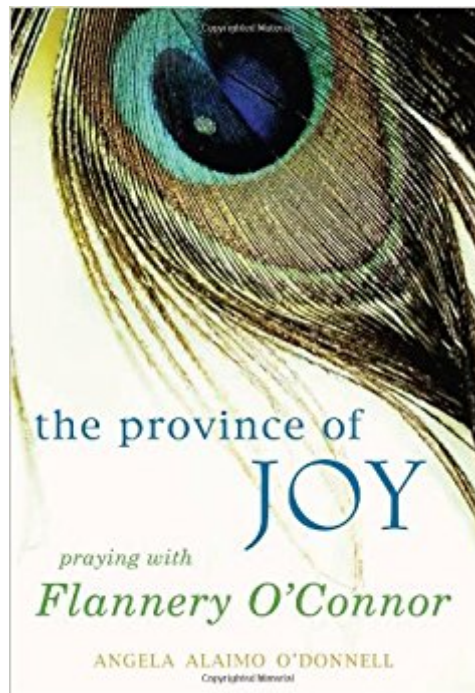




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# Province Of Joy, The: Praying With Flannery O'Connor



## Synopsis

The Province of Joy is a book of hours rooted in the rich theological imagination of fiction writer, Flannery O'Connor. A lifelong Catholic devoted to liturgical prayer, O'Connor was also an avid reader and thinker who lived a rich spiritual life. Cutting a broad swath through spiritual and theological texts of every stamp, O'Connor engaged ideas about the nature of prayer and its many forms on a daily basis and often shared them in her correspondence, essays, and stories. This book brings together O'Connor's practice of prayer and the rich spiritual context within which O'Connor lived and out of which she wrote. O'Donnell organizes this devotional around six themes: \* The False Self and the True Self \* Blindness & Vision \* Limitation & Grace \* The Mystery of the Incarnation \* Revelations & Resurrections \* The Christian Comedy. In addition, she presents brief reflections suggesting links between the themes, readings, and prayers of the day with O'Connor's fiction. These parallels illustrate of some of the ways in which O'Connor's practice of her faith and her art intersect and serve to illuminate one another.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Like a beautiful quilt, Province of Joy is a deeply loving, imaginative work of art and faith." -- Elizabeth A. Johnson, author of *She Who Is* "Flannery O'Connor's stories help us see grace in difficult circumstances. O'Donnell artfully combines selections from her writings with prayers and readings for something wonderful: a prayer book that is old and new, timely and timeless, comforting and

provocative." -- James Martin, SJ, author of *Between Heaven & Mirth* "O'Donnell has come to see into the profound heart of the Mystery even as Flannery O'Connor, with all her trials and the torch-like Pentecostal brilliance of her Christ-like imagination, came to see it. Read this book. Study these pages and pray them." --Paul Mariani, Professor of English, Boston College

"Like a beautiful quilt, *Province of Joy* is a deeply loving, imaginative work of art and faith." - Elizabeth A. Johnson "This unique *Book of Hours* is modeled on the spiritual life and prayer practices of one of our most interesting writers." "Flannery O'Connor's stories help us see grace in the most difficult of circumstances. O'Donnell artfully combines selections from her writings with daily prayers and readings for something wonderful: a prayer book that is old and new, timely and timeless, comforting and provocative." - James Martin, SJ, author of *Between Heaven and Mirth*

Such a great book.

I first started reading the works of Flannery O'Connor in 1975. A friend at the company I then worked for introduced me to "A Good Man is Hard to Find," and I was hooked. I read all of her fiction; "Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose;" and "The Habit of Being," her letters as collected and compiled by Sally Fitzgerald. O'Connor was a Southern writer, yes, but she transcended the region. She was a literary writer, and her reputation grew, and grew mightily, after her death from lupus in 1964. Her characters and plots can seem strange when you first start reading, and can be jarring and disconcerting. But as you read her fiction, you learn that behind the misfits and charlatans and con-men are the universal themes of grace and redemption. Another odd thing about her writing, and this may very well be what originally pulled me into it, was that she was a devout Catholic writer writing within (and often about) a largely Protestant South. For a reader like me, a Protestant raised in largely Catholic New Orleans, her writing was almost instantly familiar, in both a specific and a general sense. I knew what it was to feel something of a misfit in my culture. O'Connor prayed, too, and she prayed in accordance with her Catholic faith. In *The Province of Joy: Praying with Flannery O'Connor*, author and poet Angela Alaimo O'Donnell has created a devotional guide, one that reflects both O'Connor's Catholic faith and the themes of her writing. O'Donnell structures the book for a full seven-day week, with devotions and prayer for both morning and evening. Each day has a theme, and the order of the devotional is far more structured than what

might be familiar to most Protestants (and even some Catholics). The main elements for each time of prayer are a gospel meditation; a psalm; a reading; a quotation from O'Connor's writings; a canticle or song; the Lord's Prayer and a prayer to St. Raphael in the mornings; and a concluding prayer. The canticles, the Lord's prayer and the prayer to St. Raphael are repeated each day, and while it may seem repetitive at first, in practice it is not. It's a kind of liturgy that becomes new and different with each day's theme. The evening canticle is the Magnificat of Mary, her song in response to learning from Gabriel that she would give birth to the Messiah. In this devotion, however, Mary's song becomes our song, providing a depth of understanding that I hadn't previously encountered, in spite of the number of times I've read it. O'Donnell provides a solid introduction to O'Connor and her works, and includes a number of resources (and prayers) in the appendix. The daily readings also include information for additional consideration and reflection. I wasn't sure what to expect when I began reading it, but "The Province of Joy," like the author who inspired it, takes us to a different, more insightful place in our faith.

The short life of Flannery O'Connor unleashed some of the greatest fiction the world has known. Writing as a Southerner and a Christian, her characters showcase both the grotesque and the operations of God's grace. But what are the spiritual disciplines that nourished the spirituality of the artist and gave O'Connor her unique literary vision? What was her prayer life like? What insights can we gain from following her practice? In *The Province of Joy: Praying with Flannery O'Connor*, Angela Alaimo O'Donnell has drawn together a unique prayer-book which is both a devotional work and an exploration of the prayers, poems and poetry that inspired O'Connor. As O'Donnell describes her project: It is an attempt to assemble from materials O'Connor would have invested with authority and significance a prayer book she would not find "awful," but instead, might see as a helpful guide for those seeking a language and format for prayer that places ancient practice within a contemporary context. It also provides an opportunity to engage the rich theological imagination of Flannery O'Connor, to come into daily contact with her special mode of holiness—one that is grounded in an unswerving love of Christ and characterized by her extraordinary clarity of vision and a fearless commitment to her craft as a means of accomplishing good in the world<sup>(12)</sup>. The result is a window into O'Connor's practice and exploration of various themes which are important in her work. The main part of the prayer-book is comprised of the daily office pre-Vatican II Catholic's would have likely practiced, organized around various themes. Each day's prayer, includes prime and compline (morning and evening prayer), various Bible readings, a 'lectio divina' on a passage from one of Flannery O'Connor's letters and suggestions for further reading on the day's theme from

O'Connor's fiction. Here are the topics for each day: Sunday: The Christian Comedy Monday: The False Self & the True Self Tuesday: Blindness and Vision Wednesday: Limitation and Grace Thursday: The Mystery of the Incarnation Friday: Facing the Dragon Saturday: Revelations & Resurrections The second part of this book, draws together poetry, prayers, poems and quotations that were important to O'Connor (culled from her essays, lectures and letters). These offer a window into the things that O'Connor valued and the spirituality that nourished her. Angela O'Donnell, herself a poet and professor at Fordham University is well acquainted with O'Connor's works (having taught literature classes focused on her). What I liked best about this book is the ways in which the prayer practice commended here reveals a fresh Flannery O'Connor and this is testament to O'Donnell's genius. Of course as protestant and a Northerner, some of O'Connor's spirituality remains opaque to me, but I found enough here that provoked me to reflection and prayer. This book is a welcome addition to the library of any O'Connor fan (and if you aren't one, it may introduce you to her). This book was provided for me by Paraclete Press in exchange for this review.

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