

**Saint Clare of Assisi**  
born c.1193, Assisi, Italy  
died 11 August 1253, Assisi, Italy

A pregnant young countess was praying for a safe delivery when a voice assured her: "Do not be afraid, for you will joyfully bring forth a clear light, which will illuminate the world." She gave birth to a healthy girl and named her Chiara, or Clare, which means "clear light".

Clare was eighteen when she gave up her world of privilege to follow Francis of Assisi. On the night of Palm Sunday, Clare went to the small church that Francis made his headquarters and traded her fine clothes for the coarse woolen robe that marked her as a follower of Il Poverello (the poor one). Clare's family considered Franciscan poverty degrading to her and a disgrace to their good name. They tracked her down in a chapel and begged her to come home, but Clare held fast to the altar until they gave up.

Clare was soon joined by her sister Agnes (19 November). Francis found them a small house near the church of San Damiano. This became their convent and Clare became the superior. In time, they were joined by their mother and sixteen other companions who were called the Poor Ladies by their Damiano. (Only after Clare's death did they become known as the Poor Clares.) They owned nothing, went barefoot, even in winter, and slept on a bare floor. When Clare inherited a fortune from her father, she distributed everything to hospitals and the poor and kept nothing for the Poor Ladies.

Clare obtained approval from Pope Innocent III for her convent to live in "holy poverty". His successor, Gregory IX, tried to relax the harsh Rule that Clare had created for the Poor Ladies, but she resisted. The Poor Ladies survived entirely on whatever the Franciscan friars brought them from their own daily begging. Possibly this led to gossip, because Gregory ordered the friars not to enter the convent, not even to bring the Poor Ladies the Eucharist. *"Very well", said Clare, "If the holy friars may not feed us with the bread of life, they shall not minister to us the bread that perishes."* The Poor Ladies began what amounted to a hunger strike. Gregory, who had defended the powerful emperor Frederic Barbarossa, was forced to yield to Clare of Assisi.

Clare ruled her convent for forty-two years, and although she never left Assisi, her influence spread all over Europe. One of her correspondents, Agnes of Prague (6 March), turned down marriage to an emperor to become a Poor Lady.

Clare's strength failed in old age, and she was confined to a bed. One Christmas, she was too weak to attend Mass at the basilica, more than a mile away, but she saw and heard it all in a miraculous vision. The event led to Clare being named the patron of television.

In one of Clare's most famous miracles, she saved her nuns from a band of Saracens (Muslims) that descended on their convent. Clare rose from her sickbed, took the monstrance containing the Eucharist from the altar, and brandished it at the marauders while singing Psalm 9, which begins, *"I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart."* The terrified Saracens threw down their arms and fled.

Pope Innocent IV broke with tradition to attend Clare's funeral, and only the pressure of the cardinals restrained him from canonizing her on the spot. Two years later, his successor, Alexander IV, had that honour.

**The Genius of Clare of Assisi:**

In spite of her own austerities, Clare advised moderation, *"so that living and hoping in the LORD may offer him a reasonable service and a sacrifice seasoned with the salt of prudence."*

**Reflection:**

*"My enemies turn back; they stumble and perish before you.  
You upheld my right and my cause, seated on your throne judging justly."*

Psalm 9.4-5

Gallick, Sarah, The Big Book of Woman Saints p. 240