



St. Clare of Assisi
July 16, 1194 - August 11, 1253

Medieval Times

- Medieval society in the thirteenth century was a time of transition. A rising wealthy merchant class began challenging the long standing noble families. It was a time of conflict between warring city states (those loyal to the nobility versus the newly rich merchant class, those loyal to the emperor versus the pope; the poor versus the rich.) The Church, being an integral part of medieval society, was also a part of this conflict. It was seen as corrupt and gluttonous. In addition, the Church lacked spiritual credibility due to the scandalous actions of its priests and leaders.

NOBILITY

- Noble women at the time were seen as a means to extend wealth and power for their noble families. Women were schooled in reading, sewing, embroidery and running a household. They were hidden from public view inside large palaces in order to preserve their virginity and marriage marketability and essentially led semi-enclosed lives. Marriages were arranged among powerful families to extend wealth, power and preserve peace.
- Joan Mueller, *Clare of Assisi: Letters to Agnes*, 8.

Monasteries

- If a noble woman entered a monastery (sometimes to settle a daughter without marriage prospects or to obtain indulgences for the family) she was expected to bring a dowry with her to the monastery which would supply an income of support for the rest of her life. Monasteries acquired lands, orchards and goods which they were able to use for supporting themselves in a very comfortable manner. In fact, a noble woman could even bring with her servants to maintain her standard of living in the monastery. (Later, St. Colette was noted for reforming some of these practices which had crept into Poor Clare life.)



Continued...

- In addition, monasteries were not always immune to the violence which surrounded them. At times, nuns were raped and pillaged. The cloister became the means to protect the nuns with their holiness, silence and enclosure. Some well connected monasteries sponsored by powerful families, even received special papal privileges of a threat of excommunication if one of their inhabitants were harmed.

Clare of Assisi



Clare of Assisi

- Clare, born in 1193 or 1194 in Assisi, was the daughter of Offreduccio di Favarone and his wife Ortolana. The family fled to Perugia while Clare was a young girl- a town more favorable to a noble family than merchant oriented Assisi. Later they moved back to their palace in Assisi when a negotiated peace between the merchants (Assisi) and the nobles (Perugia) was formed.
- Ortolana was a very devout woman who had undertaken pilgrimages to Rome, Santiago de Compostela and the Holy Land. Later on in her life, Ortolana entered Clare's monastery, together with Agnes, Clare's sister.^[1]

Family Years

- **Clare's home, next to the Cathedral of San Rufino, was a happy one. Ortolana schooled Clare in the traditional ways of a noble woman but also with a deep religious and spiritual training. She was expected to be married at the appropriate time to another noble family for the traditional reasons. However, Clare had developed a deep prayer life and practiced mortification while still young, and from the age of 16 decided that she would consecrate her life to God.**

Adulthood

- When she was eighteen years old, she heard St. Francis preach during Lent at the Church of San Giorgio in Assisi and Clare became determined to also live the same gospel life of Francis.
- On Palm Sunday, March 20, 1212, Clare stayed behind in her pew at mass, while the other young eligible girls went up to the Bishop to receive their Palm Branches. Instead, the Bishop came down from the sanctuary and handed Clare hers. Later that night, she escaped from her home, through the 'door of death', accompanied by her Aunt Bianca and another company, so she could follow Francis. Clare met St. Francis and his brothers at the chapel of the Porziuncula (Our Lady of the Angels) and there Francis and his friars accompanied her with candles alight and accepted her vows to live in the service of the gospel. Clare put aside her rich clothes, and Francis cut her hair (tonsured) and clothed her in a rough dress and veil as a sign of her consecration.

Door of Death





Clare consecrating herself to the gospel and receiving the veil from St. Francis



Clare and her sisters

Breakaway from the World

- Initially Francis placed Clare temporarily in the monastery of the Benedictine nuns of San Paolo. (Some say this was to ensure papal protection which the monastery enjoyed.) Francis, gave her a simple “form of life” (*formula vitae*) to begin her life. Her father, hearing of her decision to share in Francis’ gospel living, went to the monastery and tried to persuade her to leave and even tried to drag her out by force. Showing her shorn head (a sign of her consecration to God), her father left without Clare. Francis then transferred Clare to another Benedictine monastery of St. Angelo in Panzo. There, Clare was joined by her younger sister, Agnes. The family attempted to recover their second daughter by forcibly removing Agnes. It was said that Agnes grew so heavy that she could not be moved.

The Poor Ladies

- . Eventually Clare was not only joined by her sister, Agnes, but also by her mother, Ortolana, a younger sister, Beatrix and her aunt, Bianca. Understanding the need for a specifically Franciscan monastery, Francis was able to move the fledgling foundation to a rustic dwelling which he built next to the chapel of San Damiano which the Benedictines allowed him to use. It was there, that he had previously prophesied, would house his “Poor Ladies” also called “Damianites:” *"- Ladies will again dwell here who will glorify our heavenly Father throughout his holy, universal Church by their celebrated and holy manner of life -"*

- Joan Mueller, *St. Clare of Assisi: Letters to Agnes*. p. xvi.
- Legend of the Three Companions (L3C), in *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, The Lady*. 24.
- *Testament of St. Clare (TestCl)*, 14.

Home of the Poor Clares San Damiano Church



Promise of St. Francis to the Poor Clares

- Throughout Clare's life, she was, as she herself described it, "the little plant of our father, Francis." It was written in her testament, "- *When the Blessed Francis saw, however, that, although we were physically weak and frail, we did not shirk deprivation, poverty, hard work, trial, or the shame or contempt of the world... he greatly rejoiced in the Lord. And moved by compassion for us, he bound himself, both through himself and through his Order, to always have the same loving care and special solicitude for us as for his own brothers -*"
- *TestCl, 27-29*

- **Much against her will, Clare was appointed Abbess by St. Francis and under her spirituality, other foundations of Poor Ladies were started throughout Italy and Europe. Her daily life was filled with prayer and what was left over was used for manual labor. (Clare was known for spinning a fine thread to be woven into beautiful corporals which were given to churches around Assisi.) Throughout Clare's life, she was a confidant and aide to Francis, helping him to discern whether Francis should retire into a life of contemplation or remain active. Ties with the Franciscan brotherhood were strong since the brothers provided spiritual care and assistance to the poor ladies.**



Clare and her sisters mourning the death
of St. Francis (1226)



St. Clare and the siege of Assisi (1240)



Clare's illness

Chronology of Poor Clare Rules

St. Francis' *Formulae Vitae*

The Privilege of Poverty (Pope Innocent III) 1215 or 16

Hugolino's Rule (FLHug) 1219

Pope Gregory IX (formerly Cardinal Hugolino) refuses Poor Clares the Privilege of Poverty (1217)

Pope Gregory IX restores Privilege of Poverty (1218)

Pope Innocent IV (FLInn) 1247

Rule of St. Clare (RCI) 1253

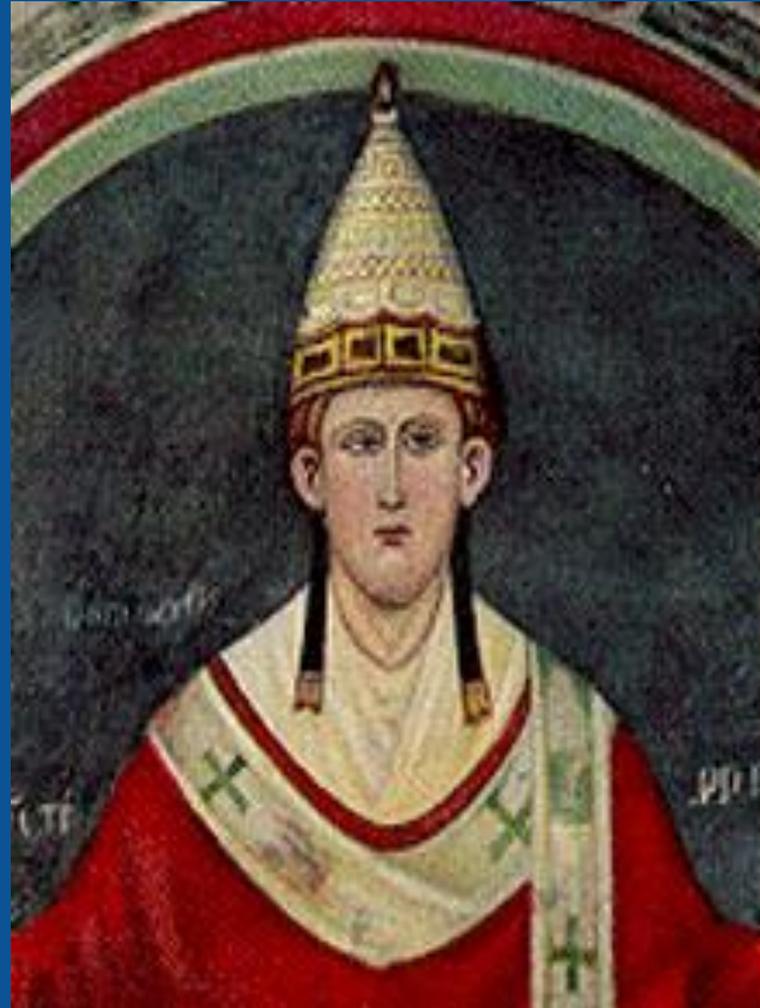
Francis' Formulae Vitae

"Since by divine inspiration, you have made yourselves daughters and servants of the most High King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers to have that same loving care and special solicitude for you as [I have] for them."



The Privilege of Poverty (1215-16)

"No one can compel you to receive possessions"



Innocent III

Hugolino's Rule (1219)

Based upon the Benedictine's Rule of Life

Removes the friars from ministry to the Poor Ladies

Refuses Clare's ideals of the Privilege of Poverty

Strictly defined enclosure



Rule of Innocent IV (1247)

Lessens Fasting

Permits possessions

Associates the "Damianites"
to the Franciscan Order

Abandons Benedictine Rule

Enforced by papal decree

1250: Pope declares Poor
Ladies no longer bound by
this Rule



Rule of St Clare (1253)

First Rule ever written by a woman

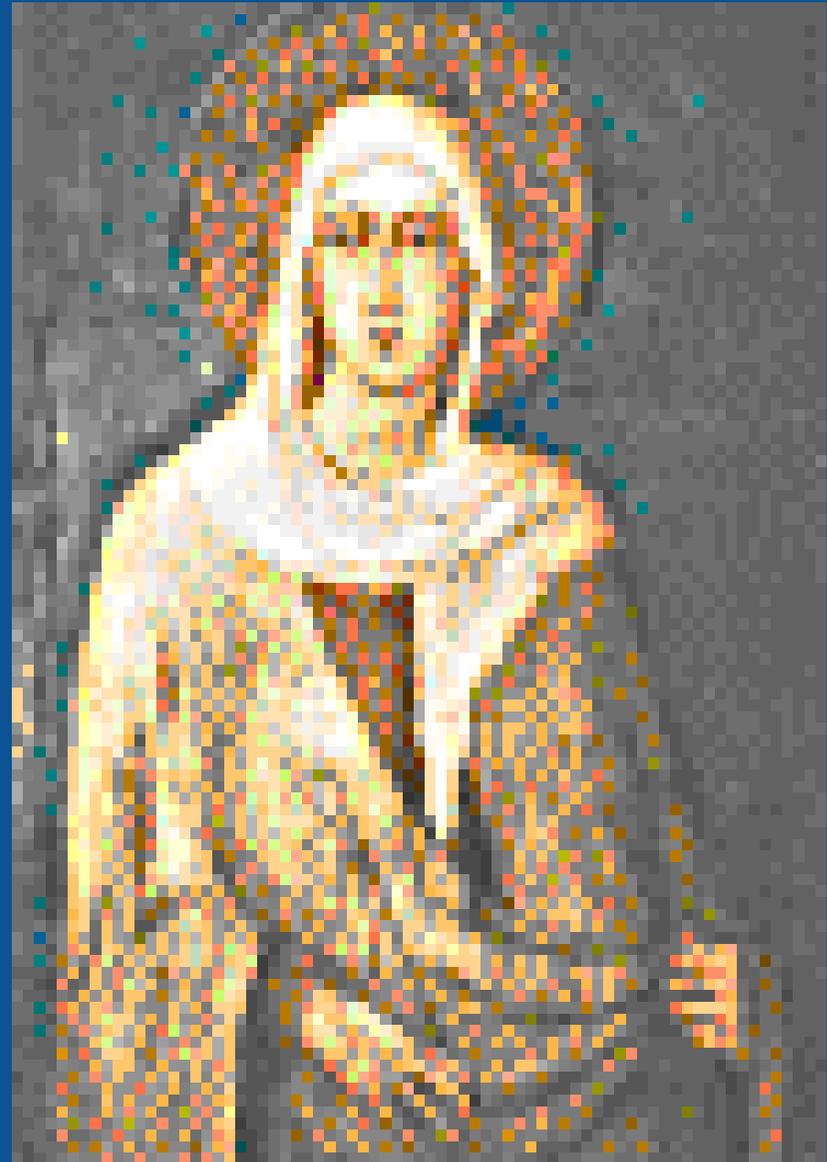
Incorporates many ideas from the Later Rule of the Friars

Three Characteristics

- All work with their hands
- Life in common
- The Privilege of Poverty

Democratic in governance

Approved by papal bull 2 days before Clare's death.



Followers of St. Clare

- **Clare's influence was also felt far from the hills of San Damiano. Agnes of Prague was one noted follower who learned of Francis through the itinerate preaching of the brothers. Agnes was the youngest daughter of King Premysl Otaker I and Queen Constance of Hungary and was betrothed as a young age to Henry VII of Germany. When this betrothal dissolved due to war, Agnes' father considered a marital alliance with the English but instead another proposal for marriage was made by Frederick II of Germany, the father of Henry VII. Agnes appealed to the Pope for his help and Frederick II's proposal was refused and Agnes was now free to chose her own future. She chose poverty. She built her own monastery and hospital from her own funds and requested papal protection for the monastery. Clare sent 5 German speaking sisters from Trent to assist with this new foundation and to help Agnes and her sisters to follow the form of life of St. Clare at San Damiano. It is Clare's letters to this Agnes of Prague which have come down to us and reveals Clare's rich spirituality and wisdom.**



"gaze on [Him], consider [Him],
contemplate [Him], as you desire to
imitate [Him]." St. Clare of Assisi

Spirituality of St. Clare

Contemplation/Transformation

Mirror Image

Spiritual Marriage/Spiritual Motherhood

Holy Unity

“Place your mind before the
mirror of eternity!
Place your soul in the brilliance
of glory!
And transform your entire
being into the image
of the Godhead Itself through
contemplation”.



Mirror Image



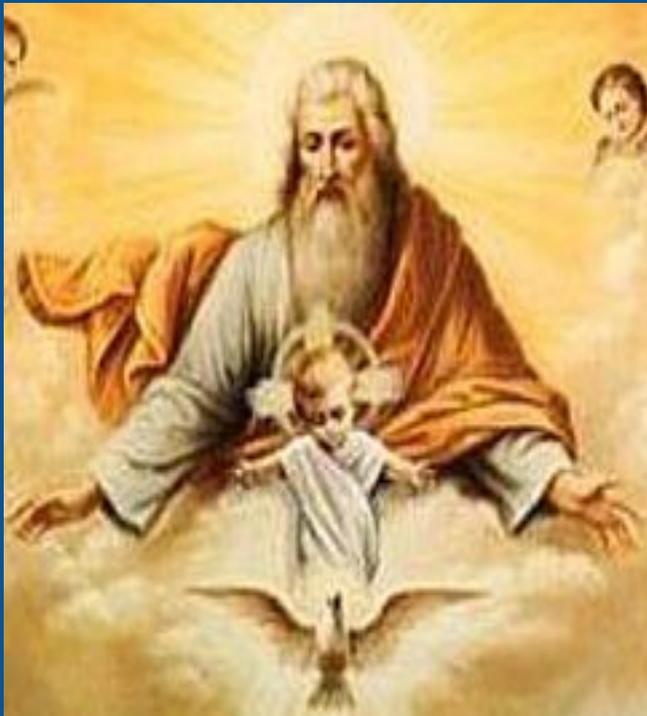
“Gaze upon that mirror each day, O Queen and Spouse of Jesus Christ, and continually study your face within it, that you may adorn yourself within and without with beautiful robes, covered, as is becoming the daughter and most chaste bride of the Most High King, with the flowers and garments of all the virtues. Indeed, blessed poverty, holy humility, and inexpressible charity are reflected in that mirror, as, with the grace of God, you can contemplate them throughout the entire mirror.”

MYSTICAL MARRIAGE/SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD



"...because you are the Beloved and the mother and the sister of my Lord Jesus Christ"

Holy Unity



"In this Presence we are made one in Triune Love. Together we call upon the Spirit, together we join ourselves to Jesus to praise and thank our God. And all of us with unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory."

Comparison of St. Clare with Classical Lectio Divina

Classic Lectio Divina

Lectio

Meditatio

Oratio

Contemplatio

St. Clare's Way

Gaze

Consider

Contemplate

Imitate

Clare's final days

- As Clare felt her death approaching, she received the last sacraments from Cardinal Rainaldo. Pope Innocent IV came from Perugia to visit the saint. Clare called her sisters around her and exhorted them to persevere faithfully in evangelical poverty and reminded them of the many benefits they have received from God. Like Francis, the Passion according to John was read and before dawn on August 11, 1253, Clare died peacefully in the company of Brothers Leo, Angelo and Juniper, three of the earliest companions of Francis. Clare lived twenty seven years after her inspiration and father in religious life, passed onto his heavenly reward.

St. Clare's Incorrupt Body





Basilica of St. Clare
Assisi, Italy