

the worst difficulties. The instruction of the children is progressing, but the ignorance of the older people makes one shudder.

After Easter we began parish work in Bacabal, midway between Sao Luis and Piripiri. About 60,000 souls. It is immigrant territory and is always increasing in population. The danger of Protestantism is great. They say one part here is wholly Protestant. This should not have happened. The people lack priests."

*Notitiae Franciscanae Missionariae III (1953)*

**CHINA.** *The judgment of God.* One of our confreres, a professor in the seminary at Macao, sent us the following story:

In a certain parish the Communists had set up the schismatic National Church and with the help of one of the Chinese priests were making considerable headway. When the Chinese Vicar General was warned of this, he summoned the priest and exhorted him to be faithful. "Dearest Father," he said, "let us remain faithful with our whole heart to our Sovereign Pontiff, for if we are with him, then and only then will we be with Christ."

"Your Reverence," replied the priest, "I am ready to swear before the Lord that I have done nothing in favor of the schismatics. If I lie, may God take my life."

Reassured by this solemn declaration, the good Vicar General retired that day in peace. The next day was Sunday, and the priest was to celebrate the nine o'clock Mass for the people. The hour struck, but no priest appeared in the sacristy. He waited until 9:10, 9:30, and still no priest. Fearing something had happened, the Vicar General went to the priest's room and knocked. No answer. He forced the door open, and saw the priest lying in bed—dead. The terrible judgment of God.

This is an isolated case, thank God, for more than two hundred Chinese Christians are languishing in prison because of their fidelity to the Holy Father. Let us pray for them, for the persecution becomes daily more violent.

**Confession on Paper.** A certain Franciscan Ordinary is being held by the Communists under strict house arrest and can have no direct communication with the people. But he has worked out a plan for administering the Sacraments to the faithful. He has two Chinese Sisters who act as his housekeepers. They wear simple clothes and are able to slip into the homes of the Christians and exhort them to be constant in the Faith. Those who wish to confess their sins write them down on a slip of paper and give them sealed to the Sisters who take them to the Bishop. The next day, when he is working in his garden like a farmer, the slips, and the next day, when he is working in his garden like a farmer, pass by and greet him, telling him their names. Then the Bishop makes a sign of the Cross and pronounces the words of absolution, and the people go on their way unnoticed and unmolested.

The Sisters are also able to bring the Holy Eucharist to the people since they visit their homes.

*Notitiae Franciscanae Missionariae III (1953)*

# the CORD

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*Cum permissu superiorum.*

3 no 8 Aug 1953

## EPITAPH

Here lies the ideals of Saint Francis:  
Pressed in the folds of earth, the little plant,  
Drooped to a smile of meager flesh and bone.

Here lies the triumph of the little poor man,  
The lovely, wasted witness to his dream.  
Bring no polite compassion to her coffin  
And stay the pitying upward flight of brow  
For Francis and his dream without a haven,  
His made, impossible schemes. Here lies the proof  
His dream was wholly possible to her heart.

Here lies the refutation for crawling cautions,  
Sweet, mute rebuttal to any compromise.  
Her crypt is full of flower-talk, and gladly  
The stars come swimming down to kiss her face  
Caught in its quiet splendor. Be still! Be still!  
The place is full of angel-talk or song.

Here lies the fragile flower of Saint Francis  
Stronger than armies! Here, the unswerving gaze  
Shuttered at last on earth and turned to Godhead.

Here lies the testimony to Saint Francis:  
Clare of Assisi.

Who weeps, weep but for joy.

*Poor Clare Monastery  
of Our Lady of Guadalupe,  
Roswell, New Mexico*

*Sr. Mary Francis*

## SAN DAMIANO, HOME OF THE POOR CLARES

When we ask those who have visited Assisi what made the deepest impression on them, they usually answer: "The tomb of Saint Francis, and San Damiano." San Damiano is indeed a holy place, unaltered for seven hundred years. It is still kept much as it was in the days of Francis and Clare. The spirit of primitive Franciscan poverty, simplicity, and union with God still hovers over the ancient little chapel, stirring the hearts of beholders like a sweet benediction.

From the Porta Nuova at the east end of Assisi, the road leads for about ten minutes through fields of wheat and corn. Here and there, grave cypresses raise their dark forms, and the ancient olives, with their gnarled and twisted branches, spread their silver-gray leaves to the sun. The road stops at a convent wall; stairs lead down the wall to a simple, lonely little chapel and convent, all hidden away among the olives and cypresses. This is San Damiano.

According to the legend a pagan mausoleum first stood there. At the time of the persecution of the Christians in 250, Saint Felicianus, patron of Foligno, kept hidden there for safety. Later a chapel was built over the mausoleum and dedicated to him, and still later Saint Benedict added a convent. For several centuries San Damiano belonged to the Benedictines, but at the time of Saint Francis it had become the property of the Bishop of Assisi. The little chapel was then somewhat dilapidated, but an old priest lived beside it and still performed the sacred functions there.

Shortly after his conversion, young Francis was praying with great fervor before the crucifix on the altar in San Damiano, when he heard the voice of the Master: "Francis, go and rebuild my house, which you see is falling to ruin." Francis took the message literally and felt himself called by Christ to restore the chapel of San Damiano and other little churches nearby. Immediately he set to work. He went about begging stones and mortar which he carried on his shoulders down the hill to the little sanctuary. Passers-by were invited to help him. One day the

spirit of prophesy seized him, as Saint Clare writes in her *Testament*: "and he mounted the wall of the church and cried out with a loud voice in the French tongue to certain poor folk of the neighborhood: 'Come and help me in building the monastery of San Damiano, for here dwell Ladies whose good name and holy life will glorify our heavenly Father throughout His holy Church.' "

When in 1212 the youthful Clare followed Francis in beginning her life of Gospel perfection, the Bishop of Assisi gave him the little church and convent of San Damiano as a present for her and her Sisters. Thus San Damiano became the first home of the Poor Ladies, and there she lived a life of perfection according to the ideals of Francis, their spiritual father.

Architecturally, San Damiano lacks harmony. The facade is marked by the low-set rosewindow, and the small square windows seem to have been set at random into the walls. Nevertheless, the total impression is charmingly picturesque. The interior of the chapel is narrow, with high round and pointed barrel vaults. The walls are darkened with shadows, but a few fragments of ancient frescoes can still be seen. Between the choir and the small apse is a grating, and here the high altar stands. Above the altar is a copy of the miraculous crucifix from which Francis heard the voice of Christ. The original is now preserved in the convent of Santa Chiara. Another impressive crucifix is kept in the chapel to the right of the famous crucifix of Brother Innocent of Palermo (1637).

The poor little convent of Saint Clare is close to the chapel. The Franciscan Friars live in the convent, and also take care of the church, but it is the spirit of Saint Clare that still lingers in this sacred place.

Leading from the left choir of San Damiano, there is a narrow cloister dating back to the fifteenth century. In the middle of the courtyard is a fountain surrounded by oleanders, palms, and geraniums. A turn to the right leads to the refectory of the Poor Ladies. It might better be called the refectory of Lady Poverty, for it is here that the suffering poverty of Clare and her first companions appears most strikingly. With the exception of the ceiling, which is a late restoration, the poor, simple room is still the same as it was seven centuries ago. The primitive tables and benches are unsteady now and partly decayed, but the dark, coarsely grained wood must have looked in Clare's time much the same as it does now. At the head table, to the right, was the place of the Sera-

Mother. It is marked by a cross carved into the table and by a bouquet of fresh flowers placed there every day.

In spirit we can still see the Poor Ladies enter the room for the noon refectory. They group themselves in two lines before the tables, devoutly recite the prayer before meals, then take their places. Their food is scanty, for they observe a perpetual fast. While eating their simple meal they listen to the word of God read to them by one of the Sisters. Clare, in her loving humility, often serves the Sisters herself and brings them water to wash their hands.

This is the room that witnessed the miraculous multiplication of the bread. Quite close to Saint Clare's place at table is an opening in the wall through which the Sisters received the alms that the Friars begged for them. The miracle of the oil jar probably occurred close to this opening. Another miraculous event took place here in the year 1228. According to the *Fioretti* (33), when Pope Gregory was once visiting Clare and speaking with her about divine things, she begged him to remain and share a meal with her and her companions. With his customary graciousness he yielded to her petition, but when Clare asked him to bless the little breads, he commanded her to do so instead. In obedience and with great reverence Clare made the Sign of the Cross, whereupon there appeared a cross most beautifully imprinted on each of the breads. Some were consumed, and others were preserved because of the miracle.

On the walls of the refectory are two paintings by Dono Doni (1619). One shows Francis praying before the Crucifix at San Damiano, the other, Clare blessing the breads.

Whenever pilgrims enter this venerable room, they are always deeply impressed by the spirit of primitive Franciscan poverty that still shines forth there, and they cannot but compare their own comfortable lives with the poor and austere life of Clare and the Poor Ladies who left everything the world could offer them to gain Christ and Him alone.

Paterson, New Jersey

Sr. Francis, S. M. I. C. (trans.)

## THE POOR CLARE NUNS IN THE UNITED STATES

As the second half of the nineteenth century grew well advanced, normal conditions began to reshape themselves from the chaos and devastation left by the Civil War. Each year, signs of the United States' future prosperity became more apparent. In the Catholic circles of European countries, this prosperity, with its changes from ancient standards and methods, its modern comforts and conveniences, was viewed with considerable alarm. Would the Catholic Church in the United States become a prey to or a tool of Modernism? Prelates shrugged their shoulders, looked grave, held conferences, and wondered what the Vicar of Christ would do. There were misunderstandings among the prelates and clerics of the United States, each endeavoring by what means he deemed best to solve the many problems presented by Catholic immigrants from the various European nations. The great Pope Pius IX did not so easily take alarm, but viewed the situation more calmly. He sifted the rumors, knowing how to use and promote what was for the good of the Church, separating it from what was or could result in evil. The heart of the great Pontiff, with its truer perspective, realized that the new nation was adjusting itself to extraordinary conditions of prosperity and freedom—a freedom which he knew could unbind the shackles of the Brethren of Christ and permit her to advance unimpeded by the control or interference of the older forms of government. However, it was to require a number of years before co-ordination was established in the heterogeneous mass that was then the American nation.

One would think it was certainly not a propitious time for a contemplative Order to launch out into its first foundation in the United States! Yet, were prayer, sacrifice, and penance ever more needed than at this epoch? It was at this time that the Vicar of Christ was requested to permit a colony of Poor Clares to establish itself in the New World. Unexpectedly, he gave his willing and unreserved consent. It was Mother Ignatius Hayes of the Third Order Regular who made the petition, she being at that time on a visit in Rome. Upon stopping at the San Lorenzo in Panisperna Monastery of Poor Clares, she requested

that some of the nuns be permitted to return with her to the United States. Although a number of the Sisters volunteered, only the two Bentivoglio sisters, Mothers M. Maddalena and M. Constanza, were given leave, with the permission of the Minister General of the Franciscans, to go to the United States and there establish the first American monastery of the Order. They left their monastery on the 12th of August, Feast of Saint Clare, 1875, amid the tears and lamentations of the Sisters; for the Mother Abbess was convinced that her two daughters were going to an uncivilized land where they would suffer martyrdom at the hands of savages! Upon leaving their monastery, the two turned their steps toward the Vatican where Pius IX received them in audience, sending them on their way with his paternal blessing, and predicting that they would have much to suffer. A Franciscan friar, Father Paolino, had been appointed by the Minister General to accompany them to the New World to be their guide and advisor.

The community of San Lorenzo observed the Urbanist or mitigated Rule of Saint Clare. Mother Maddalena, however, desired to establish the first monastery of Poor Clares in the United States according to the primitive Rule. To this end, the sisters visited en route some of the French monasteries, finally sailing from Marseilles on September 11, 1875, to reach New York on October 12. They have left us no record of their first impressions on landing in the disorder and squalor which was then the port of New York.

Upon their arrival, Father Paolino went to live with his brethren, the Franciscans in New York. Mother Ignatius had insured hospitality for the two Poor Clares with the Grey Sisters. But little did the two Bentivoglio sisters know what a *via dolorosa* was opening out before them! It seems almost incredible that Mother Ignatius had not given the two nuns to understand her true purpose in bringing them to the United States. According to her plan, they were to go to Belle Prairie, Minnesota, to teach catechism to the children, while establishing their monastery in those wilds of northern Minnesota! Belle Prairie, far from the centers of civilization, was not at all a suitable place for the establishment of a contemplative community living on alms of the faithful. Nor were Mothers Maddalena and Constanza willing to relinquish their life of contemplation in the cloister for the active apostolate. Knowing that they were following the wishes of the Holy Father in the decision they made, the two refused to go with Mother Ignatius. This decision was

a great disappointment to Mother Ignatius, and it also deeply grieved the two Poor Clares thus to abandon her. However, they felt this was God's Will, though it left them stranded in a strange land with no knowledge of the English language and only very meager means. In view of what had developed, Father Paolino advised them to return to Italy as he himself planned to do. Feeling that they could not thus abandon a mission on which the Holy Father had sent them to the New World, the two valiant little nuns wrote to the Minister General in Rome asking further direction. But they were to remain standing on the threshold of their future for a long period of doubts, bitter disappointments, utter want, and physical and moral suffering which would test their faith and endurance to the breaking point.

Not wishing to be a burden on the Grey Sisters, the Poor Clares themselves, and rented a small room. Without means, and often without food, they were absolutely destitute except for the alms a few charitable persons gave them. And these, the heiresses of the noble house of Bentivoglio, accustomed to servants and cultured living! It was at this time that they met Father Isaac Hecker, founder of the Paulist Fathers, who was himself suffering great anguish of soul in the establishment of his own Congregation. His comfort and advice upheld the two in many of their dark hours. At times, they were obliged to beg their food from various convents in New York; and once, without home or shelter, they asked a priest to permit them to pass the night in his church. Mother Maddalena remained on her knees before the Tabernacle during the entire night, doubtless receiving the strength she needed to continue carrying her cross. It may happily be remarked that a number of priests were kind, understanding, and charitable to them during this trying period. Thus the two Poor Clares waited from October 1875, to June 1876, without so much as a letter, let alone any material help, from their superiors. Can we realize how strong a fire of faith burned in the hearts of Mother Maddalena and her sister, as they waited in hope after day, only to have each day bring a fresh disappointment, and to watch the weary weeks lengthen into months? And all this time the two lived in utter poverty, wanting the very necessities of life, yet clinging to their Divine Spouse in their trust and hope! In June 1876, they finally received permission from the Minister General of the Franciscans to make a foundation in whatever diocese they should be received.

A first appeal to Cardinal McCloskey in New York brought

refusal, even the expression of his displeasure that they had loitered so long in his archdiocese "doing nothing". The same fate met their requests of various prelates in other dioceses. Finally, they obtained leave from Archbishop Wood of Philadelphia to establish themselves in his archdiocese; and the good prelate even provided them with a small house out of his own charity. However, the respite from trial was to be short for the sorely tried Poor Clares! After three weeks, having been influenced by other prelates who insisted that the time for founding contemplative communities in the United States had not yet come, the Archbishop ordered their departure. Turned out once more, the two indefatigable little nuns left Philadelphia on October 27, and returned to New York. During their short stay in Philadelphia, they had, however, received their first postulant, Elizabeth Bailey, who had come from New York. To her belongs the distinction of being the first American girl to join the Order of Saint Clare. The brave young girl remained with the Italian Mothers even after they were again homeless; as her reward, God was to permit that Elizabeth Bailey be the first one in the United States to return her pure young life to Him in the Habit of Saint Clare.

Different Congregations of Sisters in New York had manifested a true fraternal charity to the Italian nuns, helping and sheltering them. Now they received a small cottage at Eden Hall in Manhattanville with the Madams of the Sacred Heart. And finally, in December 1876, a benefactor with whom they were barely more than acquainted but who felt for the Italian Poor Clares the greatest compassion obtained from Archbishop Perche of New Orleans an invitation to come to his archdiocese. Their hopes seemed now to be realized; and in a small, rented house furnished for them by loving benefactors, the two again began the observance of their Rule with their young postulant. It was March 15, 1877, a year and a half since their arrival in the United States. This was not, however, to be the first permanent foundation of the Poor Clares in the United States.

In the early months of 1877, the Franciscan Provincial, Father Gregory, visited the nuns, and found them distressed at the deprivation of daily Mass and of the reception of Holy Communion. Upon his return to Cleveland, he approached the Most Reverend Bishop about the introduction of Poor Clares into his diocese. His request was favorably received. Acting upon this encouragement, Father Gregory bought and furnished a house and garden as a Poor Clare Monastery. Then he again visited the nuns in New Orleans, inviting them to return with him to

Cleveland to take up their abode in the newly acquired property where he would see that their spiritual and temporal needs were provided for. They acceded to the arrangement, arriving in Cleveland on August 18, 1877, two lonely Italian nuns, Mother M. Maddalena, Abbess, and Mother M. Constanza, Vicar, sisters both by nature and grace. With them was also a postulant. Not long after, they were joined by four choir nuns and one lay sister from the Düsseldorf Monastery in Germany, in exile in Holland as a result of the German Kulturkampf. Mother Veronica von Ellmendorf and Mother Josepha with their nuns arrived in the United States in December 1877. Although there was a slight difference in the observance of Rule on the part of the two groups, this did not constitute the main difficulty in their merging. Differences in language and custom made it soon apparent that separate foundations would prove a happier situation. With mutual consent, it was decided that the German Poor Clares should retain possession of the Cleveland house, and the Italian nuns with the novice, Sister M. Clare (Elizabeth Bailey), and the postulants who had joined them, should seek another shelter and make a foundation in another diocese. Mother Veronica wept on seeing Mother Maddalena and her sisters depart.<sup>1</sup>

Mother Maddalena and her four companions left Cleveland on February 26, 1878. They parted, some going to New York, and others toward the west in search of a new home. The separation of the two groups of Poor Clares caused a great deal of gossip, as needs scarcely be remarked! Seculars could not understand the affair; and the newspapers naturally left the growing "scandal" unexplained so that it mounted to such proportions that it required years for it to be repressed, to the detriment of both groups and their mutual sorrow. There was not any trace of enmity among the Sisters, however; and the foundresses of both groups remained close friends all their lives. In fact, after the Chicago foundation had been made by Mother Veronica, and the nuns of Mother Maddalena's Omaha foundation were rebuilding their monastery, Mother Veronica was overjoyed to welcome the Omaha nuns to live in the new monastery in Chicago until their own home should be completed.

But to return to the anecdote: on leaving Cleveland, Mother Maddalena went as far as Omaha, Nebraska, where she met Mr. John Creighton who was to become their greatest friend and loyalest benefactor through all the years to come. He and Mrs. Creighton encouraged Bishop Connor to receive the nuns into his diocese, promising that they themselves

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph was revised by the editor.

would provide for the Poor Clares. The Bishop gave his consent to the distinguished Mr. Creighton's petition, and that good gentleman immediately found a small house for the Sisters to occupy while he planned the building of a little monastery for them. After many more hardships and reverses, such as a storm demolishing parts of the uncompleted monastery, their new home was finally blessed on October 27, 1878, three years after their arrival in the United States. Now they were free to begin once more the observance of the primitive Rule of Saint Clare, after all the trials, heartbreak, and incredible difficulties. Their happiness was complete when cloister was established some time later. And, as God's final seal and blessing on the little monastery, Sister Death came to claim Sister M. Clare. Struck with an unexplainable illness which responded to no treatment, though Mr. Creighton sent his own skilled doctor to attend the young novice, Sister Clare Bailey made her holy Vows on her deathbed and took her pure flight to Heaven without any struggle, an innocent holocaust to God.

With the memories of the kindness she had received from friends in New Orleans always verdant in her heart, Mother Maddalena cherished the hope that they might return there. Bishop Perche, however, had died; she had no certainty that the new Archbishop would receive her and a little group of her nuns. The many friends who encouraged her to return, themselves petitioned Archbishop F. X. Leray to permit the Poor Clares to re-establish themselves in his archdiocese. And so, on June 16, 1885, Archbishop Leray having given his consent, Mother Maddalena left Omaha for New Orleans accompanied by Sister Mary Francis Moran and Sister Mary Coletta. The three remained with the Benedictine Sisters for three months while they sought a suitable site for their monastery. Finally, on October 4, 1884, they moved into their own quarters and began once more in New Orleans the observance of the Rule of Saint Clare. Mother Maddalena remained until 1886, when she had to return to Omaha because of the grave illness of Mother Constanza. The latter recovered; and in October 1889, she herself went to New Orleans, accompanied by Sister Mary Clare Tucker, to assist in the building of a permanent small monastery. This was completed in 1891; and, seeing that all was now firmly established, Mother Constanza returned to Omaha. Sister Mary Francis had been appointed superior by the Minister General in Rome. The New Orleans house was flourishing.

Mother Maddalena had received a number of postulants by this

time, young girls who gave proof that the contemplative vocation was not lacking in the United States, and that American girls possessed qualities of heart and mind making them adaptable to the life of close union with God in the cloister. One of her young professed Sisters, Sister Clare, who had come from Evansville, Indiana, to enter the monastery at Omaha, had lately lost her parents and received her inheritance. She begged Mother Maddalena to consider using the money for a foundation in her native town of Evansville. As Mother Maddalena was well known to the Bishop there, he readily consented to receive the Poor Clares in his diocese. Sister M. Charitas was sent with Sister Clare to undertake the beginnings of the Evansville foundation. A small monastery was established in January 1897; and the first Mass was offered there in July. On July 31, Mother Maddalena came from Omaha with several other nuns to begin the observance of the primitive Rule of Saint Clare. Mother Maddalena had left Mother Constanza in charge of the Omaha house; it proved to be their last parting. Remaining in Evansville, she celebrated the twenty-fifty anniversary of her coming to the United States. Mother Maddalena looked back in 1900 on the results of her labors. There were three foundations now, the fruit of her unwavering faith, as well as of her tears and sufferings. Her heart rejoiced.

In 1902, the aging Mother Maddalena received the unexpected news of the death of her dearly beloved Constanza. Her heart was convulsed with grief, and she could console herself only with the prospect of meeting her dear one soon again. For, in these years, her own strength was waning; and in the summer of 1905, at seventy-one years of age, her health came to a really precarious state. She knew she was soon to lay down her burden she had borne for so long. In June, she received Extreme Unction, but she lingered on through the humid summer days until August, when twenty-three Poor Clares knelt around the poor bed on which the foundress of the Poor Clares in the United States lay dying. It was during the octave of the Feast of Saint Clare, and the old nun's eyes sought for a final time the Crucifix facing her bed before she lay forever on the scenes of time. For a few brief moments, she seemed in joyous ecstasy. Then, she whose faith had never once wavered in the affliction, and whose body had borne the heats of the day in labor for the Divine Spouse, went to receive her eternal reward.

From the Evansville house which is blessed in having the remains of the saintly Mother Maddalena whose cause for beatification is pre-

parately before Rome, has come the present large monastery in Boston, founded by Mother M. Charitas in 1906, and also a foundation in Memphis, Tennessee. A further foundation from Boston was made at Bordentown, New Jersey, in 1909; and a second foundation at Philadelphia, in 1916. As late as 1947, the Boston monastery made a new foundation in Lowell, Massachusetts.

The mother community at Omaha established a foundation in Spokane, Washington; and then one in New York under Mother M. Seraphim who is still the revered abbess of the New York monastery. From the monastery in New Orleans came the foundation in Victoria, B. C., in 1912; it, in turn, sent a colony of nuns to Sauk Rapids, Minnesota, in 1923. At the present writing, the Sauk Rapids monastery contemplates a foundation of its own in the very near future. This foundation in Sauk Rapids brought the daughters of Mother Maddalena very close to that Belle Prairie which was originally to have been the first home of the Poor Clares in the United States. The house in Victoria has also founded a daughter monastery in New Westminster, Canada, in 1950. Thus, from the original foundation at Omaha, have sprung the monasteries of New Orleans, Evansville, Spokane, and New York. From these have come the houses in Boston, Bordentown, Philadelphia, Memphis, Lowell, Victoria, Sauk Rapids, and New Westminster. Great were the fruits of the toil and tears of the two homeless little Italian nuns of 1875.

Returning to Cleveland and 1878, we find Mother Veronica, grief-stricken over the departure of the Italian Sisters, but bravely turning with Mother Josepha to the task of consolidating her own little monastery. With the two German foundresses were three other cloistered nuns and one Extern Sister whom they had brought from their exile-refuge in Holland. They set themselves to establish the observance of the primitive Rule of Saint Clare according to the Constitutions of Saint Colette. (The differences in the observances followed by the Italian and German Poor Clares were so negligible as to be merely nominal.) The great poverty of the little group remaining in Cleveland, along with their ignorance of the language and of American customs, added not a little to their already penitential lives. When a severe epidemic of typhoid suddenly overtook the little group, one of the pioneers and a young postulant succumbed. The cause of the epidemic could not be determined, and it seemed that all the nuns were to be stricken with it. Finally, the Franciscan Fathers removed all the nuns in good health to the convent of the

Franciscan Sisters, and sent professional nurses to take care of the stricken Mother Veronica who, by a seeming miracle, never contracted the disease. She remained with her suffering daughters day and night, comforting and caring for them. When all were at length restored to health and more united in their monastery, they resumed their religious life with fervor; and their spirit of Franciscan joy which had not wavered during this trial became all the more vigorous because of the crisis they had survived.

By 1893, seventeen years after the Cleveland foundation had been established, the community had grown to such an extent that Mother Veronica looked for an avenue of expansion. It was then that she received an invitation from the saintly Archbishop Feehan of Chicago to come and establish a monastery in his rapidly expanding archdiocese. His vision, sharpened even more by his deep interior spirit, pierced the hearts of the people; he realized that the ever-increasing bustling activity of his archdiocese needed a counterbalance of prayer. Accordingly, a plot of ground was bought on the south side of the city, and a small wing of the present monastery in Chicago was built. In April 1893, the two original foundresses, Mother Veronica and Mother Josepha, came to Chicago with four cloistered nuns and two Extern sisters. They arrived just when the great World's Fair was in full swing, and the city was much too engrossed in the wonderful exhibition to notice a few lowly nuns who had come to their midst to bless their city with lives of prayer and sacrifice. The hardships and poverty which are the ordinary companions of religious foundations were especially loyal friends of this one! The little group of about decided to abandon the foundation, seeing no hope for the future when the good Franciscan Fathers took matters in hand. One Sunday morning, they appealed to the people from the pulpit to go to the aid of the suffering Poor Clares and not let them die of starvation. This appeal proved to be the turning-point. The people did go. And from that time on the community was generously supported by increasing numbers of Catholics in Chicago.

In 1916, during the first World War, the community of Cleveland sent another colony of nuns to the small town of Rockford, Illinois. In 1921, a third group made the first foundation on the Pacific coast at Oakland, California. This community later moved to a better location at Santa Cruz; and by 1928, was able to make a foundation at San Barbara, California, close to the Old Mission of the Padres.

Mother Veronica governed the Chicago community until a few years before her death, at which time she refused to accept the office of abbess again. Mother Josepha was, therefore, elected abbess, with Mother Veronica as her assistant. The latter had suffered a stroke, but had partially recovered when, on November 5, 1905, she was stricken with what, in retrospect, appears to have been acute appendicitis. At that time, little was known of that affliction; and an operation was not considered. The following day, in the midst of extreme pain, but in holy joy and loving resignation, and with her Sisters sobbing their hearts out at her dying bed, Mother Veronica peacefully expired. Born of a noble family, as Mother Maddalena had been, the former Countess Maria von Ellmenhorf died in the holy poverty she had cherished all her religious life. The beloved companion of her exile, hardships, trials, and sufferings, Mother Josepha, lived on until September 1908, when she went to join the saintly Mother Veronica and to receive with her the reward of their humble and faithful service to their Divine Spouse. The two foundresses had governed wisely and holily, leaving to their daughters an example of heroic virtue. Mother Veronica had declared that she considered the American temperament not only suited to the religious life, but as well suited or perhaps even more adaptable to the contemplative life. The years have borne out her conviction. The Chicago monastery has the great privilege of possessing the remains of the two saintly foundresses, Mother Veronica and Mother Josepha. Side by side, they rest in the little graveyard within the enclosure.

After the death of Mother Josepha, the community elected Mother Coletta Gardner abbess of the Chicago house. When she took over the reins of government, the little community numbered sixteen and was beginning to flourish. In 1919, at the request of Cardinal Mundelein, she built a new chapel destined to be the first of Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the archdiocese. Under Mother Coletta's wise government, the community grew and prospered. The numerous Chicago Catholics supported the monastery well; and Mother Coletta, in her turn, possessed a great, generous heart. No suffering person ever left her without having received comfort and aid, and her charity reached out especially to poor religious and missionaries. The extent of her loving generosity to the poor monasteries of her Sisters in Europe when they were suffering great want after the first World War, is known to God alone. Her charity was bread on running waters. She loved the missions with a real mission-



ary's heart; and the one poor diocese she loved most in the United States was that of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The Franciscan Archbishop Daeger received many a consoling word from Mother Coletta, though none but she and her secretary knew of it. After the tragic death of Archbishop Daeger, she extended the same generous charity to his successor, as she felt that the Santa Fe archdiocese so peculiarly Franciscan in character and tradition, had a particular claim on the daughters of the Poverello. When the sudden death of Archbishop Gerkin occurred, Divine Providence arranged that this link between the Poor Clares in Chicago and the Santa Fe archdiocese be apparently broken during the time that Santa Fe had an administrator of God Himself was to re-forge the link, and in His own ineffably wonderful way, so that all might know it was His work alone.

The new archbishop of Santa Fe, Edwin V. Byrne, came into a fully poor land of impoverished churches and inadequate Catholic schools. To this day, his own episcopal residence is as simple and poor as a seraphic Father Francis himself could desire. Because of his own spirituality, however, Archbishop Byrne realized that, even more than it needed material support, his archdiocese needed spiritual reinforcements. Accordingly, he invited the Cistercian monks (Trappists) to found a house just outside Santa Fe. Staunch and loyal friends of the Poor Clares in Chicago, these same Trappists were to be the instruments chosen by God to bring the daughters of Saint Clare to New Mexico, the land of Saint Francis. When the Poor Clares of Chicago were preparing to found a new monastery, the Trappists urged Archbishop Byrne to invite them to his archdiocese. Thus was re-forged with a greater strength than before the old link between the nuns and the archdiocese of Santa Fe. Having founded their own new monastery in April 1948, the Trappist monks were equipped to give practical counsel and inestimable spiritual and material help to the new little community of Poor Clares who came to Roswell, New Mexico, in November of that same year. They joined Mother Immaculata and Sister M. Annuntiata who had come to Roswell in the previous August to prepare the way. Like Mother Maddalena and Mother Constanza, the two had set out on their journey on the Feast of Saint Clare, August 12, 1948.

Like the Trappist monks, the Franciscan friars showed the greatest generosity and devotedness to the little group of Poor Clares, manifesting the usual love which exists between the sons and daughters of our

Father Saint Francis. The foundation in Roswell was made in the southernmost part of the Santa Fe archdiocese. After nearly five years, the community has grown out of its little white frame, red-roofed farmhouse monastery, and is hoping to build a small permanent chapel and choir in order to receive more postulants.

The writer may be pardoned for giving the Roswell foundation special attention in this historical sketch. There are spiritual dramas in life far more moving than any of fiction; and in eternity we shall rejoice to have endless ages for admiring the sweet providence and delicate "planning" of God in the lives of those who seemed to the world quite commonplace. Thus it was in the case of the Roswell foundation, for it was the former secretary of Mother Coletta in Chicago who was sent to establish a house of Poor Clares in the archdiocese of Santa Fe and who became its first abbess. Doubtless the story of every new foundation is much the same: a series of trials, sufferings, poverty, and sometimes misunderstanding and injustice. It is God's chosen way to place each new foundation on the Cross which alone can give it the spiritual power to become His faithful instrument.

Although the Roswell community was established as late as 1948, it is not the youngest of the foundations springing from the Cleveland house. In 1950, the community at Santa Cruz founded another monastery at Los Altos, California, bringing the number of Poor Clare houses in California up to three. It may be added here that the Cleveland monastery also made a foundation in Campina Grande in Brazil, South America, in 1950. This was the first attempt of any of the United States monasteries to make a foundation outside North America, and the joy and love with which the little group in Campina Grande has borne well-nigh incredible hardships, with the difficulties of climate, language, and custom superimposed on the ordinary trials of new beginnings, augurs well for the future of the Poor Clares in South America.

*Poor Clare Monastery*      *Rev. Mother M. Immaculata, P. C., Abbess*  
*of Our Lady of Guadalupe,*  
*Roswell, New Mexico*

## THE FOOTPRINT OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

Seldom if ever in the history of the world has man achieved anything of lasting value without the cooperation of woman. Even as the Divine Omnipotence chose to redeem mankind through the *fiat* of a young woman, so throughout the record of man's achievement the power of woman appears in active, positive, and decisive cooperation. It can be argued in the metaphysical sense, that the masculine alone possesses true personality; the feminine is rather a part of the whole. The man achieves fulfillment through the perfection of an individual form; the woman through the perfection of total selflessness. Yet it is the feminine nature of self-surrender that pervades both the order of nature and the order of grace. It is the power of the feminine that, through submergence and receptiveness, completes, preserves, and continues the masculine.

One of the most striking facets of the genius of our Seraphic Father was his penetrating awareness of the divine plan in nature. All creation spoke to him of God; natural beauty was to him a kind of mirror, through which and through which he beheld the eternal splendor of the Creator. He also found symbolized in nature the beautiful harmonies that result from the divinely ordained mingling of the masculine and the feminine. Thus he sang of Brother Sun and Sister Moon, of Brother Fire and Sister Water. He saw the masculine in the swift, strong wind; he saw the feminine hovering over the fertile womb of the bridal earth, in the meadows of field and forest, in every human act of giving and comfort and in death.

Because he understood the feminine as well as the masculine, and understood it so profoundly, Francis perceived with unerring clarity the God-given role of woman in the economy of human salvation. Woman was made to cooperate with man. Francis therefore realized that God entrusted Clare to him for a specific purpose—the sanctification of womanhood through cooperation with him in the holy service of the Lord. The pattern of her life, then, could not be identical with his. For her as well as for himself and his friars, he turned to the Gospel

guidance, and there in the life of our Blessed Lady he found the perfect pattern. The Virgin Mother of God, Mediatrix and Coredeptrix of mankind, was to be Clare's model and guide to perfection.

*Clare and the Imitation of Mary*

When Clare fled from her father's house under cover of night to begin her new life in Christ, Francis brought her to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula. There in the little mother church of the Franciscan Order she was tonsured and clothed in the rough garb of religious poverty. If Clare had been conscious of the symbolism in every step she took from the morning of Palm Sunday to the following night when she slipped through the door of the dead to join Francis, she was surely aware of the symbolism in his choice of the Portiuncula for her investiture. As Thomas of Celano remarks, "it was most fitting that she who was to become the virgin spouse of Christ and the mother of a new Order of poor and humble virgins should begin her new life in this poor little shrine of the Virgin Mother of God." Clare took the veil under Mary's protection, and for the whole time of her religious life strove for perfect conformity with Mary. As the eldest daughter of the Seraphic Father she could do no less, for Francis "honored the Mother of God with a love so great that it cannot be expressed in words." Clare herself realized, however, that if God had given His virginal Mother to the world as a model of womanhood, she, as a Christian woman, must imitate that model. For Clare, then, to follow the Christ of the Gospel meant primarily to follow the hidden life of His poor and humble Mother.

There is no direct evidence that Francis envisaged Clare's life as an imitation of Mary, but there are several clear implications. The very form of life he chose for her shows what he had in mind. He could have assigned her to a hermitage (the eremetical life was ever dear to his contemplative soul), or he could have associated her with his work of caring for the lepers and the poor. But he chose instead a form of life that would resemble as closely as possible the life of our Lady in the poverty and seclusion of Nazareth. Clare and her daughters were to form a family of contemplative religious observing the Gospel of Christ according to the example of His holy Mother.

Shortly before his death, Francis wrote his last will for Clare and the Poor Ladies, exhorting them to be faithful to their common ideal

of following "the life and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ most and of His most holy Mother." Clare incorporated the will into her and added several precepts of her own enjoining imitation of our poverty. She asked her daughters, for example, to wear only poor garments for love of the Infant Savior and of His poor Mother who wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger. She admonished for love of Jesus and Mary, never to desire possessions; and she her Rule with the prayer that her daughters would "forever observe poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His most Mother."

For Clare, however, true imitation of Mary was not simply a matter of the exterior practises of poverty and humility. It was something deeper than that. It involved the entire structure of the spiritual life. Mother of God and of men, Mary's role in the Church is that of Mediatrix and Coredemptrix with her Divine Son. If the Poor Ladies were to be true imitators of Mary, they must first of all take care lest "through fault or negligence or ignorance" on their part they hinder the work of Mary in the Mystical Body of her Son. Secondly, through total surrender to Christ in sacrificial love, they must draw down the mercy of God upon the sinful and suffering world, and obtain blessings and graces for the Church. Only then would the Poor Ladies merit the title of "coworkers with God and support to the frail and failing members of His glorious Body"; only then would they truly become "sisters, spouses, and mothers of the Son of the Most High Father and of the glorious Virgin."

Clare showed special predilection for Mary's virginal purity, humility, and poverty, and the three are always closely interwoven in her thought. The vow of chastity espouses the soul to Christ, "Whom the Virgin bore and was yet a virgin after." "Cling to His most sweet Mother," Clare wrote to Agnes of Prague, "who begot a Son Whom the heavens could not contain, and yet she carried Him in the little cloister of her womb and held Him on her maidenly lap." Chastity, together with humility and poverty, will make the soul capable of close imitation of Mary. "As therefore the glorious Virgin of virgins carried Him in her body, without shadow of doubt you can carry Him in a spiritual way in your chaste and virginal body if you follow the footsteps of her humility, and especially of her poverty." Imitation of Mary is therefore the surest way to union with her Divine Son, for it will lead to the Crib and to the final consummation of the Cross.

Like Francis, Clare centered her spiritual life on the Sacred Humanity of Christ, especially on His Nativity and Passion—the mysteries that show forth most strikingly Mary's part in our redemption. God willed that our Lady should be Coredemptrix with Christ; yet she took no part in His public life. She gave birth to Him in an unknown hillside cave; she came forth from the thirty years of seclusion in Nazareth only to share more fully in the bitterness of His Passion. Here Clare found a model for her own life. If she saw Francis as "another Christ", she understood that it was for her to become another Mary, for only then would she truly complement his work.

Clare gave Francis a love whose depth and strength have seldom been equalled. More perhaps than all the others who loved him, she was able to penetrate the mystery of his transcendent holiness; and with the miracle of his stigmatization her reverence must have increased immeasurably. She was his eldest daughter, his own "little plant"; and she committed herself wholly to his guidance, as Celano says, "considering him to be after God the director of her steps." Yet she saw him but rarely, and never was she allowed to share actively in his apostolic life. She longed for martyrdom, but when Francis set out to preach to the Saracens, she understood that she could accompany him only in spirit and support his mission by her sacrificial life of prayer and penance. She longed to be coworker with him in his service among the poor and afflicted—and she was indeed, but only through the power of her intercessory prayer. The Process of her canonization recounts miracle after miracle wrought by her merely through the Sign of the Cross; "for she who was aflame with such great love toward the mystery of the Cross was glorified in signs and miracles by the power of the Cross." Through her life of prayer and penance she obtained light for the guidance of others. Francis himself sought answers from God through her, and drew comfort and strength in trial from her firm and steadfast loyalty. Gregory IX had such trust in her counsel that he consulted her on the weightiest problems of his pontificate. "This was something as worthy of imitation as it was remarkable for humility," writes Celano, "that the Vicar of Christ should seek help from a handmaid of Christ and commend himself to her power before God. He well knew indeed what power love has and how freely pure virgins have access to the Throne of Majesty." Thus Clare's life unfolds as a beautiful imitation of Mary's. She understood that her role was that of coworker with Francis, but like Mary, she was to remain hidden in the shadow of the Cross.

It was Francis, of course, who directed Clare's spiritual life, and was from him, humanly speaking, that she learned to enter into the mysteries of the Crib and the Cross. Yet Clare's concentration on the Nativity and Passion was different from his. It was distinctly feminine. She gave Christ the love of a woman's heart, and gave it totally. The Divine Babe of Bethlehem stirred her tenderest devotion and awakened her woman's compassionate love for the weak and helpless. As a woman she shared Mary's joy in her divine motherhood and her sorrow in the poverty and rejection of the Infant Savior; and she besought her neighbor "to be conformed in their little nest of poverty to the poor Christ Who His poor little Mother laid as a babe in the narrow manger." Devotion to the Passion, however, was the formative power in Clare's spiritual life. In all her writings, meditation on the sufferings of Christ appears as the characteristic element in her teaching. In this she came closest to Francis; yet again there was a difference. Francis longed to feel in his own body and soul—as far as humanly possible—the pain Christ endured for us and to feel in his human heart something of the infinite love that drew Christ from heaven to die for sinful man. He prayed for identification with Christ, and the stigmatization was the answer to that prayer. Clare, too, longed to share the sufferings of Christ, but her devotion was directed toward compassion rather than toward identification. Clare suffered with Christ as Mary did, not in body but in soul. "Deep and tenderness was her lament over the Passion of the Lord," writes Celano, and he describes how during the hours of Sext and None "she was usually filled with greater sorrow that she might be immolated as a victim for her crucified Lord." The only recorded ecstasy in Clare's life occurred when she was meditating on the Passion one Holy Thursday evening and remained insensible until the following evening of Good Friday. In prayer she followed the Lord in His prayer, and her soul, sorrowing even unto death, felt and shared the sorrow of Christ, and was caught up in the remembrance of His arrest, His imprisonment, and mockery. Her exhortation to Agnes of Prague takes the same direction. "Behold Him" she wrote, "consider Him, contemplate Him, and desire to imitate Him." As a woman, Clare's emphasis is always on compassion, on living *with* Christ, through love.

In harmony with the mind of the Church, Clare combined the Franciscan ideal of perfect imitation of Christ with the liturgical ideal of the espousals of consecrated virgins to the Divine Bridegroom. "Through the life and teaching of His servant Francis, the Lord gave the

of His grace" to Clare, that she and her daughters might follow Christ after the example of Francis and his sons. Francis, the faithful bridesman, led Clare "to make a temple of her body and strive by virtue to be worthy of the espousals of the Great King." In bridal love she turned to Christ not only to follow Him but to contemplate Him as a mirror in which are reflected all the perfections of His Sacred Humanity. These are the perfections that must adorn the soul if it would please the Divine Spouse. "Burning desire for the poor Crucified" forms the soul according to the image of the Beloved, Clare explained to Agnes of Prague and "as a poor virgin the soul embraces the poor Christ." Clare, like Mary, contemplated her Incarnate Lord, keeping His words and pondering them in her heart, striving for ever closer union with Him.

Clare's imitation of Mary began on the night of her clothing in the Portiuncula; it culminated on her deathbed. Her last words to her departing soul are filled with the spirit of Mary's *Magnificat*: "Go forth," she murmured, "for He Who created thee has sanctified thee. He has protected thee as a mother does her child, and has loved thee with a tender love. Blessed be Thou, my Lord, Who hast created me." It was Mary, according to the *Legend*, who comforted Clare before her death. "Accompanied by a multitude of whiterobed virgins, the Queen of Heaven proceeded to the bed where lay the spouse of her Son, and bending over her most lovingly, embraced her most tenderly."

Thus Clare perfected her role of coworker with the Seraphic Francis. She sanctified her womanhood as Mary did, by fulfilling her God-given vocation with all the strength of her great and generous soul. She knew the masculine, but she kept to the feminine, and in this she was as rare in her own day as she would be in ours. There were many great women in Clare's time who were striving, by fair means or foul, to wrest from men a power that was not theirs by nature. The results were often tragically grotesque. But Clare, though possessing the influence of birth, wealth, and personal charm, and endowed with the gifts of natural leadership, was not one to throw aside the glorious prerogatives of her Christian womanhood for the vain prestige of worldly power. She kept her eyes on the example of Mary, and attained to holiness as Mary did, by being totally what God intended her to be. For forty-two years she lived in the holy seclusion of San Damiano, and "broke the alabaster vase of her body by the stripes of penance, so that the house of the Church," as Celano says, "was filled with the fragrance of her ointments."

Clare was ever the most faithful daughter of the Seraphic Father.

Her ardent soul was always receptive to his words, and whatever she was taught she observed with unswerving loyalty, preserved intact, and bequeathed un glossed to her daughters. After the death of Francis when his Order was torn by the dissension and infidelity of so many of the friars, it was to San Damiano alone that his loyal sons could turn for light and encouragement. With Clare and her daughters they could find again something of the serenity and joy that had marked their life with Francis. Clare became for them a living symbol of the Franciscan ideal, a clear light shining through the darkness of the storm.

To her contemporaries, Clare appeared as "the new leader of women" precisely because she strove to become "the footprint of the Mother of God." Her example is as valid for us today as it was for the world seven centuries ago. Never before has our civilization stood so desperately in need of woman's cooperation—the true cooperation of self-sacrificing love and intercessory prayer. We can still turn to Clare for guidance, for she is still "the lofty candle of holiness that burns brightly in the tabernacle of the Lord," and we may still light our feeble lamps from her clear bright flame.

*Paterson, New Jersey*

*Sr. Francis, S. M.*



Take care that the sad spectacle of human injustice may not cloud your soul, for this, too, has its place in the general economy. It is this human injustice that one day we shall see the Justice of God vanquish infallibly and triumph.

*Padre Pio*

## CLARE OF ASSISI: SAINT FOR NOW

Many persons have been arrested by the new perspective on hagiography given in the currently popular, *Saints for Now*. The fact that none of the gifted authors in the galaxy of literary talent represented there thought that Clare of Assisi was a saint-for-now may be a tribute to the obscurity she fostered, but it is also a judgment on our purblind age. And this, though the charming compiler of the studies bears her name! The saints whose lives are sketched in the engaging collection can all ably prove their claim to belong to our "now"; but their company would certainly have been enriched by a certain barefoot nun with little laughter wrinkles around her beautiful, illness-hollowed eyes, and lips shaped as well for singing as for compassion. Two of the literateurs chose our seraphic Father Saint Francis as the saint-for-now. Did no one think of the utterly lovely lady whose life was the incarnation of his ideals?

To recognize Clare of Assisi as a saint-for-now, we need first to clarify the needs and to study the complexion of our times. Who was it said, so deliciously, that the hero of whom he wrote was "born in a troubled age—just as everyone else is!" It is easy to subscribe to the dour philosopher's view, crediting our age as the most desperately wicked of all epochs. Perhaps it is. We have managed to systematize cruelty rather beyond anything our forbears did in that line. We have commercialized sin and made it a paying enterprise. We have also, however, proved that our wells of charity and goodness are far from dry, and have manifested a compassion far more vast than its antithetical cruelty. Our age is probably no more diabolically evil than the age which ignited Christians' bodies for lamps in its Roman parks; probably no better than the age when craftsmen spent whole lives perfecting a turret of a cathedral, or kings marched to the Crusades. But it has its particular deficiencies, the first of which seems to be a lack of thorough-going courage. This is particularly evident in our own country where the vast majority are content to compromise with evil rather than to fight a clear-cut battle for the truth they own and the ideals they profess. Compromise is often a sin against courage, and we have become adept in its practice. Compromise and expediency are the watchwords taken up to silence the small clamor

of consciences. And we like to forget that it is supernatural prudence which is praiseworthy, and that the prudence of men often gives insight to God.

Clare of Assisi was incapable of compromise where there was room for alternative. We can all dream over the romance of her elevation to Saint Mary of the Angels, her investiture in the rough robe of poverty, her adamant stand against all and whomever opposed her ideal. Can we likewise rouse ourselves to a vital concept of what courage a girl of eighteen, wealthy, lovely, cherished and pursued, required to become the first daughter of the Poverello? Francis was an enigma to those whom he was not an object of suspicion. His little ragged band of friars had no official status in the Church at that time. He had no security to offer the beautiful young Clare, not even to the extent of the next dinner (and one wonders where he contrived to get the shabby Habit thrown over her satin gown!)—nothing, in effect, but a dream as made in the Gospel and his personal guarantee that, as his daughter, she would always be entitled to nothing at all.

Clare was no more a "dreamer" in the modern accepted sense of the word than was Francis. Chesterton has said that most of us are so "centered" in our mediocrity that we juxtapose our position with that of the true "centrics" and arrive at the remarkable conclusion that the eccentric genius and the literal-mind saint are the eccentrics. Our Father Saint Francis and our Mother Saint Clare were so centric that the world could defend its own pathetic dullness and cowardice only by calling them eccentric dreamers. Such courage as Clare had, to take absolutely everything on a principle she knew to be sound and true, is the antidote for our age poisoned with pusillanimity and the small, crawling fears for our comfort, our false security, our cultivated lethargy. The courage of a young man who thought true values worth the highest stakes is the draught of fresh air needed in our hothouse world of today. And, if we tend to dwell on the beauty of the act of humiliation when Clare gripped hold of the altar with one hand and snatched off her veil with the other to uncover her shorn head before her raging relatives, we might also find the trace of Clare's delightful humor, the humor that true courage always begets. The shorn lamb of Francis, facing those fulminating Italian nobles, says the equivalent of: "And that, my dears, is that!" If we have forgotten how to laugh, it is because we have lost courage.

Thirty years later, ill and worn, this same brave woman could

calm orders above the hue and cry of the fast-approaching barbarian invaders, and then face them with the serenity of faith, while lifting up the Sacred Host for her single Defense and whispering to her Lover that sweet quasi-reproach of a sublime courage: "Deliver not, my Lord, to beasts, the souls of them who praise You." There never was a situation or a person to daunt Clare. When some of the first friars lost heart and courage for the ideal of their Father, Francis turned his sad steps to San Damiano where there was one heart that never knew any diminution of faith in him or courage to cling to his ideal. Meditating on the overwhelming griefs of our seraphic Father in those days of "too many friars" and too little courage, and on his humble turning to his first daughter for comfort and support, we feel a sense of warmest gratitude for Clare's constancy and the loyal courage of her Poor Ladies at San Damiano. The lines of Chesterton's exquisite carol might have been written as the cry of our Father Francis' anguished heart as it healed at the monastery of his daughters: "O, weary, weary is the world; but here is all aright!" It was all aright because Clare had the courage of faith and taught it to her daughters. Not even the Sovereign Pontiff could persuade her to turn a least left or a merest right from the straight path of her Father Francis' teaching. Again, there is a trace of Clare's quiet humor in her sweetly humble but calculatedly adamant reply to Pope Gregory IX: "Holy Father, absolve me from my sins, but not from my vow of poverty." Courage like Clare's could remake the face of our wavering society today.

With the cleanness of courage has gone the freshness of purity. Surely there is no need to defend the thesis that purity is a crying need of our polluted times. Our age has traded on lust so hard and so long, using it as the lure in advertisements, the cover-up for plotless, banal books, the theme of hit-parade songs, that Pope's classic lines are all too aptly evidenced by our hard-faced young girls and our prematurely-old boys: "Sin is a monster of so horrible a mien, as to be hated, need only to be seen; but seen too oft, familiar with its face, we first endure, then pity, then embrace." Purity, above all other things, is the myrrh that preserves youth. And its conspicuous absence in our modern world explains why so many high school girls look like sophisticated collegians; why so many college graduates look like faded women. Without an affection for holy purity, the heart grows quickly old in the world's precious wisdom, and the body is listless before it has ever quickened to the vast universe of those joys visible only to the clean of heart.

The Breviary has astonishing comments to make on Saint Clare.

The same childlike calm boastfulness of: "Our God is in Heaven, and does whatever He pleases," asserts that Clare is "more shining than light." God created light as the first miraculous diffusion of His own splendor. The Holy Church lets Clare's daughters claim that He made in their Mother something to outshine light itself. Each August 12th, Poor Ladies throughout the world take up their breviaries and sing out, in how many hundreds of bare little choirs, that: "The brightness of Clare has filled the whole earth."

If we quote Chesterton again, let us lay the blame on his own passing love for Saint Francis and Saint Clare! It was GK who insisted that, "Chastity is not mere abstention. . . it is something (positive) flaming." It was in Clare. Her purity was a white flame yearning towards Love. It was radiant. It blazed. Only the pure really know how to love. And Clare, who was fashioned for loving, made no apology for the rugged measures she took to preserve that wisdom. The thousands who endure tortures to effect a semblance of physical beauty in themselves shudder at the notion of a perpetual fast, a continual silence, an endless cycle of vigils, and the other means Clare used to insure the beauty of her spirit and that of her daughters. With her, it was always a question of penance, yes,—but penance for love's sake! She knew that without penance is as meaningless as turns on a trapeze. But she was not so foolish as to credit original sin in theory and not a vital principle. The impure always fear for their purity. The impure do not trouble with precautions having already slipped beyond them.

Belief in the Communion of Saints, the Mystical Body of Christ was the second living principle actuating Clare in her life of penance. She knew that on the mysterious scales of Divine Justice, the penance of the Poor Ladies would avail for the impenitent in the world, that her purity would weigh against the impurity of others, that they would be accepted as victims for others' sins. Seven centuries before Our Blessed Lady said to the children of Fatima: "Many souls go to hell because there is no one to pray and make sacrifices for them," Clare of Assisi was demonstrating that thesis with her own and her daughters' lives of chastity and penance. A return to the humble paths of Clare who was "purer than light," could rekindle the blaze of youth in modern hard young people and could release incredible vials of fragrance down the odorous streets of our stale age.

It is the nature of goodness to diffuse itself, and in quiet. It is

nature of evil to defend itself, and most often with noise. We have called Clare of Assisi the candle in Umbria, because that seemed the truest symbol of her life and of her soul. She who was brave against the dark as candleflame is brave, pure in her flicker of life as candlelight is pure, was also quiet in her sanctity as the constant candle is quiet in giving up all that makes it a candle. The real office of a candle is to cease to be a candle. And the basic business of one aspiring to perfection is to become Someone Else. It is an extremely difficult business, for one does not get so attached even to the unpleasant person one is! It has been said that the predominant evil of any age ultimately manages to scale cloister walls. If the world has found that a constant racket will, in time, fill in its thought chambers and outcry its conscience, religious need likewise to be careful that they do not camouflage a great lack of being with a great deal of doing. The hero of the hour is the man who can do the most things in the shortest possible time, but he makes a sorry monastic hero.

In her century, when abbesses were more often than not women-of-affairs, with huge temporal holdings and immense households, enjoying the prestige of worldly queens, Clare quietly shut herself up in dilapidated old San Damiano. And, at once, it was a monastery. Not because it was grand or picturesque or thriving, but because it was a house of prayer and a haven of silence where souls devoted themselves to the most intense of all activities: passivity. Most of the first Poor Ladies were noblewomen, one was a princess royal. To all of them, Clare offered nothing in substitute for the trumpeting and adulation they had known in the world, except prayer and solitude and poverty. She herself has left us not even one colorful statement on the political character of her times. And if some Popes have sought temporal counsel from certain saints, three Popes sought at San Damiano the spiritual counsel of one whose only concern with the world was for its soul, a concern of quiet prayer and self-immolation. When the aged Innocent IV found himself prostrated by temporal tragedies as well as by spiritual anguish, he came to his "daughter and mother, the Lady Clare," not for a plan of action, but to renew his own soul in the quiet of her holiness. It has never been claimed that our holy Father Saint Francis asked Clare what to do about recalcitrants or schismatics; it is known that he found his own answers in her serene loyalty.

We learn nowhere so quickly and yet so profoundly as we learn in quiet. Because the world cannot bear to learn about itself or to look in its own wizened soul, it fears and hates quiet. It hustles, because it

cannot afford to think. It rivets and blares because it dare not be st. Ours is an age of accomplishment, but one draws in the breath to thi of what real and lasting accomplishments could spring out of a retu to the silence of contemplation. The very word, contemplation, ought be the most companionable of words for any soul, since it is the term our eternal destiny. Yet most persons are ill at ease with it. Action a noise are less demanding companions. By modern standards, Clare Assisi's life was wasted. She built no hospitals, introduced no system pedagogy, made no speeches, wrote no books, did not even proclaim a r way of sanctity. The Gospel was her way. Francis was her guide. A her destiny was the quiet of utter union with God her Lover

Clare had a taste for solitude and a talent for quiet. By indulg the one and perfecting the other, she learned the secrets of the King, a gained open sesame to His Heart. His first spiritual daughters have t us of their Mother's increasing hunger for hours of companionship w her Divine Spouse in the quiet of private prayer. The Poor Cla prayer schedule would probably seem staggering to most persons. Saint Clare, it was never sufficient. When her daughters slept, Clare mained before the Blessed Sacrament, lost in the quiet of her per union with God. How many times her daughters saw flames or ring light about her head when she knelt in quiet prayer, oblivious of ear Her quiet, "useless" life brought her to such intimacy with Christ t when dying she could say to Him with a sweet simplicity that pr tears to our own eyes: "I thank you for having created me." Hers the true courtesy of her seraphic Father. One is reminded of Mo Janet Stuart of our own times who died, not with a protest of her l for God on her lips, but with a Franciscan cry of simple wonder: " how He loves me!" In the simple song that was Clare's life, the ictus always on God!

Clare is the saint of silence. If our holy Father Saint Francis embled our Lord as no other saint quite did, who will gainsay belief that Saint Clare most resembled the Holy Mother of God? has left us no autobiography, no guidebooks, no "accomplishments". as our Blessed Lady did, she has left us the legacy of her quiet. We it so acutely, we poor, noisy, busy little people, that we could well out like thunder: Clare is the saint-for-now! Her courage, her bla purity, her perfect quiet are her claims to twentieth century venerat Her valor sweetly rebukes our pusillanimity; her exquisite purity ph for our stale generation; the great, missionary heart that beat for

the world in the silence of her cloister, sends its throb across seven centuries to us now. If we look for light in these dark days, let us hear, in Clare's year of jubilee, our seraphic Father's simple directive, uttered over and over again to sufferers of his own age and confided to our age from Heaven: "Go to the Lady Clare."

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Humility and purity are the wings that lift us up to God and almost deify us. Remember this: The evildoer who is ashamed to do evil is closer to God than the honest man who is ashamed to act honestly.

*Padre Pio*