

Clare was born into a patrician family in Assisi in 1193 or 1194. As a girl she refused two offers of marriage, though we know little else about her early life. Then in 1212 she heard Francis preaching and was so impressed that she determined to devote herself to the religious life. Like many others at that time, she was attracted to a life of poverty as a witness against the wealth, power and corruption that infected much of the church. In March 1212 Clare secretly left home and joined Francis at Portiuncula outside Assisi. Here he received her vows as a nun and then placed her in the temporary care of a convent of Benedictine nuns for her spiritual and religious formation. She resisted strong family pressure to return home, and was eventually joined by others, including her sister Agnes, who wished to follow with her the Franciscan ideal of absolute poverty. Later, her widowed mother joined her as well.

In 1215, when the number of adherents had grown, Francis set up the small community in a house near San Damiano, the church just outside Assisi he had repaired a few years earlier. The order followed rules of rigid poverty and strict enclosure, even more so than other women's religious houses of the day. Pope Innocent IV granted Clare "The Privilege of Poverty", a papal grant which ensured that the three early houses of Assisi, Perugia and Florence should never be endowed but depend solely on alms. Before long there were religious houses belonging to Clare throughout Europe. Debate about poverty continued among the nuns, as it did in the Franciscan Order.

Clare's relationship with Francis was always close, though they met rarely in his later years. He wrote for her the first rule of "The Poor Ladies", as the order was originally called. Shortly before his death, he paid a brief farewell visit to San Damiano. Clare became an important figure in the contemplative tradition. Like Francis she was committed to serving the community joyfully and was imbued with a love of nature.

Clare never left the house at San Damiano. Her long period of rule as an abbess was characterised by her discretion and by her love for her nuns and for Assisi, despite the fact that she was often ill. The rule of the order was austere, nevertheless she warned against extravagant austerities for her nuns. To one superior she wrote, "Our bodies are not made of brass." She herself wrote that her master Christ was "the splendour of eternal glory, the brightness of eternal light". She died in 1253. She was canonised two years later.

For Liturgical Use

Clare was born into a patrician family of Assisi in 1194. At the age of 18 she ran away from home to join Francis and his poor brothers. Under his guidance she became the founder and first abbess of the order now called "The Poor Clares". She directed and led the order with loving discretion and devotion for nearly forty years. Strongly ascetic though the rule of the order was, Clare still warned about extremes: "Our bodies are not made of brass", she once wrote. She died in 1253.

Sentence

The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the neediest of the people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 29:19

Collects

Loving God,
your Son became poor
that he might make many rich;
by the example of your servant Clare,
inspire in us a singleness of heart in your service,
so that we may love and care for those around us,
in humble obedience to Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus, you called the gentle lady Clare
to be poor,
and by her prayer,
her sweetness, her courage and self-denial,
to reflect your glory;
help us to see the value of poverty and prayer.

Psalms 63:1-9 116:1-9

Readings

Proverbs 22:1-2,4,8-9	A good name is better than riches
2 Corinthians 6:3-10	Poor, yet making many rich
Luke 12:32-34	Treasure in heaven

Post Communion Sentence

God chose the poor people in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom.

James 2:5 (adapted)