

## The First Letter to Agnes of Prague

(1234)

<sup>1</sup>To the esteemed and most holy virgin, Lady Agnes, daughter of the most excellent and illustrious King of Bohemia, <sup>a</sup> <sup>2</sup>Clare, an unworthy servant of Jesus Christ and *useless*<sup>b</sup> <sup>Lk 17:10</sup> handmaid of the enclosed Ladies of the Monastery of San Damiano, her subject and handmaid in all things, commends herself totally with special reverence that *she may attain the glory*<sup>Sir 50:5</sup> of everlasting happiness.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>3</sup>I greatly *rejoice* and exult in the Lord on hearing the fame of Your holy conduct and irreproachable life, [a fame] that has wonderfully reached not only me but almost the whole world,<sup>d</sup> <sup>4</sup>and so not only I, but all who serve and desire to serve Jesus Christ are able to rejoice. <sup>5</sup>For, though You, more than others, could have enjoyed the magnificence, honor, and dignity of the world and could have been married to the illustrious Emperor with splendor befitting You and His Excellency, <sup>6</sup>You have rejected all these things and have chosen with Your whole heart and soul a life of holy poverty and bodily want.<sup>a</sup> <sup>7</sup>Thus You took a spouse of a more noble stock,<sup>b</sup> Who will keep Your virginity ever unspotted and unsullied, the Lord Jesus Christ,

<sup>8</sup>Whom in loving, You are chaste;  
in touching, You become more pure;  
in embracing, You are a virgin;<sup>c</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Whose strength is more robust, generosity more lofty,  
Whose appearance is more handsome, love more courteous,  
and every kindness more refined,

<sup>10</sup>Whose embrace already holds you;

Who has adorned Your breast with precious stones, placed priceless pearls on Your ears,<sup>d</sup>

<sup>11</sup>surrounded You completely with blossoms of springtime and sparkling gems  
and placed on Your head

*a golden crown as a sign of Your holiness.* <sup>Sir 45:14 e</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, most beloved sister, or should I say, Lady worthy of great respect, because You are *the spouse and the mother and the sister*<sup>2 Cor 11:2 Mt 12:50</sup> of my Lord Jesus Christ<sup>f</sup> <sup>13</sup>and are beautifully adorned with the banners of an undefiled virginity and a most holy poverty, be strengthened in the holy service of the Poor Crucified undertaken with a passionate desire,

<sup>14</sup>Who *endured*<sup>Heb 12:02</sup> the suffering of the cross for us all,  
delivering *us from the power* of the prince

*of darkness* <sup>Col 1:13</sup>

to which we had been enslaved by the disobedience of our first parent,

thus *reconciling us*<sup>2 Cor 5:18</sup> to God the Father.

<sup>15</sup>O blessed poverty,

who bestows eternal riches

on those who love and embrace her! <sup>16</sup>O holy poverty,

God promises the kingdom of heaven

and, beyond any doubt, reveals eternal glory

and blessed life to those who have and desire her!

<sup>17</sup>O God-centered poverty,<sup>a</sup>

whom the Lord Jesus Christ

Who ruled and still rules heaven and earth,<sup>b</sup>

Who spoke and things were made, <sup>Ps 32:9 [Vulgate, Ps 31:9] Ps 148:5</sup>

came down to embrace before all else!

<sup>18</sup>He says: For the foxes have dens, *and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man, Christ, has nowhere to lay His head, but bowing His head He gave up His spirit.* <sup>Mt 8:20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>If so great and good a Lord, then, on coming into the Virgin's womb, <sup>Jn 19:30</sup> wanted to appear despised, *needy,* <sup>2 Cor 8:9</sup> and poor in this world, <sup>20</sup>so that people who were very poor and needy, suffering excessive hunger of heavenly nourishment, may become rich in Him by possessing the kingdom of heaven, <sup>21</sup>*be very joyful and glad,* filled with a remarkable happiness and a spiritual joy! <sup>22</sup>Because, since contempt of the world has pleased You more than its honors, poverty more than earthly riches, You have sought to store up greater treasures not on earth but in heaven, <sup>23</sup>*where* <sup>Mt 6:20</sup> rust does not consume *nor moth destroy nor thieves break in and steal, Your reward is very rich in heaven!* <sup>Mt 5:12</sup> <sup>24</sup>And You are virtually<sup>a</sup> worthy to be called *a sister, spouse and mother* <sup>2 Cor 11:2</sup> <sup>Mt 12:50</sup> of the Son of the Most High Father and of the glorious Virgin.

<sup>25</sup>For I firmly believe that you know *the kingdom of heaven* <sup>Mt 5:3</sup> is promised and given by the Lord only *to the poor* because she who loves what is temporal loses the fruit of love; <sup>26</sup>*that it is not possible to serve God and money,*<sup>b</sup> for *either the one is loved and the other hated, or the one is served and the other despised;* <sup>Mt 6:24</sup> <sup>27</sup>that one clothed cannot fight another naked, because she who has something to be caught hold of is more quickly thrown to the ground;<sup>c</sup> <sup>28</sup>that one who lives in the glory of earth cannot rule with Christ; and that it is easier for *a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.* <sup>Mt 19:24</sup> <sup>29</sup>Therefore, You have cast aside Your garments, that is, earthly riches, so that instead of being overcome by the one fighting against You, You will be able to enter the kingdom of heaven through *the straight path and the narrow gate.* <sup>Mt 7:13</sup> <sup>Mt 7:14</sup>

<sup>30</sup>What a great and praiseworthy bargain (*commercium*): to barter the temporal for the eternal; to gain the heavenly in exchange for the earthly; *to receive the hundred-fold* in place of one, and *to possess* a blessed eternal life. <sup>31</sup>Because of this I have led Your excellency and holiness, as best I can, to beg with humble prayers *in the heart of Christ,* that You be strengthened in His holy service, <sup>32</sup>progressing from good to better, *from virtue to virtue,* so that He Whom You serve with the total desire of Your soul may bestow on You the reward for which You so long. <sup>33</sup>Therefore, as much as I can, I also implore You in the Lord, to include me in *Your* most holy *prayers,* Your servant, though *useless,* <sup>Rom 15:30</sup> and the other sisters with me in the monastery, who are all devoted to You. <sup>Lk 17:10</sup> <sup>34</sup>With the help [of Your prayers] we are able to merit the mercy of Jesus Christ, so that, equally together with You, we may merit to enjoy the everlasting vision. <sup>35</sup>Farewell in the Lord and *pray for me.*

## The Second Letter to Agnes of Prague

(1235)

<sup>1</sup>To the daughter of *the King of kings,* the servant of *the Lord of lords,* <sup>Rv 19:16</sup> the most worthy spouse of Jesus Christ, <sup>Lk 17:10</sup> and, therefore, the most noble Queen, Lady Agnes, <sup>2</sup>*Clare, the useless* and unworthy handmaid of the Poor Ladies, greetings and may you always live in the highest (*summa*) poverty.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>3</sup>I give thanks to the Giver of grace from Whom, we believe, every good *and perfect gift proceeds,* <sup>Jas 1:17</sup> because He has adorned you with such great titles of virtue and decorated you with signs of such perfection, <sup>4</sup>that, since you have become such a loving imitator of *the Father of all perfection,* <sup>Mt 5:48</sup> you might be made perfect and that there might be no imperfection in you for His eyes to see.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>5</sup>This is that perfection with which that King will join you to Himself in the heavenly bridal chamber where He is seated in glory on a starry throne,<sup>c</sup> <sup>6</sup>because you have despised the splendor

of an earthly kingdom and considered of little value the offers of an imperial marriage. <sup>7</sup>Instead, as someone zealous for the holiest poverty, in a spirit of great humility and the most ardent love, you have held fast *to the footprints* <sup>1 Pt 2:21</sup> of Him to Whom you merited to be joined in marriage. <sup>8</sup>But since I know that you are filled with virtues, I will spare my words and not burden you with needless speech, <sup>9</sup>even though nothing seems superfluous to you if you can draw from it some consolation. <sup>10</sup>But because *one thing is necessary*, <sup>Lk 10:42</sup> I bear witness to that one thing and encourage you, for love of Him to Whom you have offered yourself as *a holy* and pleasing *sacrifice*, <sup>Rom 12:1</sup> <sup>11</sup>that you always be mindful of your commitment<sup>a</sup> *like another Rachel* always seeing your beginning.<sup>b</sup>

What you hold, may you hold,

What you do, may you do and not stop.

<sup>12</sup>*But with swift pace, light step, unswerving feet,*  
so that even your steps stir up no dust,<sup>c</sup>

<sup>13</sup>*may you go forward*

securely, joyfully, and swiftly,  
on the path of prudent happiness,

<sup>14</sup>*believing nothing,*

agreeing with nothing

that would dissuade you from this commitment

*or would place a stumbling block* for you on the way,

so that nothing prevents you from *offering*

*your vows to the Most High* in the perfection

to which the Spirit of the Lord has called you.<sup>d</sup>

<sup>15</sup>In all of this, follow the counsel of our venerable father, our Brother Elias, the Minister General, that you may walk more securely in the way of the commands of the Lord.<sup>e16</sup>Prize it beyond the advice of the others and cherish it as dearer to you than any gift. <sup>17</sup>If anyone has said anything else to you or suggested any other thing to you that might hinder your perfection or that would seem contrary to your divine vocation, even though you must respect him, do not follow his counsel.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>18</sup>*But as a poor virgin*

embrace the poor Christ.

<sup>19</sup>*Look upon Him Who became contemptible for you,*

and follow Him, making yourself contemptible in this world  
for Him.

<sup>20</sup>*Most noble Queen,*

gaze,

consider,

contemplate

desiring to imitate Your Spouse,

*[Who] though more beautiful than the children of men* became, for your salvation, the lowest of men, was despised, struck, scourged untold times throughout His entire body, and then died amid the suffering of the Cross.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>21</sup>*If you suffer with Him, you will reign with Him.*

weeping with Him, you will rejoice with Him;

*dying* on the cross of tribulation *with Him,*

you will possess heavenly mansions with Him

*among the splendor of the saints*

<sup>22</sup>and in the *Book of Life* your name will be called glorious among the peoples.

<sup>23</sup>Because of this you shall share always and forever the glory of the kingdom of heaven in place of what is earthly and passing, and everlasting treasures instead of those that perish, and you shall live forever and ever.

<sup>24</sup>Farewell, most dear Sister and Lady, because of the Lord, your Spouse; <sup>25</sup>commend me and my sisters to the Lord in your fervent prayers, for we rejoice in the good things the Lord works in you through His grace. <sup>26</sup>Remember us warmly to your sisters as well.

### **The Third Letter to Agnes of Prague**

(1238)

<sup>1</sup>To the lady most respected in Christ and the sister to be loved before all mortals, Agnes, sister of the illustrious King of German Bohemia, but now *the sister and spouse* of the Most High King of heaven, <sup>a</sup><sup>2</sup>Clare, the most lowly and unworthy handmaid of Christ and servant of the Poor Ladies [wishes] the joys of redemption *in the Author of salvation* and whatever better thing can be desired.

<sup>3</sup>I am filled with such joy at your well-being, happiness, and marvelous progress through which, I understand, you have advanced in the path you have undertaken to win a heavenly prize. <sup>4</sup>And I sigh with so much more exultation in the Lord as I have known and believe that you supply most wonderfully what is lacking both in me and in the othersisters in following the foot-prints of the poor and humble Jesus Christ.

<sup>5</sup>Truly I can rejoice, and no one can rob me of such joy, <sup>6</sup>since, having at last what under heaven I have desired, <sup>b</sup>I see that, helped by a special gift of wisdom from the mouth of God Himself and in an awe-inspiring and unexpected way, you have brought to ruin the subtleties of our crafty enemy, the pride that destroys human nature, and the vanity that infatuates human hearts; <sup>7</sup>that by humility, the virtue of faith, and the arms of poverty, you have taken hold of that *incomparable treasure hidden in the field* of the world and of the human heart, with which you have purchased that by Whom all things have been made from nothing. <sup>c</sup><sup>8</sup>And, to use the words of the Apostle himself in their proper sense, I judge you to be *a co-worker of God* Himself and a support for the weak members of His ineffable Body.

<sup>9</sup>Who is there, then, who would not encourage me to rejoice over such marvelous joys" <sup>10</sup>Therefore, dearly beloved, may you too always rejoice in the Lord <sup>Phil 4:4</sup>. <sup>11</sup>And may neither bitterness nor a cloud overwhelm you, O dearly beloved Lady in Christ, joy of the angels and crown of your sisters!

<sup>12</sup>Place your mind before the mirror of eternity!<sup>a</sup>

Place your soul in the brilliance of glory!

<sup>13</sup>Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance  
and, through contemplation,  
transform your entire being into the image  
of the Godhead Itself,

<sup>14</sup>so that you too may feel what friends feel  
in tasting the hidden sweetness

that, from the beginning,

God Himself has reserved for His lovers.

<sup>15</sup>And, after all who ensnare their blind lovers  
in a deceitful and turbulent world  
have been completely passed over,  
may you totally love Him

Who gave Himself totally for your love,<sup>b</sup>

<sup>16</sup>At Whose beauty the sun and the moon marvel,  
Whose rewards and their uniqueness and grandeur have no limits;<sup>c</sup>

<sup>17</sup>I am speaking of Him,  
the Son of the Most High,

Whom the Virgin brought to birth  
and remained a virgin after His birth.

<sup>18</sup>May you cling to His most sweet mother who gave birth to a Son Whom the heavens could not contain,<sup>d</sup> <sup>19</sup>and yet she carried Him in the little cloister of her holy womb and held Him on her virginal lap. <sup>20</sup>Who would not dread the treacheries of the enemy of humanity who, through the arrogance of momentary and

deceptive glories, attempts to reduce to nothing that which is greater than heaven itself? <sup>21</sup>Indeed, it is now clear that the soul of a faithful person, the most worthy of all creatures because of the grace of God, is greater than heaven itself, <sup>22</sup>since the heavens and the rest of creation cannot contain their Creator; only a faithful soul is His dwelling place and throne, and this only through the charity that the wicked lack. <sup>23</sup>The Truth says: *Whoever loves me will be loved by My Father, and I too shall love him, and We shall come to him and make Our dwelling place with him.* <sup>24</sup>As the glorious virgin of virgins carried [Him] materially, <sup>25</sup>so you, too, *by following in her footprints,*<sup>a</sup> especially [those] of humility and poverty, can, without any doubt, always carry Him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body, <sup>26</sup>holding Him by Whom you and *all things are held together* possessing that which, in comparison with the other transitory possessions of this world you will possess more securely. <sup>27</sup>In this, certain worldly kings and queens are deceived, <sup>28</sup>for, even though their *pride may reach the skies and their heads touch the clouds, in the end they are as forgotten as a dung-heap (sterquillinium)*!<sup>29</sup>Now concerning those matters that you have commissioned me to clarify for you,<sup>30</sup> namely, what were the feasts that,<sup>31</sup> as I think, you somehow think our most glorious Father St. Francis specially admonished us to celebrate in a variety of foods, I decided I should reply to your charity. Your prudence should know, then, that except for the weak and the sick, for whom he advised and directed us to show every possible discretion in matters of food,<sup>b32</sup> none of us who are healthy and strong should eat anything other than Lenten fare, either on ferial days or on feast days. <sup>33</sup>Thus, we must fast every day except Sundays and the Nativity of the Lord, on which days we may have two meals. <sup>34</sup>And on ordinary Thursdays everyone may do as she wishes, so that she who does not wish to fast is not obliged. <sup>35</sup>However, we who are well should fast every day except on Sundays and on Christmas.

<sup>36</sup>During the whole of Easter, as the writing of Saint Francis tells us, and on the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the holy Apostles, we are not obliged to fast, unless these feasts occur on a Friday. <sup>37</sup>And, as I have already said, we who are well and strong always eat Lenten fare.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>38</sup>But *our flesh is not bronze, nor is our strength that of stone,* <sup>39</sup>rather, we are frail and inclined to every bodily weakness! <sup>40</sup>I beg you, therefore, dearly beloved, to refrain wisely and prudently from an indiscreet and impossible austerity in the fasting that you have undertaken. <sup>41</sup>And I beg

you in the Lord to praise the Lord by your very life, to offer the Lord your *reasonable service* and your *sacrifice* always *seasoned with salt*.

<sup>42</sup>May you do well in the Lord, as I hope I do myself, and, in your holy prayers, remember me along with my sisters.

### **The Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague**

(1253)

<sup>1</sup>To her who is half of her soul and the special shrine of her heart's deepest love, to the illustrious Queen and Bride of the Lamb, the eternal King, to the Lady Agnes her most dear mother, and, of all the others, her favorite daughter, <sup>2</sup>Clare, an unworthy servant of Christ and a *useless* handmaid of His handmaids in the monastery of San Damiano of Assisi: <sup>3</sup>health and may she sing *the new song* with the other most holy virgins before the throne of God and the Lamb and *follow the Lamb wherever He will go*.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>4</sup>O mother and daughter, spouse of the King of all ages, if I have not written to you as often as both your soul and mine desire and long for, do not wonder at all <sup>5</sup>or think that the fire of love for you glows with less delight in your mother's heart. <sup>6</sup>No, this is the difficulty: the lack of messengers and the obvious dangers of the roads.

<sup>7</sup>Now, however, as I write to your love, I rejoice and exult with you *in the joy of the Spirit*, O spouse of Christ, <sup>8</sup>because, since you have totally abandoned the vanities of this world, like the other most holy virgin, Saint Agnes, you have been marvelously espoused to *the spotless Lamb, Who takes away the sins of the world*.

<sup>9</sup>Happy, indeed, is she  
to whom it is given to drink at this sacred banquet  
so that she might cling with her whole heart  
to Him

<sup>10</sup>Whose beauty all the blessed hosts of heaven  
unceasingly admire,

<sup>11</sup>Whose tenderness touches,  
Whose contemplation refreshes, Whose kindness overflows,

<sup>12</sup>Whose delight overwhelms,  
Whose remembrance delightfully dawns,  
<sup>13</sup>Whose fragrance brings the dead to life again,  
Whose glorious vision will bring happiness  
to all the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem,

<sup>14</sup>which [vision],<sup>a</sup>  
*since He is the radiance of eternal glory  
is the brightness of eternal light and  
the mirror without blemish.*

<sup>15</sup>Gaze upon that mirror each day,  
O Queen and Spouse of Jesus Christ,  
and continually study your face in it,  
<sup>16</sup>that you may adorn yourself completely,  
within and without,  
covered *and arrayed in needlework*

<sup>17</sup>and similarly adorned  
with the flowers and garments of all the virtues,

as is becoming, the daughter and dearest bride  
of the Most High King.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Indeed,  
in that mirror,  
blessed poverty,  
holy humility,  
and inexpressible charity shine forth  
as, with the grace of God,  
you will be able to contemplate them throughout  
the entire mirror.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Look, I say, at the border of this mirror, that is, the poverty of Him  
Who was placed in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>20</sup>O marvelous humility! O astonishing poverty!

<sup>21</sup>The King of angels,  
the Lord of heaven and earth,  
*is laid in a manger!*

<sup>22</sup>Then reflect upon, at the surface of the mirror, the holy humility, at least the blessed poverty,<sup>b</sup>  
the untold labors and punishments  
that He endured for the redemption of the whole human race.

<sup>23</sup>Finally contemplate, in the depth of this same mirror,  
the ineffable charity that He chose  
to suffer on the tree of the Cross  
and to die there the most shameful kind of death.

<sup>24</sup>Therefore,  
that Mirror, suspended on the wood of the Cross, warned those passing by that here are things to  
be

considered, saying:

<sup>25</sup>“*All you who pass by the way, look and see if there is any suffering like my suffering!*”<sup>c</sup>

<sup>26</sup>“Let us respond to Him,” It says,  
“crying out and lamenting, in one voice, in one spirit:  
*‘Remembering this over and over  
leaves my soul sinking within me!’*”

<sup>27</sup>O Queen of our heavenly King, may you, therefore, be inflamed ever more strongly with the  
fire of love! <sup>28</sup>As you further contemplate His ineffable delights, riches and perpetual  
honors, <sup>29</sup>and, sighing, may you cry out from the great desire and love of your heart:

<sup>30</sup>“*Draw me after you,  
let us run in the fragrance of your perfumes,*<sup>a</sup>

O heavenly Spouse!

<sup>31</sup>I will run and not tire,  
until *You bring me into the wine-cellar,*  
<sup>32</sup>until *Your left hand is under my head* (Cantica 1:1, 2:6, 8:3)  
and *Your right hand will embrace me happily,*<sup>b</sup>  
*You will kiss me with the happiest kiss of Your mouth.*”

<sup>33</sup>Resting in this contemplation, may you remember your poor little mother, <sup>34</sup>knowing that *I*  
*have inscribed* the happy memory of you indelibly *on the tablets of my heart*, holding you dearer  
than all others.

<sup>35</sup>What more? In your love may the tongue of the flesh be silent; may the tongue of the Spirit speak and say this: <sup>36</sup>“O blessed daughter, because the love that I have for you can never be fully expressed by the tongue of the flesh,” <sup>37</sup>it says, “what I have written is inadequate. I beg you to receive my words with kindness and devotion, seeing in them at least the motherly affection that in the fire of charity I daily feel toward you and your daughters to whom I warmly commend myself and my daughters in Christ.”

<sup>38</sup>On their part, these daughters of mine, especially the most prudent virgin Agnes, our sister, recommend themselves in the Lord to you and your daughters as much as they can.

<sup>39</sup>Farewell, my dearest daughter, with your daughters until we meet at the throne *of the glory of the great God*, and desire [this] for us.

<sup>40</sup>As much as I can, I recommend to your charity the bearers of this letter, our dearly beloved Brother Amatus, *beloved of God and men*, and Brother Bonaugura. Amen.