

In the year 1212, Clare di Favarone with her sister Agnes were escorted by Francis di Barnardone, the little poor man of Assisi, from the Benedictine Monastery of Sant' Angelo de Panzo to the sanctuary of San Damiano. It was here in the monastery at San Damiano as the first Abbess and founder of the Poor Clare's, the Second Order of the Franciscan family, that Clare would be a guiding light and a blessing to all who came seeking to follow Christ.

While the Franciscan and Benedictine Orders have different charisms, Francis had been wise in placing Clare within a Benedictine house. His goal: that she might become acquainted with the Rule of St. Benedict regarding guiding a community and experiencing the monastic rhythm of blending work and prayer, of community life where all had a voice from the youngest to the oldest and of stability that was promoted within the monastery walls themselves. To these aims Clare gave her spirit, strength and love of Christ.

A MOMENT OF PRAYER WITH SAINT CLARE OF ASSISI

St. Clare had come from a wealthy and devout family, was well educated and sought by the young men of her time for marriage. Her beauty was well known and her graciousness admired.

Clare's journey began at the age of sixteen with receiving a rough brown habit on the night of Palm Sunday in the year 1212 that began the Second Order of Franciscans known as the Poor Ladies later known as the Poor Clares. For the next forty-two years, enclosed in her convent in San Damiano she lived out her vows in literal poverty and prayer, sleeping on a straw mattress, fasting three times a week, never eating meat, doing penance and praying the divine offices. Clare was known for her compassion and wisdom, as well as, being a healer and spiritual counsellor. Clare was chronically ill herself, yet she healed others of sickness and depression by signing them with the cross Everything Clare did was prayer. She took no vacations, made no pilgrimages. She lived in obscurity and ordinariness.

What can we learn from St. Clare, a cloistered Poor Lady of the 13th century?

While some of us do live in monasteries or hermitages, not all are called to such a life. Many of us are committed to families and occupations or ministries that require us to "go forth" into the active world of business, school, carpooling, soccer games and little league. But each of us need and can create a space, an enclosure of our heart, "a cell" where we can meet and allow God to monopolize our attention even if for only a few minutes each day.

What will our "cell" be like?

An area in our home set aside with candles, incense, icons and music, OR

the outdoors with sun or moon and the voices of nature?

Two essentials that this space will need to share are being 'focused on God and interior silence. We are not always able to control the world around us but we can choose to turn off our self-talk within ourselves. Everything should speak to us of God's presence.

Can we immolate (offer up) Clare's willingness to accept enclosure out of love for our Lord Jesus Christ? Can I be willing to welcome temporary 'enclosure' in creating space to be with God in solitude and attentiveness, what Benedictines refer to as with intentionality?

Are we serious about improving our prayer life in order to create and be faithful to that space of our choosing?

Imagine you are at San Damiano; your space of enclosure has become the little cell of Clare's. It is early morning, birds are singing announcing that the sun has risen, and darkness has been lifted from the valley. Within the monastery all is quiet. It is a sacred time. You feel at one with all you see and hear around you. You look around the cell, you see the straw mattress, a wash basin, a crucifix. This place, this cell like the cloister at San Damiano becomes a tabernacle in which Jesus makes himself at home. It has become a "thin space" where heaven and earth meet.

Take time to listen to what the Lord is saying to you in your heart.

Lord,

Free me from my restless activity, my attention to the clock, my habit of bobbing along on the open sea of busyness when you have called me to be still. When I meditate on how you consented to the enclosure of your mother's womb, of the crucifixion, in the bread of the Eucharist, my heart is moved to seek enclosure with you. Amen.

FOURFOLD STAGES OF PRAYER **THE BENEDICTINE & FRANCISCAN CHARISMS**

BENEDICTINE

Reading of scripture (*lectio*)

Meditation (*meditatio*)

Prayer (*oratio*)

Contemplation (*contemplatio*)

CLARE

Gaze upon the cross (*intueri / active presence*)

Consider (*considerare / dwell in the mystery*)

Contemplate (*contemplari / discover Christ - the mirror*)

Imitate (*imitation / become Christ in the world*)