

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you” (Jeremiah 1:5). Ortulana di Offreduccio knew during her pregnancy that something was indeed special about her 1<sup>st</sup> child. God called her daughter Clare to be a light to the world.

Born in Assisi in 1193, Clare was “strongly drawn to the things of God, praying fervently, devoutly visiting the Blessed Sacrament, and manifesting a tender love towards the poor.”<sup>i</sup> While the men in the family were off to war, the women of the family, Ortulana and her daughters, fasted, prayed, and did corporal works of mercy.<sup>ii</sup>

When Clare was 15, she heard and was deeply moved by the preaching of Francis of Assisi. It was not uncommon for young girls to marry in their teens. However, Clare wanted to be a bride of Christ. At 18, much to the disappointment of her father, she left home to join the Franciscans at their Portiuncula Chapel and embrace a life of evangelical poverty.

Francis of Assisi, her friend and spiritual guide, placed her in a Benedictine Convent and saw in her the potential for drawing others to Christ. 16 days after she arrived, her sister Agnes joined her. Her mother, another sister, and an aunt in time would join her. Three years after leaving home, Francis asked Clare to be in charge of the San Damiano Convent for women. Clare held the position of Abbess for the next 42 years never leaving the walls of the convent.

Assisted by the sisters in community, Clare was the first woman to help write a rule of life for women living in a religious community. All decisions were made in common. The Poor Clares, as they came to be known, wore no shoes nor sandals. Their vegetarian diet was plain and simple. They slept on the ground. They observed complete silence. Emphasizing gospel poverty, the sisters relied on the daily contributions of others and held no property. Following the example of Jesus who washed the feet of the apostles, Clare as Abbess ruled as the “servant of the sisters.”<sup>iii</sup>

The Poor Clares lived a life of contemplative prayer. When Jesus was transfigured, “his face shone like the sun” (Mt 17:2). When Clare came from prayer, her face shone with a joy that dazzled others.<sup>iv</sup>

Coming from the same town and sharing a deep love of God, Francis and Clare were of great mutual support to one another throughout their lives. “Their ministries took on different forms—Francis among the people, Clare within the walls of San Damiano—but they never lost their connection. Francis was an inspiration for Clare; Clare was a constant support for Francis.”<sup>v</sup>

Clare taught, “We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become.”<sup>vi</sup> She was deeply in love with Jesus and a life devoted to him helped her to radiate the love of Christ to others. Saint Paul’s words are most befitting, “I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12b). Jesus suffered on the cross and died at the age of 33. Clare had a much longer life and suffered serious illness from the age of 33 to the end of her life in 1253.

In the midst of the pandemic when our movements are limited, and many of our freedoms are restricted, we can look to Clare for inspiration. In quiet contemplation, she listened for God and found profound peace and joy. Her daily tasks of praying, cleaning, and gardening were all done without traveling to and fro. God was at the center of every moment of the day.

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<sup>i</sup> catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-clare-of-assisi-564

<sup>ii</sup> franciscanmedia.org/celebrating-saint-clare-of-assisi/

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<sup>iv</sup> franciscanmedia.org/saint-clare-of-assisi/

<sup>v</sup> info.franciscanmedia.org/st.-clare-novena-pillar

<sup>vi</sup> info.franciscanmedia.org/st.-clare-novena-pillar