

Radiant Lady of Noble Birth, Illustrious Queen, Clare by Name



This illumination is taken from the *Life of St. Clare*, Codex 4 by the Master of Tennenbach, 1478. The Blessed Mother is crowning Clare. I've loved this image (and the whole series in Codex 4) since 2007. The artist expresses a certain vision a Sister Benvenuta had while praying with other sisters around Clare on her deathbed. They'd heard Clare speaking with "her own soul" about leaving Earth in peace. Lost in prayer to Mary for Clare, Benvenuta described this moment in the *Process of Canonization*, 11.4: *I saw a multitude of virgins with crowns on their heads coming through the door of that room where Mother Clare was lying. Among these there was one greater and far more beautiful than all the others and wearing a crown on her head larger than all the others. These virgins approached the bed of holy Lady Clare and the greater Virgin first covered her bed with the most delicate cloth. Then the Virgin of virgins inclined her face above the Lady Clare or above her breast, so that the witness could not discern one from the other.*

I've written many Legionnaire articles about Clare of Assisi, the first one in 2013. I can never seem to have enough room to write about even one aspect of her life. The circumstances of our world we find ourselves in this year drive me to write about what has inspired me to emulate and search for the strength I know this woman had.

Through the past six months I've received a couple of "take me off the mailing list" letters from people who don't care for what I've said about the clash between Gospel values and the present state of affairs in our country. Those letters don't bother me at all because at least people read what I wrote. And I am confident that when I preach or write about living the Gospel as we friars profess for life, there will necessarily be conflicts, just as Jesus promised. Read what our Pope has written about the U.S., Gaza and other troubled parts of the world. Finally the U.S. bishops are speaking very directly against the abuses of power, the justice system, a lack of concern for immigrants, the poor and elderly, and neglect of the common good of humanity. One of the sources of inspiration for me to preach forthrightly and bravely at times has been this marvelous woman, Clare of Assisi.

In one word, the world into which Clare was born was also tumultuous. The 13th century Church was ruled by warrior popes like Innocent III, whom Francis came to know personally. The Holy Roman Emperors ruled with swords and political intrigue. There was no separation of Church and State because the Church permeated every single aspect of everyday life. Francis had his nose crudely rubbed in the brutality of war and was a POW in Perugia for over a year before his father ransomed him. Sound familiar? Rival gangs fought constantly, one city against another. Perugia and Assisi were constantly at battle. Assisi was once described as "a town where the streets ran with blood." Constant struggles between the Upper City of Assisi (the nobles) and the Lower City (the poor) pitted gang against gang. And that inner warfare is remembered to this day in Assisi's annual Kalendimaggion, a huge 3-day medieval spectacle and vocal contest between

the Upper and Lower City. Francis and Clare were directly touched and influenced by the hatred and bloodshed surrounding their everyday life. Francis was even involved in it as a young man.

Clare's noble family had five knights within it so war and power struggles, class boundaries, bitter rivalries and hatred were facts of life. Today Assisi's nickname is City of Peace, but in the 13th century, it was by no means the lovely haven it is today.

Clare left her family at 17 on the night of Palm Sunday in 1212 to join Francis and his brothers. A woman? With male religious? One of our Franciscan scholars, Michael Cusato has often said that "Francis didn't know what to do with her" because of scandal, etc. She eventually ended up living at San Damiano on the hillside of Assisi until her death in 1253. But I want to zero in on the courage it took Clare to leave her noble, comfortable life and join this movement led by what appeared to be a crazy religious zealot. She was already known to be holy, generous and beautiful; yet Clare knew that God was calling her to make a dramatic change in life. What she had seen and known of Francis encouraged her to respond positively to God's call.

For a young, single woman to relinquish family, wealth and power in the Middle Ages took incredible courage and her example enlivens and enables me to renew my own vowed life daily. Seriously. She encountered fierce opposition from the Offreduccio family. But her conviction to follow the Lord's call to holiness touched her family too; eventually her two sisters and their widowed mother joined this newly founded religious community for women.

Throughout her years of cloistered life Clare and the nuns played a unique role in the very beginnings of our Franciscan family. Clare considered herself a "little plant of Francis" in the sense that she was faithful to live the Gospel in his spirit. Church laws allowed only one rule for women religious, the Rule of St. Benedict; but Clare refused to commit the Ladies to adopt that rule forever. She resisted more than one pope only because she was faithful to Francis. Read her life and you see courage as never before known in the Church. One of the 13th century hymns I translated years ago from a manuscript in Assisi referred to her many deeds as "filled with courage only God can give." A contemporary of Clare wrote that, so she was known as a strong woman of faith who knew exactly what God had asked of her.



Clare is the first woman in the history of Christianity to write a Rule for women religious. Imagine! What strength! What courage! For me, the clearest indicator of her powerful will and fidelity to Francis is what happened in her last days. Pope Innocent IV was in Perugia and paid a visit to San Damiano to see Clare, who was near death. He brought with him the Rule she had written and presented it to her with his papal seal. A lifetime of fidelity, courage and complete trust in God became reality in writing. Clare gathered her sisters and as recorded in her Proclamation of Canonization: *She reverently took the parchment, even though very close to death, and pressed that seal to her mouth to kiss it. On the following day, Lady Clare, truly clear with no darkness in her heart, passed from this life to the Lord, to the clarity of eternal light.* Yet another 14th century hymn I translated proclaimed: *At death was Clare indeed rich, her habit now was changed to robes of glory: newness in God's embrace.*

What can Clare's acts of courage mean for us today? Well, read the July 9 letter of our Cardinal Blase Cupich, wherein he quotes Archbishop Timothy Broglio, president of the U.S. Conference of Bishops about the "unconscionable cuts to healthcare and food assistance, tax cuts

that increase inequality, immigration provisions that harm families and cuts to programs that protect God's creation." I feel better now that some U.S. bishops have finally spoken out about the moral depravity surrounding us. They are following our fearless Pope Leo who wrote on July 20: "I once again call for an immediate end to the barbarity of this war (Gaza) and for a peaceful resolution to the conflict." The strength of God lives on through the Lord's followers!

By her example, letters, Rule and one other ministry – healer – Clare bore witness to the power of God. She suffered with chronic illness her last 28 years, yet she had a remarkable reputation for bringing people to spiritual, physical, even psychological wholeness. For anyone who suffers with persistent illness or aging, read about and turn to Clare in prayer. One of my most consistent benefits in dealing with illness has been the ability to accept and live with whatever life brings, including all the suffering. Lady Clare will intercede!

I offer this ministry of healing to you as our gift to this world that cries out for healing on every level. Rather than bark back or use vitriolic language in return to those who may disagree or even destroy any semblance of Jesus in action ~ offer kindness and the love of God which may mean being silent yet attentive. Hatred breeds deeper hatred and I believe ugly, mean behavior only exacerbates the mess around us. Clare was strong beyond words. Strong yet gracious and understanding. Committed to her vocation and the Gospel. This approach to Christian life brings Light to our world, even to our enemies; it can heal and leads to peace. All this reminds me of a passage from Clare's first



letter to Agnes of Prague: **What a great and praiseworthy exchange: to leave the things of time for those of eternity, to choose the things of heaven rather than the goods of the earth, to receive the hundred-fold in place of one, and to possess a blessed eternal life.** Celebrate the *Feast of Clare on Monday, August 11* with us at St. Peter's. As always, may God bring you and our world healing because of our gracious lives.

Fr. Bob Hutmacher, ofm

St. Peter's 2025 Franciscan Festival



Sept. 29, 12:15 – "Stories of Friars" who've served at St. Peter's over the years

Sept. 30, 12:15 - Lecture on the *Canticle of Creatures* by renowned Franciscan scholar, Gilberto Cavazos-Gonzalez, OFM,

Oct. 1, 12:15 – Concert *Serenade of Strings*, featuring guitar, violin and surprises

Oct. 2, 12:15 – Art Show: *The Treasures of St. Peter's* – liturgical vessels and works of art



Oct. 3, 5:00 p.m. – *The Transitus* - we remember Francis' death in prayer, story and song

Oct. 4, 5:00 p.m. *Solemn Eucharist* with Provincial Minister Larry Hayes, OFM presiding, along with choir and instruments

7:30 p.m. *Concert for Creation* with full chorus and orchestra including the U.S. premiere of Fr. Bob Hutmacher's new setting of *The Canticle of Creatures*