

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. After seeing her shorn head, 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. 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, as he had previously prophesied, that he would house his "Poor Ladies" also called "Damianites:"⁸ "*Ladies will again dwell here who will glorify our heavenly Father throughout his holy, universal Church by their celebrated and holy manner of life*"⁹

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*"¹⁰

Much against her will, Clare was appointed Abbess by St. Francis and under her spirituality, other foundations of Poor Ladies were started in Italy and throughout 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.

When Francis knew his time of death was near (in the year 1226), he came to visit San Damiano for the last time and there the nuns erected a little wattle hut for him close to the monastery. There he composed the last section of the "Canticle of the Sun." At the end of his life, Francis left a blessing to St. Clare absolving her from any failings if she had any and told her that she "should put aside her grief and sorrow over not being able to see me now. Let her be assured that before her death, both she and her sisters will

⁸ Legend of the Three Companions (L3C), in *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, The Lady*. 24.

⁹ *TestCl*, 14.

¹⁰ *TestCl*, 27-29

see me and will receive the greatest consolation from me.”¹¹ After his death, Francis’ remains were brought to the monastery at San Damiano where a grill was removed so that Clare and her sisters could say their goodbyes for over an hour.

One night in 1234, Frederick II’s army, on its way to assaulting Assisi, scaled the walls of the monastery at San Damiano. The nuns were in great fear and Clare, rising from her sick bed, took the ciborium from the chapel and faced the invaders. It has been related that as Clare raised the ciborium, the soldiers fell backward as if dazzled and then took flight and the monastery was spared. This is why St. Clare is so often depicted as holding a ciborium.¹²

Later, on June 22nd, 1241, a much larger force returned to attack Assisi and Clare with her sisters gathered in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament praying that the town might be spared. A huge storm rose up, scattering tents and soldiers everywhere and causing such panic that the army left. The people of Assisi showed such gratitude to their “Seraphic Mother” that she became enshrined in the hearts of the common people and this date is celebrated by the people to this day.¹³

Clare’s health was not good and she spent many years as an invalid, being bed bound but still participating in the life of the monastery when able. During one Christmas (as it was described during the testimony for her canonization) Clare was unable to leave her bed to participate in the liturgy. She prayed, “Lord God, look, I have been left here alone with you.” She immediately began to hear the organ, responsories, and the entire Office of the brothers in the Church of Saint Francis, as if she were present there.”¹⁴ She described this experience to her sisters with such detail and joy even though it was impossible for Clare to physically attend the liturgy.

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 Otakar I and Queen Constance of Hungary and was betrothed at 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 choose 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 five German speaking sisters

¹¹ AC13

¹² PC.174-5.

¹³ PC 175.

¹⁴ PC 161.