

The Spiritual Practice of Passionate Love Prayers **By Joe Colletti, PhD**

The writings of church mystics are filled with prayers that passionately express a love of Jesus Christ that is born out of his suffering and death upon the cross.¹ An intense expression of this passion can be found in a prayer of the 13th century saint, Clare of Assisi, who wrote

“Praise and glory be to you, O Loving Jesus Christ, for the most sacred wound in your side, and by that adorable wound and by your infinite mercy which you made known to us in the opening of your breast to the soldier Longinus, and so to us all. I pray you, O most gentle Jesus, having redeemed me by baptism from original sin, so now by your precious blood, which is offered and received throughout the world, deliver me from all evils, past, present and to come. And, by your most bitter death give me a lively faith, a firm hope and a perfect charity, so that I may love you with all my heart and all my soul and all my strength; make me firm and steadfast in good works and grant me perseverance in your service, so that I may be able to please you always. Amen.”

For Clare of Assisi, the wounds, blood, and death of Christ are expressions of the deep intimate love that her savior displayed to her centuries earlier. She noted the wounds of Christ as “sacred” and “adorable,” his blood as “precious,” and his death as “most bitter” which is followed by her sweet desire for a “lively faith, a firm hope and a perfect charity,” so that she may love Christ with all her heart and all her soul and all her strength in order to please him always.

The 16th century saint, Teresa of Avila, expressed similar feelings of intimacy also based upon the suffering and death of Christ upon the cross. She prayed

“My God, because you are so good, I love you with all my heart, and for your sake I love my neighbor as myself. If I love you, it is not just because of heaven which you promised; if I fear to offend you, it is not because hell threatens me. What draws me to you, O Lord, is yourself alone, it is the sight of you, nailed to the cross for me, your body bruised in the pains of death. Your love so holds my heart that, if there were no heaven, I would love you still. If there were no hell I would even still fear to offend you. I do not need your gifts to make me love you, for even if I

¹ The passionate love prayers are taken from the **Prayer Book of the Saints**, compiled and edited by Rev. Charles Dollen, Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1984.

should have no help of hope at all the things I do hope for, I would still love you with that very same love. Amen.”

What draws out her deep love for Christ is the sight of him “nailed to the cross” for her and his “body bruised in the pains of death.” She is so gripped by the painful love that Christ expressed that “so holds (her) heart” that “if there were no heaven” she would still love him and if “there were no hell” she would “still fear to offend” him. She culminates her feelings of love by stating that even if she should have no “hope at all (of) the things I do hope for,” she would still love her savior with the very same love.

A very intimate, passionate interpersonal relationship was felt by past saints that stemmed from their belief that the love that Christ expressed through his death on the cross can be felt hundreds of years later. The 16th century saint, Francis Xavier, unmistakably makes this point in his following prayer when he notes the “bloody sweats” from “a thorny crown” that “transpierced (Christ’s) sacred brow” where expressions of love both in the past and in the present. “Such as then was and is your love for me,” and his response is “such is and shall be still my love for thee.”

O God, you are the object of my love, not for the hope of endless joys above, nor for the fear of endless pains below, which those who love you not must undergo. For me and such as me, you once did bear the ignominious cross, the nails, the spear; a thorny crown transpierced your sacred brow; what bloody sweats from every member flow. Such as then was and is your love for me, such is and shall be still my love for thee; Your love, O Jesus, will I ever sing—O God of love, sweet savior, dearest king.

What follows is a compilation of Passionate Love Prayers that further express the deep intimate interpersonal relationships that were felt by past saints. Not all of the prayers explicitly describe the wounds, blood, and death of Jesus Christ. The prayers, however, explicitly describe the mutual loving relationship that the saints felt which is based upon the love that Christ expressed to all of humanity when he died on the cross and out of the same love that he expresses to all of humanity today.

A Passionate Love Prayer of
Crescentia Hoess
(1682-1744)

Grant, O God, that love and suffering may grow hand in hand in me, so that I may love you more and more with the cheerful disposition which is the fruit of love. O Lord, only grant me love for you, and I shall be rich enough. I desire only that you leave me to my nothingness and that you alone, if I may say so, be all in all and loved and honored by everybody. I wish to take pleasure in nothing but only in you and your love.

A Passionate Love Prayer of
Clare of Assisi
(1194-1253)

Praise and glory be to you, O Loving Jesus Christ, for the most sacred wound in your side, and by that adorable wound and by your infinite mercy which you made known to us in the opening of your breast to the soldier Longinus, and so to us all. I pray you, O most gentle Jesus, having redeemed me by baptism from original sin, so now by your precious blood, which is offered and received throughout the world, deliver me from all evils, past, present and to come. And, by your most bitter death give me a lively faith, a firm hope and a perfect charity, so that I may love you with all my heart and all my soul and all my strength; make me firm and steadfast in good works and grant me perseverance in your service, so that I may be able to please you always. Amen.

A Passionate Love Prayer of
Claude de la Colombiere
(1641-1682)

O Jesus, you are my true friend, my only friend. You take a part in all my misfortunes; you take them upon yourself; you know how to change them into blessings. You listen to me with the greatest kindness when I relate my troubles to you, and you always have balm to pour on my wounds. I find you at all times; I find you everywhere; you never go away; if I have to change my dwelling, I find you wherever I go.

You never weary of listening to me; You are never tired of doing me good. I am certain of being loved by you if I love you; my goods are nothing to you, and by bestowing yours on me, you never grow poor. However, miserable I may be, no one more noble or learned or even holier can come between you and me and deprive me of your friendship; and death, which tears us away from all other friends, will unite me to you forever.

All the humiliations attached to old age, or to loss of honor, will never detach me from you. On the contrary, I shall never enjoy you more fully, and you will never be closer to me than when everything seems to conspire against me, to overwhelm me and to cast me down. You bear with all my faults with extreme patience. Even my want of fidelity and my ingratitude do not wound you to such a degree as to make you unwilling to receive me back when I return to you. O Jesus! Grant that I may die praising you; that I may die loving you; that I may die for love of you. Amen.

A Passionate Love Prayer of
Francis Xavier
(1506-1552)

O God, you are the object of my love, not for the hope of endless joys above, nor for the fear of endless pains below, which those who love you not must undergo. For me and such as me, you once did bear the ignominious cross, the nails, the spear; a thorny crown transpierced your sacred brow; what bloody sweats from every member flow. Such as then was and is your love for me, such is and shall be still my love for thee; Your love, O Jesus, will I ever sing—O God of love, sweet savior, dearest king.

A Passionate Love Prayer of
Margaret Mary Alacoque
(1647-1690)

O Jesus, my supreme good, I love you, not for the sake of the reward which you have promised to those who love you, but purely for yourself. I love you above all things that can be loved, above all pleasures, and above myself and all that is not you, promising in the presence of heaven and earth that I will live and die purely and simply in your holy love, and that if to love you thus I must endure persecution and suffering, I am completely satisfied and I will ever say with St. Paul: Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God. O Jesus, supreme master of all hearts, I love you, I adore you, I praise you, I thank you, because I am now all yours. Rule over me and transform my soul into the likeness of yourself, so that it may bless and glorify you forever in the abode of the saints. Amen.

A Passionate Love Prayer of
Paschal Baylon
(1540-1592)

I desire to love you, my Lord, My Light, my Strength, my Deliverer, my God and my all. What have I in heaven, O God, and what do I want besides you on earth? My

spirit and my body languish with yearning for your majesty. You are the God of my heart. You are my portion, my inheritance for eternity. Amen.

A Passionate Love Prayer of
Teresa of Avila
(1515-1582)

My God, because you are so good, I love you with all my heart, and for your sake I love my neighbor as myself. If I love you, it is not just because of heaven which you promised; if I fear to offend you, it is not because hell threatens me. What draws me to you, O Lord, is yourself alone, it is the sight of you, nailed to the cross for me, your body bruised in the pains of death. Your love so holds my heart that, if there were no heaven, I would love you still. If there were no hell I would even still fear to offend you. I do not need your gifts to make me love you, for even if I should have no help of hope at all the things I do hope for, I would still love you with that very same love. Amen.

A Passionate Love Prayer of
Therese of Lisieux
(1873-1897)

O Jesus, who in your cruel passion became the reproach of men and the man of sorrows, I worship your divine face. Once it shone with the beauty and sweetness of the Divinity; now for my sake it has become the face of a leper. Yet in that disfigured countenance I recognize your infinite love and I am consumed with the desire for loving you and of making you loved by all humanity. The tears that streamed in such abundance from your eyes are to me as precious pearls which I delight to gather, that with their infinite worth I may ransom the souls of poor sinners. O Jesus, whose face is the sole beauty that ravishes my heart, I may not behold here upon earth the sweetness of your glance, nor feel the ineffable tenderness of your kiss. I consent to this, but I pray you to imprint in me your divine likeness, and I implore you so to inflame me with your love that it may quickly consume me, and soon I may reach the vision of your glorious face in heaven. Amen.

A Passionate Love Prayer of
Therese of Lisieux
(1873-1897)

I consider that all is vanity but to love God and serve him alone. The grace which I especially ask, O Jesus, is never to offend you. My gifts are all unworthy, and so I offer you my very soul, O most loving Savior. I fear only one thing, my God, to keep my own will. Take it, therefore, for I choose all that you choose. It is confidence and nothing else that leads one to love. And what offends Jesus, what wounds

his heart, is lack of trust in him. If souls, who are as feeble and as imperfect as I, could feel as I feel, no one would despair of reaching the summit of the mountain of love. Jesus, indeed, does not demand great deeds, but only self-surrender and gratitude. O my beloved, I offer myself to you, that you may perfectly accomplish in me your holy designs, and I will not allow anything created to be an obstacle to their accomplishment.

A Passionate Love Prayer of
Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)

Dear Lord Jesus, your broken heart is the source of my salvation, the foundation of my hope, the cause of my love. It is the sacred place where all that was, is, and ever shall be is held in unity. There all suffering has been suffered, all anguish lived, all loneliness endured, all abandonment felt and all agony cried out. There, human and divine love has kissed, and there God and all men and women of history are reconciled. All the tears of the human race have been cried there, all pain understood and all despair touched. Together with all people of all times, I look up to you whom they have pierced, and I gradually come to know what it means to be part of your body and your blood, what it means to be human.