

Lives of Saints

St Clare

1194 – 1253

Feast day: 11th August



“Blessed be you
my God, for
having created
me.”

St Clare

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S O C I E T A S
D O C T R I N Æ
C H R I S T I A N Æ

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My parents were noble and wealthy. As a child I was most devoted to prayer and to practices of mortification, and as I passed into girlhood my distaste for the world and her yearning for a more spiritual life increased. At 15 I refused to marry. I was too moved by the dynamic preaching of Francis. He became my lifelong friend and spiritual guide.

One night, at the age of 18, I escaped from my father's home, was met on the road by friars carrying torches, and in the poor little chapel called the Portiuncula received a rough woollen habit, exchanged my jewelled belt for a common rope with knots in it, and sacrificed the long tresses of my hair to Francis' scissors. Francis then placed me in a Benedictine convent which my father and uncles immediately stormed in rage. But I clung to the altar of the church and threw aside my veil to show my cropped hair and remained adamant.

Sixteen days later my sister Agnes joined me. Others came. We lived a simple life of great poverty, austerity and complete seclusion from the world, according to a rule Francis gave us as a Second Order (Poor Clares). At 21, Francis obliged me under obedience to accept the office of abbess in which I continued until my death.

We went barefoot, slept on the ground, ate no meat and observed almost complete silence (Later, like Francis, I persuaded my sisters to moderate this rigor: "Our bodies are not made of brass." The greatest emphasis was on simplicity, humility and gospel poverty. We possessed no property, even in common, subsisting on daily contributions. There was a lot of pressure to dilute the ideal, but I resisted it.

I served the sick, waited at table, washed the feet of the begging nuns. I suffered serious illness for the last 27 years of my life. I never left the walls of San Damiano, but popes, cardinals and bishops often came to consult me.

Francis always remained my great friend and inspiration. I was always obedient to his will and to the great ideal of gospel life which he was making real.