot that make the sidewalks so slippery produce mulch and nutrients for the new growth. The roses in our garden have to be artificially put into dormancy by pruning the branches and stripping off the leaves in order that the plants can re-gather their strength for the spring growth.

As Christians we cannot think of death except in the context of life—the baptismal prayer tells us we are buried with Christ in his death in our baptism and raised with him in his resurrection. On the other side of the death of the winter is the new birth of spring.

Winter is both the last and the first season of the year; it occupies a special place on the religious calendar and in the Earth's life cycle. To Christians, it's the season of Jesus' birth. In nature, it's the season when animals hibernate and the trees gather sap. Like the Sabbath, winter is a sacred time set aside for all Creation to rest and regroup in preparation for spring.



Winter is the time for gathering at the home. People travel from far to go “to grandmother’s house.” We sing songs about being home for the holidays.



At home we gather around the table for the Thanksgiving and Christmas feasts and afterwards huddle around the fireplace and tell stories. The Advent Retreat at the Bishop’s Ranch which Sr. Maggie and I facilitate each year always features these comfortable gatherings around the various fireplaces that burn cleared logs from the grounds—a great opportunity for those of us from San Francisco with our “Spare the Air Days” discouraging us from burning wood in our decorative fireplace.

May this winter be for you a sacred time of preparing for the newness that will come with the spring.

Pamela Clare, CSF

COMPANIONS IN FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY 2019

Three Ten Day Residential Immersions in Franciscan Spirituality. Join the Sisters of the Community of St. Francis in a study of Franciscan Spirituality and a living out of that spirituality through participation in our life of prayer, work, ministry, and community. Open to any interested woman over 18. Room and board provided as part of this free program, but donations are always welcome. (Note: St. Francis House is not wheelchair accessible).

Holy Week/Easter Immersion, April 12-22

Summer Immersion, July 19-29

St. Francis Day Immersion, Sept. 27-October 7

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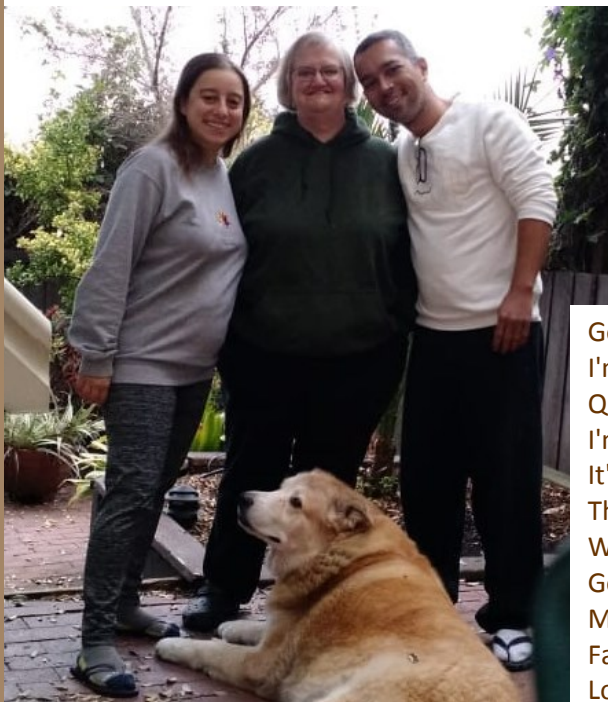
Homeward Bound

Sr. Ruth, CSF

The Family Link is a guesthouse for families who come to San Francisco to be with a gravely or terminally ill loved one. For over thirty years we have seen guests come and go, from small towns in rural California and from six continents.

Some families come to support and encourage their loved ones through a critical time – after a traumatic brain injury, an advanced cancer treatment, an organ transplant etc. Many of these patients will be going home to recover, some sporting hats or T-shirts saying, “I really did leave my heart in San Francisco!” or “I got my heart in San Francisco!”

During this past summer the parents of two babies stayed at The Family Link. Both babies were micro-preemies – Rafael born at 24 weeks (40 is normal) and weighing under a pound and Jaylah at 25 weeks and one and a half pounds. Both parents were just visiting San Francisco for a few days and ended up staying months. The babies survived and it was a great joy that they went home, hopefully to live happy, healthy lives.



Sr. Ruth (and Morag) at the Family Link with the Brazilian couple who had the 24 week baby, Rafael.

Goin' home, goin' home,
I'm a goin' home;
Quiet-like, some still day,
I'm jes' goin' home.
It's not far, jes' close by,
Through an open door;
Work all done, care laid by,
Goin' to fear no more.
Mother's there 'spectin' me,
Father's waitin' too;
Lots o' folk gather'd there,
All the friends I knew,
All the friends I knew.
Home, I'm goin' home!

Sadder by far are the families who lose their loved one. They often bid us farewell with a hug and tears, but not the excited wave we get from those who had a successful journey from critical illness to recovering health. The bereaved leave quietly, returning home to take in the magnitude of a death. We recently said farewell to a large family. The son/brother had become critically ill very suddenly at the age of nineteen. The cause of his illness was never determined. He turned twenty while on life support and died within weeks. I watched the family gather up their things and leave – they were carrying a huge mylar balloon which had printed on it, “Happy Birthday”. Perhaps it will become a keepsake for the family. For me it was a symbol that the young man had shed his earthly body to travel light as air to his Creator.

The dark days of heartache are, in my opinion, best done at home. The faith traditions and cultures that encourage the bereaved to stay home make a lot of sense. In the familiar surroundings of one's home there is freedom to weep, to speak one's memories, to laugh, to rage, to come to know the profound nature of loss and to allow in the first glimmers of restorative recovery and resurrection to pierce the darkness.

Text: William Arms Fisher Music: Antonin Dvorak

Goin' Home

Nothin lost, all's gain,
No more fret nor pain,
No more stumblin' on the way,
No more longin' for the day,
Goin' to roam no more!
Mornin' star lights the way,
Res'less dream all done;
Shadows gone, break o' day,
Real life jes' begun.
There's no break, there's no end,
Jes' a livin' on;
Wide awake, with a smile
Goin' on and on.
Goin' home, goin' home,
I'm jes' goin' home,
goin' home, goin' home, goin' home!

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WINTER



The Canticle—digital version
Send us your e-mail address!

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