

They say that lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place. This may be true in nature but often times it is just the opposite in faith. Every so often where God inspires a man to found a religious order for brothers, he also inspires a holy woman to found a religious order for sisters.

Francis of Assisi made a pilgrimage to Rome. Feeling a call to embrace a life of poverty, he “deposited his money at Saint Peter’s tomb and exchanged clothes with a beggar.ⁱ” After he returned home, lightning struck when he had a vision of Christ calling him to rebuild his church. The Lord wanted Francis to lead a spiritual renewal of the church. Guided by God, Francis called others to embrace a new way of life and help rebuild the church.

In 1193, Clare of Assisi was born. In this case, the lightning struck even before her birth. Clare’s mother “received a sign that her daughter would be a bright light of God in the world. As a child she was already very strongly drawn to the things of God, praying fervently, devoutly visiting the Blessed Sacrament, and manifesting a tender love towards the poor.”ⁱⁱ At the age of 18, when she heard Francis preaching in the town square, she was drawn then and there to a life of poverty and humble service to Christ. “For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him” (Phil 3:8).

Later that night, Clare journeyed to the little church that Francis had helped to rebuild and turned her life over to God. “At the altar of Our Lady, Saint Francis cut off her hair, clothed her in his habit of penance, a piece of sackcloth, with his cord as a cincture.”ⁱⁱⁱ Francis instructed Clare to go to a Benedictine Convent.

In time and under the guidance of her spiritual mentor Francis, Clare founded the Order of Poor Clare’s. Francis appointed Clare to be the superior of this new religious order at the age of 22. Clare was an inspiration to her 14-year-old sister, later on her mother and other noble women joined her. The discipline of the Poor Clare’s was observed through perpetual abstinence, constant silence so as to contemplate God, and an embrace of poverty that called for walking barefoot, living without any possessions, and asking for alms for their daily bread.^{iv}

Jesus teaches, “everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29). Inspired by Jesus and the call to evangelical poverty, the religious order proved to be truly motivated. “Many young noble women left all they had to take on the poor habit of Clare and the order grew rapidly, with houses being founded all over Italy, all of whom took St. Clare as their model and inspiration.”^v

Clare truly believed: “We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. If we love things, we become a thing. If we love nothing, we become nothing. Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ, rather it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation. This means we are to become vessels of God’s compassionate love for others.”^{vi}

As the pandemic continues, there is a great pent-up demand for people to travel. Clare was content with Christ. “She came from prayer, it was said, with her face so shining it dazzled those about her. She suffered serious illness for the last 27 years of her life. Her influence was such that popes, cardinals, and bishops often came to consult her—Clare herself never left the walls of San Damiano.”^{vii}

Clare led the community for 42 years until her death in 1253. In death her beauty continued to shine. Her body did not decay and to this day remains uncorrupted by the ravages of death and time. “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? ... But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved

brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:55, 57-58).

ⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-francis-of-assisi-614

ⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-clare-of-assisi-564

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibreviary, Memorial of Saint Clare.

^{iv} Ibid, CNA-564.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} azquotes.com/author/30129-Clare_of_Assisi

^{vii} franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-clare-of-assisi