

STEWARDSHIP SAINT

Stewardship Saint for August: Saint Clare of Assisi

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Clare of Assisi was a close friend of Saint Francis of Assisi and the foundress of the Poor Clares. She was born in Assisi in 1194 and at age 18 was so moved by the Lenten sermons of Francis that she renounced all of her possessions and entered a convent, much to the dissatisfaction of her family and friends, who tried very hard to dissuade her and bring her home. She was formed in the religious life at Benedictine monasteries and then accepted Francis' offer of a small house for herself and her companions adjacent to the church of San Damiano in Assisi. At age 21, she was appointed by Francis to lead the community, much against her will. She would lead the community for the next forty years and would never leave the San Damiano convent. The community would eventually include her mother and two sisters.

The way of life in the new community was marked by poverty and austerity, and sustained itself entirely from charitable contributions. The Poor Clares observed almost complete silence unless spoken to or in order to perform a work of charity. They went barefoot, slept on the ground and ate no meat. In later years, Clare urged her nuns to moderate their own austerities and offer Christ "reasonable service and sacrifice seasoned with the salt of prudence."

The greatest emphasis, of course, was on gospel poverty. They owned no property.

Clare served the sick and washed the feet of the begging nuns. She was devoted to a life of prayer and celebration of the Eucharist. She was first up in the morning to ring the choir bell and light the candles.

Clare sought to imitate Francis' virtues and way of life so much so that she was sometimes called "another Francis." She played a significant role in encouraging and aiding Francis, whom she saw as a spiritual father figure. She took care of him during his final illness.

From the time Francis died in 1226 until her own death 27 years later, Clare suffered various illnesses and was often bedridden. All the while, she lived a simple but dedicated religious life, performing such menial tasks as sewing altar linens for local parishes. Twice when the town of Assisi was under attack, Clare prayed before the Blessed Sacrament and the armies were said to have ended their siege and fled.

Clare's nuns soon spread to other countries in Europe, including Spain, Italy, Germany, France and England. Today, they are also established in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. She passed away on August 11, 1253 and was canonized two years later. Her feast day is August 11.