St. Clare of Assisi

Clare was born in Assisi, Italy, in 1193 to wealthy parents, and was taught to read and write as well as spin yarn and do needlework. She had little interest in her luxurious surroundings (she lived in a palace), and influenced by her mother's religious devotion, Clare dedicated her life to God at an early age. She also showed early on that her calling would involve helping the poor, as she set aside food from her family table to give to the needy on the streets.

When Clare was 18, Francis of Assisi came to preach in the church of San Giorgio at Assisi. Inspired by his words, Clare asked Francis to help her in dedicating her life to God, and he vowed to do so. The following year (1211), Clare's parents chose a wealthy young man for Clare to marry, but she pointedly refused, fleeing soon after for the Porziuncola Chapel, where Francis received her. She took vows dedicating her life to God, and that moment, occurring on March 20, 1212, marked the beginning of the Second Order of St. Francis.

Clare's sister Agnes soon joined her, and they moved to the Church of San Damiano, recently rebuilt by Francis. It wasn't long before other women joined them, and San Damiano's residents, known for their ascetic lifestyle, became known as the "Poor Ladies." Known as the Order of San Damiano, 10 years after Clare's death the order would be renamed the Order of Saint Clare.

Clare became the abbess of San Damiano in 1216, and, while spending her days doing manual labor and praying, she began dedicating much of her time to changing the governing rule (established by the Pope) of the order from the Benedictine spirit to one of the newly established Franciscan rule. Two days before Clare died, Pope Innocent IV finally approved her request. The order became known for its life of abject poverty and committed life of prayer.

Clare cared for Francis toward the end of his life and was with him when he died in 1226. Afterward, despite ill health, Clare continued to promote the growth of her order until her death in 1253. In August 1255, Pope Alexander IV canonized Clare, and today the Order of St. Clare numbers more than 20,000 sisters worldwide, with more than 70 countries represented. Her feast day is August 11th.

Source: Biography.com
Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the brilliance of glory! And transform your entire being into the image of the Godhead itself through contemplation.

*St. Clare of Assisi*

Clare, like Francis, did not choose poverty for philosophical reasons, nor for practical ones, as a choice making her life more productive or efficient. And neither of them speak about this poverty as a response to the affluence of Church or society in their day, through it was undoubtedly seen by others in that way. The focus of their attention was God’s overwhelming generosity and love, expressed in the free choice of the Son to embrace poverty in becoming a creature. The two disciples from Assisi embraced poverty because it was embraced by their Beloved.

*William J. Short, Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition*

One of his fellow guests on hearing this said to him, “Blessed is the one who will dine in the Kingdom of God.” He replied to him, “A man gave a great dinner to which he invited many. When the time for the dinner came, he dispatched his servant to say to those invited, ‘Come, everything is now ready.’ But one by one, they all began to excuse themselves. The first said to him, ‘I have purchased a field and must go to examine it; I ask you, consider me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have purchased five yoke of oxen and am on my way to evaluate them; I ask you; consider me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have just married a woman, and therefore I cannot come.’ The servant went and reported his to his master. Then the master of the house in a rage commanded his servant, ‘Go out into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ The servant reported, ‘Sir, your orders have been carried out and still there is room.’ The master then ordered the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedgerows and make people come in that my home may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited will taste my dinner.”

*Luke 14:15-24*

1) What strikes you about the life of St. Clare?

2) St. Clare’s spiritual mentor was St. Francis of Assisi. Who are your (a saint, a parent, friend, spiritual director)? Who do you go to when you need to seek counsel?

3) In the first passage, St. Clare talks about contemplation. How do you make space for quiet in your life? Do you feel like you have time to listen to God?

4) The second passage describes St. Clare’s life of poverty. Why did St. Clare choose poverty? How does Christ Himself embrace poverty? How do you think it can be lived out practically, in this day and age?

5) The Gospel passage from Luke tells the parable of a great feast that many were invited to, but that few attended. What are some of the recent excuses you have made to the Lord? What do you put between you and God? How did St. Clare show obedience?