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Presentation

With much gratitude and a bit of emotion we are introducing *Communion and Communication* No. 65. It's the last step of the journey following the directions given by St Francis to the Poor Clares in the *Words of Exhortation, Audite, poverelle - Listen, Little Poor Ones*. We are doing this precisely in the chronological time that marks the 800th anniversary of its composition. We can recognise in this coincidence a *kairós*, an opportunity to further increase 'the understanding of the greatness and the relevance of our Franciscan-Clarian spirituality', that [the *Audite poverelle*] ever urges forward in our living of it', as br. Fábio, General Delegate Pro Monialibus, notes in his introductory letter. A special thanks to him, for offering us in each issue a commentary on Francis' words contextualised in today's ecclesial events and the world reality of our communities.

On the theme of sickness and sharing in the glory of the Virgin Mother Mary, which opens up for those who "bear in peace" the labours and tribulations that come with sickness, we are helped to reflect by the testimonies that have arrived from Verona (Italy), Thu Duc (Vietnam), Alexandria (USA), Mairena del Aljarafe and Hinojosa del Duque (Spain). The latter are offered by the Sisters of the Order of the Immaculate Conception (Conceptionists), who are spiritually linked to the Order of Friars Minor and accompanied by the Office Pro Monialibus of the OFM General Curia. You are again welcome, Sisters, to the pages of *Communion and Communication*, after several years of absence!

From Borgo Valsugana (Italy) and from Mbarara (Uganda) we receive news that make the link between the present and the roots of the foundation of the monastery, highlighting the profile of Sisters who have determined a history of holiness, centuries or decades long, and who in various ways question and stimulate our response today.



This is followed by the second and final part of the reflection of Sr. Frances Teresa (Hollington, Great Britain), who has given and continues to give us the opportunity to look at and listen to the event of the stigmatisation of St Francis with the heart of St Clare, prolonging the grace which the Stigmata Centenary of 2024 has given us.

The section 'We have received', in the same spirit, gives us also news of a valuable volume on St Francis Stigmatised.

More, it presents the collection of works of St Camilla Battista da Varano published on the occasion of the fifth centenary of her death (1524-2024).

This issue is concluded with the communications of the results of the Federal Elective Assemblies of some Federations.

The next one will open with testimonies of experiences and reflections around the *Canticle of Creatures*, whose 8th centenary we are also celebrating. We encourage all of you to send us your contributions on this topic.

Happy reading!

Office Pro Monialibus

Letter of the General Delegate

Dear Sisters, Dear Brothers,
May the Lord give you peace!

With this edition of our review, we come to reflect on the last two verses of the *Exhortation with Words* given by St. Francis to the Poor Ladies of the Monastery of San Damiano, better known as Listen, little poor ones. We have been reflecting on this for the last two years. Even as I write these lines on these days of the European spring of 2025, we are celebrating the 800th anniversary of the composition of that text. In it we find so many points of contact with the *Canticle of the Creatures* which Francis had composed a little earlier and under the same circumstances (cf. AC 83-85: FA:ED II, p. 185-189).

I have learned with great pleasure about the various initiatives of formation (reunions, spiritual exercises, Federal courses and so on) which have taken place in various parts of the Order, all inspired by the words of Francis. This is a witness which has much to say to us today because it expresses the essence of the *Form of Life* of the Poor Sisters of St Clare to whom we must continually return.

Because of this, I would like to offer a very simple reflection on the last verses of the poem. I would like to divide it into three parts as a way of highlighting how close it is to our actual reality as Poor Sisters and Lesser Brothers.

*Those weighed down by sickness
and the others wearied because of them...*

In this penultimate phrase we see the reality lived by Clare herself and her Sisters at San Damiano. They were



weighed down by many illnesses, due in large part to the difficult material circumstances in which they lived. There were also the difficulties of getting medical help, which was particular to the Middle Ages and for many illnesses, such help did not even exist. We however, live in a different era in which for many medicines has succeeded in overcoming so many illnesses and for many more a cure does exist. However, we know that the reality of illness does still exist among us, that new illnesses are appearing and that the cures are not always accessible for everyone in the way they should be. In fact, many Sisters and Brothers among us suffer from very serious illnesses and are helped by the great dedication of the Community which, often at the cost of tiredness, offer the sick person the necessary care and - above all - their affection and spiritual support.

Naturally, under the term infirmity, we not only place our difficulties with physical health, but also those situations of personal or community fragility that we are called up on recognise and deal with. In many places now, for various reasons it is no longer possible for the Community to live a life which is both dignified and also fully religious and contemplative. However, Sisters and Brothers, this reality must not be seen negatively. Rather it represents a great chance for all of us to practice the most important commandment, the law of Christ, which helps us to carry each others' burdens (*Gal 6,2*). This not only applies within the Community or Province but also in the wider context of the Federation, Confederation, Conferences and Orders. And it is exactly within this look at the Order today in its totality that the proposed text of the new General Constitutions has been drawn up, and this text you now have in your hands.

*...All of you bear it in peace
for you will sell this fatigue at a very high price...*

With these words, Francis invites the Sisters at San Damiano to live peacefully in every situation of infirmity. Better



than that, Francis noticed that it was precisely in this way that they were already living the many troubles which weighed them down and without ever losing their peace and inner joy. This is what I also touch with my own hands as I visit so many of the Monasteries around the world, namely the great inner strength of so many Sisters who bear serious illnesses but whose faces radiate peace and whose mouths are filled with words of gratitude. These are the Sisters who are living the very essence of the charism because, stripped of everything else, they embrace and follow the poor Christ to the very end (cf. *2Ag* 18). They are truly happy and blessed. But it is not only they who are blessed because in this poem Francis extends that blessedness even to those who help the sick, while in the *Canticle of Creation* he only extends it to those who bear infirmity and tribulation (cf. *Cant* 25).

This joy and this peace in situations of great suffering and fragility are only possibly by virtue of a higher reality which gives meaning to everything.

For us Christians this can only be the Lord, his love, his kingdom. This is the precious pearl, the treasure hidden in the field for which it is worth selling everything, indeed of offering everything. It was just this experience that Francis himself faced during that night of such suffering when he was tempted to self-pity, and when he then rediscovered the value of the treasure of love and divine mercy which was worth everything. Then he burst out with that moving hymn of praise to the Lord: the *Canticle of Creation* (cf. *AC* 85: FA:ED II, p. 186).

So we, therefore, are invited and challenged about the centrality of the love of the Lord in our personal and community lives. We must ask ourselves if his Kingdom is in fact the final meaning of everything that we are and suffer, if it is indeed our treasure because where your treasure is, there will our heart be also (cf. *Mt* 6,21).



...for each one will be called queen
in heaven with the Virgin Mary.

If we live our whole lives within this eschatological perspective of faith, then our lives will gain a dimension of eternity, because in the Kingdom of Heaven our sharing in the life of Christ and his love will come to its fulness.

It is to just this dimension of eternity that we are directed by the last phrase of Francis' Canticle. It proclaims the great promise contained in the vocation of the Poor Sisters: the promise of sharing in the same glorious destiny as the Virgin Mary, Our Lady Queen Wisdom (*Sa/V* 1) in such a way that 'the Poor Sisters of San Damiano are daughters and handmaids at the earthly court of the of the most High King, waiting to be crowned with the holy Queen Mary. This all hangs, of course on our seeking, in this life, to 'follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of his most holy Mother, and to persevere in it until the end' (*Last Will*). This means that we follow the same path that Mary followed in this world, the path of poverty, service and humility. Then, only by the grace and mercy of the *Father of Mercies* (*TestCl* 2) shall we realise our great hope and we will make that great passage of every Poor Sister - to go from *Little Poor One* to *Queen*.

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, therefore, I wish each and every Sister that 'the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may enlighten the eyes of your hearts in order that you may know the hope to which you have been called' (*Eph* 1,18). Thus may you run along the path of poverty, service and communion, supported as you live with your fragility and, in the context of faith in the invincible love of God, may your always be supported in peace and joy of heart.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed with their reflections and inspiring experiences to *Audite poverelle*, as well as the dedicated Sisters of the editorial team and the many translators.



I believe that all of us are growing, not only in knowledge of the words of Francis but also in the understanding the greatness and the relevance of our Franciscan-Clarian spirituality, praying that it may be made manifest and we may be ever urged forward in our living of it.

A fraternal embrace to everyone
and may God bless you all!

*Br. Fábio Cesar Gomes, ofm
General Delegate Pro Monialibus*

We sincerely thank
the Sisters and Brothers
who contributed to the production
of this issue 65 of the magazine.

We remind you that **cTc 66**
will be published
next **December 2025**.

The topic will be:

The Canticle of creatures.

We invite all of you to send us
life stories and/or reflections
within **September 2025**.

Audite Poverelle



Francis delivers the Rule to Clare
(*Miniature from the Monastery of Novaglie Codex*)

Those weighed down by sickness...

...to Verona, Italy

Dearest Sisters,

With an embrace of glances and of heart, with timidity and trepidation, I dare to stammer some words of a language known to all men and women, yet always to be learned so as to express it in the depth of its richness: illness and physical pain.

Alas, to speak with this language, which has words we would not want to know or pronounce, is yet so capable of understanding, of weaving relationships, of living in communion!

For 27 years, as the gift of life welcomed in the gratuitous love of the Lord Who called me, I have lived, albeit with steps that must always be renewed, our Form of Life at the Monastery of St Elizabeth in Verona, in Italy.



I too, like every young person who approaches desirous of discerning her life in the Monastery, knocked with trepidation at its door, strong in a Word heard during a Confession: “Knock, and it will be opened to you (cf. *Lk* 11:9)!” I carried this Word of the Gospel in my heart, the joy of feeling loved, the desire to love in order to live “hidden in Christ” for humanity (cf. *Col*

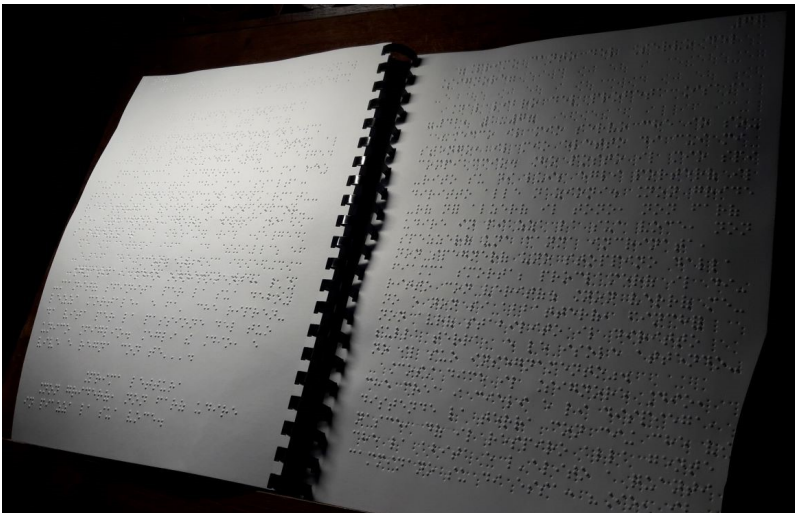


3:3); and yet I feared an obstacle: physical illness, which from the first years of life, accompanied me with its challenges and its resources.

I was just a baby when, perhaps due to a medical error, I began to have vision problems, a disease that gradually developed in its gravity. However, this event did not prevent me from living my childhood and youth in an almost normal way like any girl. Obviously, there was no lack of inevitable fatigue, misunderstandings, some humiliation... but I managed to complete my small commitments, such as school performance, also thanks to many gifts and abilities that the Lord gave me, such as having a good memory.

The greatest gift, however, that helped me live the same life as the gift to welcome and return, was and is, the love of my dear parents who, in their simplicity, moved by caring love for their daughter, educated me to a good personal autonomy. Later, when I was already in the Monastery, learning Braille and technology gave me back the autonomy of reading and of writing, which had been lost over the years.

All this, for me, is a gift!





Thus, I guard in my heart the preciousness of a treasure hidden in the field of my life (*Mt 13:44*), which in the embraced gift of the Clarian Vocation, makes me a sister of every man and woman. I feel this aspect of my life as a possibility of communion, a gift that has opened my heart to the gaze of the Lord who says to all His children: “You are precious in my eyes (*Is 43:1-4*)!”

And, stopping before Jesus in the Eucharist, with what trepidation I let resonate within me the invitation that our Holy Mother Clare said to Agnes and now to us all: “Place your eyes before the mirror of eternity, place your soul in the splendor of glory, place your heart in Him who is the figure of the divine substance, and transform yourself entirely, through contemplation, into the image of His divinity (cf. *3LAg 12-13; CA:ED 51*).”

Dearest Sisters, drawing from the only Source of light, if only as a weak reflection, I feel my small mission to pray for the many realities of pain and darkness, tears and sighs that are also confided in me by the people who arrive in the parlor with their problems and worries, struggles and hopes.



Thus drawing near to other dark-nesses and nights, I understood that this illness of mine is precious in its silence, which in God can become a word, if only timid and simple, of understanding and welcome for every brother and sister.

How amazing it is to seize the presence of the Lord in every situation: among the lights of simple joys, or among the first clouds of uncertainty and of doubt, or in the night of so many dramas. Well, for the certainty that the Lord is always close to us, together we can always praise him with the song:



“Bless the Lord, nights and days; bless the Lord, light and darkness (*Dn 3: 71-72!*)”

With this praise, daring to echo some words of our Holy Mother Clare, we are all grateful to the Giver, the Father of Mercies, who has called us in the great gift of our vocation; and in this communion I also thank each one of You, Sisters, because there is where Providence has called you, without fearing “any shortage, poverty, toil and tribulation, nor ignominy or contempt of the world (*TestCl 27; CA:ED 61!*)”; you are a mirror to many brothers and sisters, because you share that which you have in your heart, certain that He will always take care of us!

Likewise, I thank the Lord for the Sisters of my Sorority, for the Sisters encountered at some training courses, but also, with predilection, I thank and remember the many Sisters who have passed through our Monastery, also accompanied by “Sister Illness.” Indeed, thanks to the geographical position of our Monastery, from which it is possible to reach, with a certain ease, the various hospitals of the City, hospitals that also enjoy international fame for their medical research; some Sisters from various parts of Italy and also from Albania, have been hosted by us, for the time necessary for visits and eventual operations, and for convalescence.

In this fraternal embrace, unanimous in the “Magnificat” for the gift of the Jubilee, each one of us, with her history of joy and sorrow, of light and darkness, together let us pray, with the whole Church, to the Father of Mercies that he may always bless and guard for us: “May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts, to make us understand what hope He has called us to, what treasure of grace He holds among His Saints (*Eph 1:17!*).”

United with my Mother and Sisters, a fraternal embrace,

Sr. Maria Giovanna Rama, osc
clarisseverona@gmail.com



...to Hinojosa del Duque, Spain

My God and my All

On the infirmity and departure to heaven of our Sister Maria de los Ángeles Martínez Prados

In the summer of 2018, when she was 48 years old, our Sister Maria de Los Angeles was diagnosed with a degenerative disease called *semantic dementia*. For some time, she had been confusing a few words, which, at first, given her somewhat playful nature and great sense of humor, we thought she was doing on purpose. But when the confusion began getting worse, we decided to consult specialists. When the neurologist gave her the diagnosis, she, fully aware, asked him candidly what “dementia” meant. The doctor looked at her with compassion and explained it to her very simply... and she accepted it without further ado,



knowing that she was loved by God. This characterized the entire course of her illness: on one hand, the natural and even joyful acceptance of that which humanly we would tend to reject, seeing it as the loving will of God; and on the other hand, drawing tenderness, smiles and love from all hearts.

Although we were told that she would



go through stages in which she would become very aggressive, this was not the case. It is true that she passed through different stages, which succeeded one another very quickly, but in none of them did she lose her sense of humor or her endearing charity, because although she was progressively losing her speech, she had the ability to express herself.

“All, all, all” was the only and repeated word with which she expressed herself in her last years, and she did so gracefully, changing her tone according to the need (it caught our attention that “My God and my All” was the phrase she chose to commemorate her Profession and that in the end, when she could no longer utter anything, she was taken by the All); even later, when she could no longer say anything, and with her stiff body could hardly move at all, in her silence, in her gaze and in her limitation she spoke of God; she bore witness to Christ.

She reached everyone in her stiffness; in her rigidity, like our Redeemer on the Cross, she extended love, and in her complete paralysis she moved us all to charity. By making her small, the Lord





demonstrated her greatness, and glorified her, and in this way she gave Glory to God.

“Rejoice, daughter of Zion; sing, daughter of Jerusalem; behold your King who comes...”. These words of the prophet Zechariah, which we recite on Palm Sunday, were just what was needed for our dear little Sister, bedridden since March 13, 2024.

In her long agony, we didn't know if St Joseph would come for her, but in the end, St Joseph gave way to the Virgin, whom she loved so much, so that she could come and collect her soul and present it to her Son.

Her death occurred during Holy Week, just as Holy Monday began (at 1:30 a.m.) and coinciding with March 25, the day of the Annunciation.



Although it was not celebrated liturgically this year, our community saw it as a gesture of God's favor for her, one of many we have been able to witness. After the Gospel of the Annunciation was proclaimed to her by Mother (a very important event for us because it contains a Marian consecration: "Let it be done to me, let it be done to me..."), Sister Maria de los Ángeles was born into Eternal Life in her arms, surrounded by a group of Sisters.



“Only God’s love for me can open the door to his intimacy, and the Holy Spirit is the Love that opens the door, that allows me to contemplate the intimate Life of God. I seek heaven, not only earth, which is a tent I will have to leave one day.”

It is a text written by our Sister María Ángeles that was read before her burial, after celebrating her funeral Mass. All of us who attended felt as if we were experiencing an early Easter, for it seemed as if we were touching Heaven.

Placed before the altar, with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament since the previous night, the place where years before, prostrate on the ground, she had definitively dedicated herself to Him in her Solemn Profession, her lifeless body now lay there, adorned with a wreath of flowers, a green olive branch, and the cross she herself had engraved at the beginning of her illness with the words: “Living Victime.”





There lay this humble and blessed bride of Christ, her dedication consummated and being watched over by the One for whom she had watched over so many nights and days.

Without a doubt, this last Mass was a true step of the Lord, also palpable the presence of the Virgin, the Immaculate, through the sweetness, peace and communion that was breathed in the atmosphere. And although we felt pain, a serene and profound joy was felt that was contagious to all. It was moving how not only her family, but so many non-believers remained in the church since the previous night, in silence - a silence that has reigned in the temple at all times! - contemplating, praying, blessing...

As a final hymn, the one that perfectly summarized the vocation and life of Sister Maria de los Ángeles: "You have seduced me, Lord." How many hearts He must have seduced through this consecrated woman, sower of hope, who in such a way allowed herself to be loved by God and by all her Sisters!

The Sisters of Hinojosa del Duque



...to Alexandria, Virginia (USA)

Audite Poverelle: a Canticle for Hope

Even outside the Franciscan family many Catholics are familiar with St Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures* which is sung in parish churches. Fewer know of the second Canticle he wrote that same year, the *Canticle of Exhortation for the Ladies of San Damiano*. The *Canticle of Exhortation* is commonly called by its opening words, *Audite, Poverelle*, which means 'Listen, poor little Sisters'. In addition to it being the 800th anniversary year of its composition, this year is also the Jubilee Year of Hope. It is an opportune time to reflect again on the *Audite* and on the Franciscan story of hope which inspired it.

In the final years of his life, St Francis was weakened by a prolonged illness and nearly blind. Sensitive to daylight he was in a darkened cell for many days and he felt discouraged. In his weariness he prayed to God for help. A voice responded to his prayer and told him of the immense treasure he would receive in compensation for his suffering. Finally the voice told him, "be glad and joyful in the midst of your infirmities and tribulations: as of new, live in peace as if you were already sharing my kingdom." (*Legend of Perugia*) Shortly after receiving this grace, Saint Francis joyfully composed two Canticles, the *Canticle of the Sun* and the *Canticle of Exhortation to the Poor Ladies*. He sent his brothers to the Sisters at San Damiano to sing his new canticle, *Audite, Poverelle*, to comfort them in their sorrow over his grave illness. (*Mirror of Perfection*, 337)

The *Exhortation's* final verses echo the words of heavenly consolation St Francis heard. The *Audite* encourages the Sisters to bear in peace their sickness and weariness because their fatigue will be exchanged for something greater in a heavenly kingdom when they will be crowned queens.



St Francis had been given the grace to know that suffering is truly a cause for joy and hope because of what awaits us in heaven., and he desires that the Sisters embrace this hope as well. With the same encouragement that God had given him, St Francis consoled his Sisters. God is “the source of all patience and encouragement” (*Rom 15:5*); “He comforts us in all our afflictions and thus enables us to comfort those in trouble, with the same consolation we have received from him.” (*2Cor 1:4*)

Our Holy Mother St Clare, a faithful disciple of our Father St Francis always took to heart his teaching. Many years later when she was close to death Brother Rainaldo encouraged her to be patient in her difficulty. St Clare “*responded with a very unrestrained voice: After I once came to know the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ through his servant Francis. no pain has been bothersome, no penance too severe, no weakness, dearly beloved brother. has been hard.*” (*The Legend of St Clare, 44*) Both St Francis and St Clare lived in hope of eternal life so that even in the trials of the present life they showed a joy which is the fruit of hope, and at the hour of death they consoled those closest to them.

In this Jubilee Year of grace, may we all be renewed by virtue of the hope exemplified in the life of our Father St Francis and our Mother St Clare.

St Francis’ admonition in the *Audite* still speaks to us today, if we listen carefully to this Canticle of Hope.

A Poor Clare Sister

...and the others wearied because of them, / all of you bear it in peace / for you will sell this fatigue at a very high price...

...to Thu Duc, Vietnam

POOR CLARE SISTERS' LIFE IN VIETNAM:

A personal look to challenges and advantages

The spirituality of Mother St Clare is still foreign to our country and I was not aware of the Order of St Clare until I arrived at the monastery. However, those who know us and come to visit us love our simplicity, joy and poverty.

When a candidate chooses the vocation of the Poor Clares in Vietnam, it is a courageous choice and a grace from God because she will only be able to visit her parents when they are seriously ill, dying or deceased. For the peoples of Asia, especially Vietnamese people, filial piety towards parents is an absolute priority. I grew up in a family of four: three boys and one girl. Answering the call of God is a great grace but my parents didn't really accept it because when they will be old, they will not be able to travel long distances to come and visit me.



Therefore they will not be able to see me anymore and this is upsetting and worrying for them. Today, as Pope Francis has often said, the elderly are forgotten, abandoned. We always have a duty to pray for our parents, but it doesn't seem enough to comfort them when they are old and lonely. How are we able to show our filial piety towards our parents, especially when they are old?



They have sometimes the need for a presence to comfort them even if a silent and small one... Could we consider the possibility to let the Sisters visit their sick parents on special occasions, like “Tết”¹ is in the Vietnamese culture?

Sr. Marie Jean François, osc

I. CHALLENGES

First challenge: From my point of view, I see a challenge to consecrated life and particularly to the Poor Clare Sisters in Vietnam today: vocations are in decline, the younger generation rarely chooses contemplative life in an enclosed monastery. Are the values of the Kingdom worth less than those of the world? In recent years, in the monastery of Poor Clares in Thu Duc, one or two young women have come to explore the vocation and way of life of the Sisters. Many people are afraid of the enclosure. When I decided to enter the monastery, everyone said: "There are so many orders to follow, why do you choose this one?"

Second challenge: Health problems in the monastery. A good health is very important in religious life. Some people want to live religious life, but their health does not allow it; so it is a great challenge when I have to face some serious and incurable illness. We can hesitate about the treatment: we desire to endure the illness because of our love of God and in union with God, but when it becomes more serious and we need medical treatment, this becomes a problem for which an answer must be found. It is unfortunate if the monastery lack the resources even while we know that when we are following God then God will find a way of taking care of us. In practice, the monastery will try to care for us but the reality is that malignant diseases require long-term treatment and not a quick cure. Sometimes they demand that the patient overcome many obstacles and has strength and



a strong faith. By entering into this situation, you really need God's grace. Quite apart from our life with God and the community, bad health makes it more difficult to serve God and the Sisters as we would wish and we can become a burden to all. We are human beings and we cannot avoid these thoughts if we don't have enough faith and trust in God.

II. ADVANTAGES: In addition to the challenges, there are also many advantages. Most of us came from families with a moral basis and a love for God. We have inherited faith from our grandparents and from our parents. We grew up in a diocese seeing many generous and dedicated people which attracted us. Through their dedication and commitment, they are true witnesses and disciples of God. Most of our families are farmers so God has given us the virtue of assiduity and the ability to overcome difficulties. When we entered religious life, we easily adapted to the life and were not afraid of difficulties.

The Vietnamese people love and respect those who become monks and nuns, this is why the monastery receives help with basic necessities from benefactors and relatives (food, utensils...). To thank the Sisters for their prayers, they are helped and supported in their life by the people.

III. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LESSER BROTHERS: The Sisters also receive the help of the Friars Minor for their spiritual life: celebration of the Mass and the sacraments, teaching, visits... and they always help the Sisters when they need them for work.

The Friars Minor in Vietnam still keep the promise of the Holy Father to the Sisters of the Second Order: "I and my brothers will always have a special care and solicitude for you as for the brothers."



IV. PATIENT CARE: “To those who are seriously ill and to those who are tired through taking care of them, please, everyone stay in peace. The work is sold at a high price: everyone will receive a royal crown in heaven with the Virgin Mary” (*ExhPD 5*).

The words of encouragement and inspiration of St Francis to the Sisters of Saint Clare still resonate today. Birth-Ageing-Illness-Death are the inevitable law of human life. The Vietnamese often say: “A good doctor is like a mother.”

This is clearly seen in the nuns of the monastery. The Sisters have made many sacrifices for the love of God. They see God in the sick Sisters so their service is very caring and devoted as they care for the sick Sisters, providing them with medicine, food, daily activities, accompanying them when they go to hospital. There are times when they sacrifice their health and sleep to take care of their Sisters. I myself was treated like this when I was sick, so I can feel your love and dedication to me and the other Sisters. Thank God for sending nurses to the monastery.

Some of the special messages our Father St Francis has written to the sick Sisters reminded me of the image of the former Abbess, Sr. Maria Rose.

She discovered that she had cancer at an advanced age and when her time in office was about to end. Even in extreme pain, she was always peaceful, kind and patient.

Anyone who met her admired her "peaceful resistance to illness". And indeed, her difficulties were well rewarded. when God called her home during the Octave of Christmas (December 26, 2024), a time of God's love, of sisterly love in the monastery and fraternal love in the Franciscan family.

We are sure that God rewards you in Heaven with Mother Mary who you loved so much.

I also admire the elderly and sick Sisters seeing their patience, their gentleness in enduring their illness, their fervent



and faithful prayer life, their joyful and positive spirit. Nurses are as caring and gentle as good mothers.

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¹ **Tết Nguyên Đán**, commonly known as **Tết**, is the Vietnamese New Year and the country's most important holiday. Tết is around the end of January or the beginning of February. Customs include preparing special dishes and cleaning the house, visiting relatives and temples.



...to Mairena del Aljarafe, Spain

STORIES TO PRAY FOR - From the Hospital

This text was written in the waiting room of a Hospital where several Sisters spent three months, in shifts, waiting for one of our Sisters to recover and get out of the ICU. In that room we met many 'stories' of sick people and their families. It was a place of listening, prayer and intercession.

We spent three days in the family waiting room of the Hospital ICU. It is a grace-filled place, where time seems on an eternal plane, without being in heaven, and the world is a smaller, closer place because of the immensity of human suffering there.

Seated in armchairs, we waited for the three daily visits allowed the sick in this place, always, of course, behind a glass door.

Every morning after the first visit, the families wait for the interview with the doctor. The mood of the day depends in part on this interview. A smile breaks out on faces with the improvement of the family member. Tears and fearfulness





when the patient is getting worse. There is always tension. This is managed through a telephone which rings day and night, through which the intensive care unit calls the family if there is a problem: an unforeseen surgery, a worsening of the patient's condition, or simply and bluntly to communicate that the patient has died.

Lord, we hear stories that break the soul, that make the concerns of the turbulent world seem insignificant, lives changed forever in a single instant:

The moment, for example, of Julian, aged 17. He was in a motorcycle accident and one second of interrupted blood flow to his brain left him in a deep coma for the rest of his life. Or the seconds that weren't enough time for Pilar, aged 25, to escape a "madman" who crossed over into her lane travelling at 180 km/hour, shattering her face and breaking most of her bones. Or the moment of heart attack for Alonso, a poor man and father of a family, who clings to life with all his might even as the doctors say there is no hope. In just a few moments, Juan and Yanelis must decide whether to bring their son into the world at just six months in the womb and 900 grams. The mother's brain tumor couldn't wait.





These are stories to pray about, to illustrate with names the psalms of Lauds, the reading of Vespers, the responsory of mid-morning Prayer or the hymn of Compline.

They are stories which put a face and a voice to the article of our constitutions which speaks of presenting continual supplication to the Father of the joys and hopes, sadness and anguish of humanity.

Stories to keep us from resting on the laurels of our morning prayer, to raise our crestfallen brow above our navel and populate the horizon where so often only my “I” walks. Never before did I find it so necessary to speak of hope, to delve into the shores of human life and listen to the trembling soul of a mother, father, wife, daughter, or brother; to believe that, just as there is no night that does not end in dawn, neither is there a sorrow that will not be consoled in you, Lord, because, as someone once said, we Christians are not threatened with death but instead are promised resurrection. I leave each and every one of them in your hands, Father.

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**...for each one will be called queen
in heaven with the Virgin Mary.**

...to Mbarara, Uganda

“Do not look at life outside, the life of the Spirit is better” (St Francis)

When it comes to telling the wonders God does in our Monasteries, we fall short of words for we can never tell it all. Indeed, the Providence of God has always surprised us. The theme of our Clarian life these months, “Do not look at life outside, the life of the Spirit is better” (The *Exhortation* of St Francis to St Clare and her Sisters at San Damiano) as proposed by our editors of cTc, was surprisingly in line with the



theme of our Community annual retreat proposed by our Franciscan Brother Fr. John Baluku, ofmcap: “Life in the Spirit”. And I firmly believe it was not just coincidence, but the amazing providence of God.

The life in the Spirit as pointed out to us by our Mother St Clare, was introduced in this pearl of Africa, Uganda, by our Mother foundresses, who hailed from Nancy, France in 1967. Of the eight foundresses, only one is still with us: our dear Mother and Sister, M. Roseline.

Our Sister celebrated her Diamond Jubilee on the Solemnity of our Mother St Clare, past year (2024). Needless to say, it was a grace filled moment as we reminisced the wonders of Clarian consecration for these



60 years. The Ceremony was private and celebrated only in the Community as our Jubilarian had requested. Sr. M. Roseline has chosen to spend the rest of her life in Africa to our greatest joy and admiration. Her African name, which she has whole heartedly welcomed, is *Ndyowaha*, it literally means 'I am here to stay'.

We have never heard enough of the experiences of our Mothers as they set down roots in our land, with the joys and challenges that such an endeavour entail. At the time of the founding of our Monastery, ours was a young Church with only few Priests and Religious and quite a big demand for labourers in the active apostolate. Poor Clare Nuns wholly dedicated to Contemplation, living 'the life of the Spirit' within the confines of the cloister, was unheard of and not well understood. "African girls can never embrace silence", some dared to say. So, there were different proposals to the Foundresses, when they finally arrived. Work in the printing press, take on teaching in schools and working in hospitals.

Our dear Foundresses, mindful of our Clarian calling and faithfully holding on to it, encouraged the African Candidates that 'the life of the Spirit' is equally possible for all regardless of nationality, race, and colour.

Time has proved this bold ascertain to be true. Our Archdiocese has been blessed in the growth of our Church, both in number and grace and with an increase of Priests and Religious each year. The spiritual fruitfulness in our Church is





attributed solely to the life, prayers and sacrifices of the Poor Clares. “This is the Powerhouse of all the activities undertaken here”: this is the constant and often repeated pronouncements from many pulpits in our churches. All to the Glory of God and His Power to save through the action of the Holy Spirit for whom all things are possible.

One of the qualities of the Spirit as seen in our retreat was that the Holy Spirit is the Enabler. With the Holy Spirit, impossible things are possible (*Lk 1:38*). Is this not precisely what St Francis was reminding Mother St Clare and our Sisters at San Damiano. “Do not look outside for life, the life of the Spirit is better.”

“Happy indeed are we to whom it has been given to drink at this sacred banquet and to cling with all our hearts to Jesus, whose beauty all the blessed hosts of Heaven unceasingly admire, whose tenderness touches, whose contemplation refreshes, whose kindness overflows whose delights overwhelms, whose remembrance delightfully dawns, whose fragrance brings the dead to life again whose glorious vision will bring happiness to all the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem” (St Clare).

Congratulations and Best Wishes our dear Mother Sr. Mary Roseline. We will never thank God enough for you and all our beloved Foundresses who brought this beautiful Form of Life to our African continent.

May that missionary spirit which has enabled





you and all our other Mother Foundresses in the different Monasteries of Africa, assist you to keep the Clarian light burning among us.

May this light continue to draw many fervent disciples, who with swift pace, light step unswerving feet, will go forward on the path of prudent happiness.

Our Mother St Clare and Father St Francis, pray for us All.

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...to Borgo Valsugana, Italy

The Presence of the Poor Clares in the Province of Trent and the Ven. Giovanna Maria of the Cross (Bernardina Floriani)

Forty years ago, on 25 August 1984, two hundred years after the suppressions that erased the presence of the Clarian charism in the Province of Trent (Trentino), at the insistent request of the then-Archbishop Alessandro Maria Gottardo and the Friars Minor, four Sisters from the Protomonastery of St Clare in Assisi began the foundation of the monastery located in Borgo Valsugana in the convent ceded by the friars.

These are some words from Archbishop Gottardi, taken from the greeting pronounced in the church of St Clare in Trent on the occasion of welcoming the Poor Clares into the Diocese, 25 August 1984.

In 1218, Saint Francis went to the Holy Land and personally met the Sultan: it was an embassy of peace that did not succeed in stopping the logic of violence, but which equally marked human conscience with the certainty that it is possible to meet. In the Holy Land, Saint Francis probably had the opportunity to meet the bishop of Trent, Federico di Vanga. The hypothesis that the two people met is not without foundation, especially since in the city of Acre, where Vanga died, the bishop at the time was Jacques de Vitry, who later worked in Rome with Pope Gregory IX, a great protector and friend of Francis and the Franciscans. The same pope, when he was Visitor of Italy, had been able to realize the great necessity for reform existing in the Christian community; it is therefore not surprising that, after the arrival of the Friars Minor in Trent while Francis was still alive, Gregory IX personally made sure that in Trent – already an important communication route with Northern Europe – in addition to the friars, Clare's Sisters also landed.



From these words we already understand that the presence of the Order of the Poor Sisters in Trentino, at its beginnings, is closely bound to the missionary expansion of the Order of Friars Minor, but it is also mixed with the contemporary penitential experience of the Order of San Damiano. In fact, the first nuns who arrived in Trent to open a monastery in 1227, came from a monastery in Verona belonging to the movement of the Order of San Damiano. The monastery, initially dedicated to St Michael, took the name of St Clare after the cloistered community moved within the walls of the city. After the suppression of religious orders in the first decade of the 19th century, the name of “St Clare” passed to the hospital, located in the convent structure, and subsequently to the University of Trent. In the small church of the monastery, reopened for worship in recent decades, daily eucharistic adoration continues, thus expressing a strong spiritual bond with Clare of Assisi and her love for the Eucharist.

Three centuries later, in 1500, another monastery arose in Trent, dedicated to the Holy Trinity (now the site of the Prati Lyceum). Both communities benefited from the spiritual care of the Reformed Friars Minor who helped them keep the Franciscan charism alive, despite the mitigations to poverty provided for by the Rule of Urban IV.

In the 17th century, an experience of Clarian life began in Trentino, in Rovereto, which desired to revive the original charism of Clare, thanks to Bernadina Floriani, i.e., the Ven. Giovanna Maria of the Cross (Rovereto 1603-1673), a singular figure of mysticism who, in the post-conciliar period, founded a monastery near the church of St Charles in Rovereto for which she wrote constitutions, referring to the radical form of poverty embraced by St Clare.

The greatness of Giovanna Maria, mystic of divine mercy, is also evident in relation to the demands of her time. Heir of the Tridentine Council, which proposed the objective of a renewed Catholic response to the Protestant rigorism that had conquered Europe and, in particular, the regions of



Northern Italy, Giovanna Maria wanted to reconquer the hearts of believers to trust in God, whose face is Love. The very human and tender ecclesial sensitivity of Giovanna Maria had glimpsed in the border valleys of Trentino providential crossroads for the encounter with brothers in humanity, for the testimony and the announcement of the lovable face of God and of the spousal union of the Cross. For this reason she will recommend the opening of Franciscan convents in the various valleys and will hope, on the part of the Monastery of San Carlo, the foundation of monasteries on German and Italian soil. She will realize only the foundation of the Monastery of Sant'Anna in Borgo Valsugana which saw the light in 1673, the year of her death. The presence of the Friars Minor in the small town of Valsugana preceded the foundation of the monastery by a few decades: also for Giovanna Maria, as for St Clare, the bond with the friars was always fundamental.

Between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, the Habsburg and Napoleonic suppressions dramatically put an end to the presence of the diverse monasteries. But in 1973, precisely on the occasion of the celebrations for the 300th anniversary of the death of the Ven. Giovanna Maria of the Cross, the reopening a Poor Clare monastery in the Diocese began to be talked about.

The welcome we received forty years ago, on our “return” to this land, was affectionate and warm, and continues to express itself even today as benevolence, esteem, delicacy, and attention towards us, revealing how great was the expectation of our people, of the Diocese, and of the Friars. Every day we become aware, with enormous gratitude, of how undeserved that good is, of the distance that exists between that benevolence, that gratuitous affection and our poor response...

In these forty years, the first, initial nucleus of Sisters has been approached by young people to begin a discernment that led some of them to embrace the charism of St Clare



and respond to the gift of vocation. Today we are eleven Sisters: a small family that tries to live the Gospel.

Those planted by Giovanna are silent roots, apparently without fruit also because of the suppressions: but they bear the traits of the specific vocation of our Diocese to which St Paul VI entrusted the task of being Catholicism's ecumenical "gateway" to Europe.

At the time of the Council, the city of Trent was chosen to facilitate the meeting, to act as a bridge, in order to offer the embrace of reconciliation and friendship. Trent did not have this joy and this glory. It must always have, like us, like the entire Catholic world, the desire. It must rise to be the symbol of this desire, today still, today more than ever, alive, imploring, patient, praying. It must, with the firmness of its Catholic faith, not set a boundary, but open a door; not close a dialogue, but keep it open; not reproach errors, but seek virtue; not wait for those who have not come for four centuries, but go fraternally to seek them. This is what the new Council, continuing the old, with the help of God, wants to do; and it is what you, more than anyone else, in the Church of God, must understand and still today, as Providence will suggest, support! (Mandate of St Paul VI to the Church of Trent, 8 March 1964)

The desire that animates us is to place ourselves in this furrow, first of all in the simplicity of daily life that is made ad intra of prayer, work, fraternal relationships and ad extra of prayerful participation in the mission of the universal and local Church, of communion with the various faces of the local Church, from our bishop to the priests and religious, to the parishes of Trentino who often arrive with young adults in Christian initiation, of welcoming, listening to those who approach the monastery in search of a word, of accompaniment, and of a comparison on the journey of faith and of vocation. Yet every desire has to remain open to the breath of the Spirit who "blows where it wills." For this reason every charism needs to be incarnated in the vocation of the local



Church because it is “the Spirit that speaks to the Churches,” so that some feature of the infinite beauty of the face of Christ may shine. So, yes, in this time of great and rapid changes, of challenges of integrating diversity, of economic solidarity, of humanizing relationships, of seeking dialogue and peace, in this time that thirsts for hope let us remain listening, in order to receive from the Spirit, with you, the ever-new gift of this vocation.

The manuscripts of the Ven. Giovanna Maria of the Cross have been edited by the International Society for the Study of Medieval Latin Culture (SISMEL), Florence: <https://www.sismel.it/autorimedievali/1365-giovanna-maria-della-croce>

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We received

Clare and the Stigmata of Francis

Antonianum, 24 August 2024

[*from n. 64*](#)

Francis died in 1226. Clare tells us herself that it was a hard experience, one in which she touched new depths of fragility (*TestCl* 37). By the time she came to write to Agnes of Prague nearly ten years later, she had spent that time absorbing and reflecting on the Stigmata. Those ten years of prayerful thought may be one explanation of why she never mentions this extraordinary mystery. I suspect it became completely integrated it into her life and prayer and, still more, into what she understood by the “holy service of the poor crucified One” (*1Ag* 13). This extended meditation, I believe, gave her insights into the sufferings of Christ and, by extension an understanding of the exchange which had been made by the Word becoming flesh. As she wrote, especially as she wrote the second letter, she seems constantly in awe at the vast extent of this exchange. It gave her new insights into the mystery of the Incarnation which, as she understood it, was a meeting of extremes. The most beautiful became the most vile (*2Ag* 20) and Clare herself seems to have become wholly caught up in the span and depth of Christ’s exchange.

By 1234, she had begun to find ways of expressing the radical shift in understanding which she herself had experienced. Her early letters to Agnes are largely influenced by Francis’ *Letter to all the Faithful*. Her imagery is feudal, filled with banners and rescues and reconciliations all leading up to her song in praise of poverty. This is the background against which she tries to set out for Agnes the reversal of values which she herself had experienced. This process had begun for Clare a long time ago but there can be no doubt



but that the Stigmata gave her a different measure against which to understand everything else. What she sets out for Agnes is not so much a complete reversal of everything Agnes had previously known (though it was also that) but she sets out an entirely new insight into the great themes of faith, redemption, love, commitment. For her, everything from then on was seen in the context of the Incarnation. In writing about it, she is pushed into new areas so that her language is rich in feudal imagery and colour, as if having 'left the world' she has now returned to it as a new woman in a new world. The banner she carries is one of virginity and poverty but thanks to the Stigmata, those two familiar words are somehow turned upside down. They are set free from renunciation or loss or anything negative and instead have led her into the rich and vibrant world of the Crucified Lover, so that she could say, with the bride in the *Song of Songs*: "His banner over me is love."

From that time on, the Stigmata seem to have become the yardstick against which she measured all authenticity and truth. It gave her a new insight into what the Incarnation really meant, because at every turn, she was pushed to re-think suffering and love and joy. She saw them merging into one another, or - more accurately perhaps - she learnt from Francis that suffering could come clothed in such great love that pain and joy come close to one another or even identical. We recall how this is what Francis had prayed for when he first went to the mountain for that Lent of St Michael, he asked to share the pain but he also asked to share the love and joy as far as he was able. This is how Clare's thoughts could go from suffering to joy, from dying to life, from poverty to splendour. She can only have learnt this from Francis himself, either from his words or maybe simply from observing him at San Damiano as he learnt to live in this new place of joy and pain. Observing and thinking about Francis' intense union with Christ also enabled her to explore greater depths in her own calling. From this exploration she continually gained insights into the reality of virginity and poverty.



I suspect that the Stigmata of Francis led her into a world transformed, that her previous meditation about the Incarnation had now become something far more multi-dimensional than we can imagine. She did not speak about it because all the words were too small but she knew that it was connected with the invitation which she knew had been extended to her and the other Sisters, to become, as she said to Agnes, sister, spouse and mother of the Son of the most High Father and the glorious Virgin (1Ag 24).

In the life of Francis, she had seen with her own eyes a glimpse of what the passion of Jesus entailed. Looking for parallels to explain it to Agnes, she finds echoes which made great sense in their culture (though less in ours) in the young knight's feudal bond of loyalty to his liege lord. She saw that the service into which Agnes had now entered was an ever deepening commitment to their poor and crucified Lord. Agnes was no longer in her former world of kingly riches, but in the new world which found value in other things than wealth and glory. All these images arose out of their feudal and structured culture and would have made excellent sense to them both because they were children of that world and that culture, just as the metaphors of the Olympics make some sense to us. We do not need explanations to understand about gold, silver and bronze!

If Agnes, Princess of Bohemia, had expected Clare to send her a bland welcoming letter containing a few polite courtesies, she must have been much surprised. Presumably Clare felt that her first letter had been well received and she may well have had a reply which is lost to us. (Has anyone looked in the Vatican library or archives for letters from Agnes, both to Clare and to Gregory IX and later popes? She seems to have been a prolific letter writer and, as the sister of an influential and powerful king, she had no need to be shy or withdrawing. It is statistically unlikely that all her correspondence has all vanished without a trace).

In her *First Letter* to Agnes, Clare says more about the upside - down values of a poverty which deals in the curren-



cy of eternity (1LAg 15). Then from that same thought, she begins again to focus on the sufferings of Christ. It is interesting to note how physical her verbs are. She speaks about touching, being held in a close embrace, being adorned, being surrounded - all in a passage from the martyrdom of St Agnes (1Ag 8-11). She tells us that the Lord “wanted to be seen” (1Ag 29) by those who were starving to death (1Ag 20). She refers to the athletic contests of Assisi in which young men, naked and oiled, wrestled together for glory in the city’s games (1Ag 27).

This very visual and tactile approach also raises another question, for me at least, about the nature of Francis’ Stigmata. What did they actually look like? What did other people actually see? Were they five neat wounds as artists have tended to show them or was his whole body wounded and traumatised, as if by crucifixion? Did his body show any signs of the other sufferings of Christ, the scourging for instance? Or the dislocation which came from the weight on his arms? We are not told any of this and Celano gives no indication, but it is possible that in this passage from her *Second Letter*, we might have a glimpse of how Clare’s meditation moved from Francis to Christ and back again. She says: “See him, made contemptible for you and follow him being made contemptible for him in this world. Your Bridegroom, who is the most beautiful of the sons of humanity, was made the most vile of men, despised, beaten and many time whipped all over his whole body” (2Ag 19).

When we look at her *Third Letter*, we can see that her meditation has deepened even more. She draws together several rich strands of thought. This is the Letter in which she reflects on the mirror. Her thinking about the human soul has grown enormously in depth because she has now made a link between Francis and the mirror. This mirror image was widely known in the Middle Ages, but Clare adds a dimension all her own and I wonder if this was because of what she learnt from Francis in those last two



years of his life? She tells us clearly that we are all called to be mirrors of the Godhead and that transformation will come as we surrender ourselves to our true role in the universe, which is to be “his mansion and his throne and to carry him spiritually” (3LAg 22.24).

Clare had seen the wounds of Francis with her own eyes and they had led her straight into the mystery of the Incarnation. She had seen Francis, the mirror of the crucified God. This is surely what Francis himself would have wanted most? This is surely, also, what Francis would have agreed was the most true and discerning way of understanding him? For Clare, why speak much about the reflection in the mirror when, in that same mirror, is seen the objective reality? Francis was reticent about the Stigmata for many reasons but one reason must have been that while he knew very well that they were Christ’s wounds not his, he was less sure that everyone else would make that same clear distinction. However, we see that Clare did make that distinction, that she understood and that for her, the mirror led immediately to the One mirrored. Francis was the mirror, but what Clare saw in this mirror was Christ. When she tells us to “transform your whole self into an image of the Godhead” (3Ag 13), she speaks as one who has seen that this can be done. She was one who had looked into the mirror of Francis and seen Jesus Christ and in one sense, the Stigmata simply authenticated this insight. In a very real sense, the Stigmata were not the point, the point was human transformation into an image of the Godhead and for this, Francis was a trail blazer as well as a true mirror. In that mirror she clearly saw the blessed poverty, holy humility and love beyond words of the poor, crucified One. Did Francis also give her a glimpse of that ‘love beyond words’ and what it really means when the soul becomes “His mansion and his throne” (3Ag 22)?

I wonder if the real reason why Clare says so little about Francis is because in reality she spoke about him all the time but it never shows because Francis, like a true disciple, al-



ways led her directly to the Son of God. Her love for Francis was quite different from the love given him by the Lady Jacopa in Rome or Filippa Mareri in Rieti. We can lose our way if we allow ourselves to be sidetracked by the relationship portrayed in, for instance, “Brother Sun and Sister Moon” or numerous other books and films.

Clare was powerfully single-minded. She loved and revered Francis and suffered greatly when he died, yet her gaze never once stopped at Francis but always went on to the Poor Crucified One.

I think we can sum up by saying that far from being silent about the Stigmata, Clare gives us a whole new understanding of the meaning and power of those wounds. This is particularly true of the *Third* and *Fourth Letters* in which she describes for us what she saw in the mirror of Francis. If we read the passages in Clare about the sufferings of Christ as descriptions of the mirror of Francis, we learn more about the Stigmata itself and we also begin to grasp what she understands by poverty and virginity and above all by love. It is now clear that Francis is apparently absent from her writings because, like John the Baptist, he had decreased and Christ had increased which is exactly what Francis had always wanted.

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San Francesco stigmatizzato. L'innovazione materno-sacerdotale delle creature **[Saint Francis Stigmatized. The Materno-Sacerdotal Innovation of Creatures]**

Anyone who reads the book «San Francesco stigmatizzato. L'innovazione materno-sacerdotale delle creature» [Saint Francis Stigmatized. The Materno-Sacerdotal Innovation of Creatures] by fr. Dario Chiapetti, ofm, finds themselves drawn into the same experience as the Poverello, which has its roots in the Trinitarian life communicated to believers at baptism.

If the reader is a Poor Clare Sister, she may find herself confirmed in the awareness that Clare participates in that experience, receiving life from it, sharing that life, and generating it in turn: daughter, sister, mother.

The stigmatization is taken by the author as a symbol of Francis' Christian journey and constitutes the heart of the work. However, in the 'Centenary of Centenarians', in which we are retracing the last three years of Francis' life, it is stimulating, as well as a precious opportunity, to consider the fruitful dynamism that sprang from the event of the Stigmata. San Damiano, in the fraternal and charismatic closeness of Clare and the Sisters open to the work of the Holy Spirit, was the guardian and womb of this dynamism.

The following text offers a very brief overview.

Francis' will for the Poor Ladies was that they, united on many sides in holy charity, should live in poverty, in obedience, in unanimity in charity, in familiarity of life, in discreet



and contemplative satisfaction of the needs of bodies, in patience in labors, to the glory and edification of the Church. The focus placed on 'always living in truth', in its Trinitarian-mariological content, which structures the composition, and in its connection to the perfection of unity, seems to reveal precisely the content of the form of living that Francis experienced with Clare and the Sisters, in an innovated way, in the Alvernine-Damianite event, by virtue of the stauro-pneumatic centering, and which involved the friars whom he sent to sing the composition to them, and, with the Canticle, all the other faithful and creatures.

Francis thus went from actuating from himself his materno-filiality with the Poor Ladies to actuating this with, in and through his companions, triggering this passage also in these and in the Sisters, thus realizing the 'gathered in unum' with the companions, in virtue of the Poor Ladies, and between the friars and these, in virtue of Francis with Clare, and of the ladies, in virtue of the friars.

Francis-son, at La Verna, passed through Clare-Leonmother, from affliction to consolation, was stigmatized, that is, delivered, heart-soul-body, to the Father: and they were the Praises of God Most High.

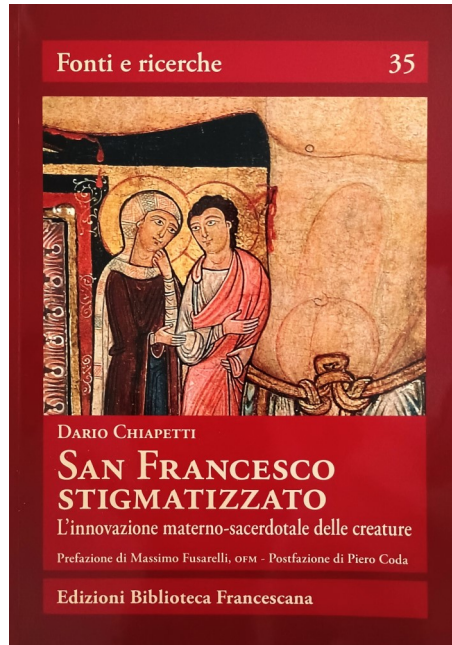
As mother, Francis opened Clare-daughter to the same stigmatizing passage and so she was delivered to the Father; in the masculine-feminine distinction, concerning heart-soul-body, in the Father, all creation was stigmatized: and it was the Canticle.

Francis-son passed from tribulation, due to the worsening of illness, to consolation, thanks to the Canticle, the fruit of the experience of sanctification with all creatures, which he intoned and was intoned by his companions, which is the consolation received from Clare-daughter and companion-son and returned to him by Clare-mother and companion-mothers.

"For a greater consolation" (AC 85: FA:ED II, p. 188) of the isters, and by virtue of that greater consolation of his, as



the fruit of reciprocity of receiving affliction and consolation and returning consolation, Francis made himself creative again: the Sisters were delivered to the Father, crowned by the Father: and it was the *Canticle of Exhortation* for the Ladies of San Damiano. (p. 404f)



DARIO CHIAPETTI, ofm, *San Francesco stigmatizzato. L'innovazione materno-sacerdotale delle creature*, Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, Milano 2024, pp. 528



«The Purity of Heart» by Camilla Battista da Varano

It is not as if there were all that many authors from Camerino - especially literary ones - who have crossed the barriers of time and become the object of universal attention. Camilla Battista da Varano is one of them, even though, and I want to say this straight away, we are not in the presence of a writer who chose this way and who is, therefore, a writer by definition. Rather we see a figure of high spirituality who accepted the need to write, but as a complement to her vocation. Nobody, not even the dramatist Ugo Betti, has ever been the subject of such a searching philological study nor has ever rejoiced in the possibility of seeing themselves as one in a series of publications like that of the Lorenzo Valla Foundation edited by Mondadori. This is the Italian parallel of the classical texts of the French *Belles Lettres* or the *Oxford Classical Texts* in English. Now, on the fifth centenary of the death of Camilla Battista da Varano (1458-1524), we welcome the volume called «Purity of Heart and other Writings» edited by the scholar Silvia Serventi who has dedicated a whole year to the study of the Saint of Camerino. As she has argued in her Introduction, we are looking at the collected works of Camilla Battista.

«Purity of heart» is the title of her book and not by chance. There were several manuscripts of the tract (as it is called in the Italian edition) which were known in the sixteenth/seventeenth centuries. Giacomo Boccanera, revising these sources, published them in the *Spiritual Works* of 1958 but however, he gave a less than flattering assessment («Reasoning prevailed over feeling») and dating the work in the later years of the writer's life. Something new happened in 2009 when the University Library of Padua discovered a manuscript in Latin and, in the Civic Library Berio of Genoa, an Italian translation was found which was very close to this Latin one and more complete those previously known. These



events have clearly revolutionised our understanding of the «Purity of Heart», and they enable us to assign a date prior to 1502. It can now be seen as «a true and very sweet Epithalamium, a wedding Song, in which the voice of Battista alternates, in a single melodious text, with that of the Spouse of the Song of Songs, rather as the warp and the weft interplay in a fabric».

The tract begins with two different prologues. The first is Scriptural and rests on the quotation from Matthew: *Seek and you shall find*. The second focusses on giving a short description of the «three things which seem most useful and appropriate for the soul who desires to arrive at the holy Kiss of her most peaceful, heavenly Spouse». The first is purity of heart, the second the crucifixion for love, the third and last is the free offering of ourselves. Battista maintains that no living soul can ever see the Lord without first coming to this triple purity of mind towards God, towards our neighbour and towards ourselves.

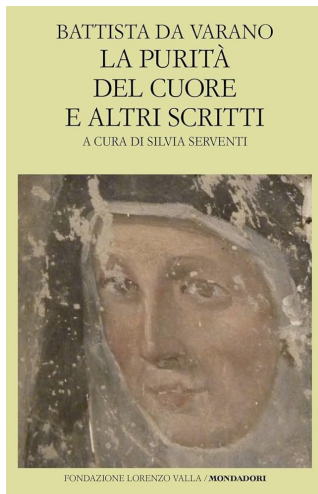
The direct influence of Francis and Clare of Assisi can be sensed in her work. The voice of Camilla Battista rings out, simple and fresh, just as if it did not come from a mind filled with learning. We read phrases and gather images which are moving and memorable, such as when she speaks of the Crucifixion with a breath from the Song of Songs: «This sorrow is unbearable, this pain is beyond expression. O sorrowful crucifixion, who could explain your torment? This, Oh Lovers of God, is why I beg, telling you that I languish from love and I am sick with love.» And the other responds: «What has your beloved more than any other, Oh you, the most beautiful among women? Oh most beautiful and adorned one, Oh sweetest and most splendid, and this not only among women and other beautiful souls, but you are most beautiful seated among the saints and amid the choirs of angels.»

The other works of Camilla Battista which are published in the same volume include: «A Letter to Giovanni da Fano» (in Latin with a translation), «The Spiritual



Life» (which is autobiographical), «The Mental sorrows of Jesus in his Passion», «A Prayer to God», «Memories of Jesus», «The joyful death of Blessed Pietro da Mogliano», «Remembering the Olivetan of Segovia», «Instructions to a Disciple», «Letter to a Sister Vicaress», «Letter to Muzio Colonna», «Letter to Sir Battista Pucci», the house doctor of the Varano family. Works wrongly attributed to the Saint of Camerino have been eliminated. A careful reading inevitably leads to the conclusion that the work of the Camerino mystic is a unique example of literature which is at once spiritual and humanist. From humanism she took her style and literary form while remaining firmly within the format of scripture. The critical apparatus, the notes and the bibliography make this volume into a unique work, unprecedented on any level, while it still acknowledges the 1958 two volume work of Giacomo Boccanera, especially bearing in mind the times in which that publication was made.

The cover reproduces a fresco that can be dated to 1540 (just sixteen years after her death) which was found in 2011 in the parish church of San Pietro ad Appennino di Pieve Torina, and it shows us the sweet and peaceful face of the Saint.



Giuseppe De Rosa
from «Orizzonti della Marca»,
October 26, 2024, p. 3

BATTISTA DA VARANO, *La purità del cuore e altri scritti*, a cura di Silvia Serventi, testo latino a fronte, Fondazione Lorenzo Valla - Mondadori, Milano 2024, rileg., pp. LVIII-312

News from the Office Pro Monialibus

“Inmaculada Concepción” Federation, Poor Clares in Peru

The Poor Clare Federation “Inmaculada Concepción”, which includes Poor Clares in Peru and in other countries belonging to it, had its Federal Ordinary Assembly from 18 to 22 November 2024, at the House for Retreat of the Mercedarian Sisters of Mercy, in La Molina, Lima, Perú.

Opening the Assembly, the President M. Johanna de Jesús, osc informed that the Poor Clares in Los Ángeles, Chile, are officially incorporated to the Federation.

The Elective Assembly took place on 21st November and was presided by br. Tomás Valencia, ofm, Federal Assistant.

The Federal Council for the six-year period 2024-2030 is composed as follow:

President: *M. Cecilia de San José*, Abbess of the Monastery in Lima, Peru.

1st Councillor: *M. Johanna de Jesús*, Monastery of Trujillo, Peru.

2nd Councillor: *M. Nelly de Dios Trino*, Abbess of the Monastery of Cusco, Peru.

3rd Councillor: *M. María Paulina*, Abbess of the Monastery of Los Ángeles, Chile.

4th Councillor: *M. María de Carmen*, Abbess of the Monastery of La Florida, Santiago de Chile, Chile.

Federal Bursar: *M. Teresita del Niño Jesús*, Abbess of the Monastery of Huanta, Peru.

Federal Secretary: *Sr. Inmaculada* of the Monastero in Lima, Peru.



“Bikira Maria” Association - English-speaking Poor Clares of Africa

The 9th General Assembly of the Bikira Maria Association of English-Speaking Poor Clare Sisters in Africa was held in Lusaka, Zambia, from the 4th to 20th May, 2025 under the theme: *Clarian Contemplatives on the Synodal Journey: Definition, Identity, Purpose*.

The new Office Bearers for the period of six years are:

President: *M. Lilato Sang'andu*, Abbess of the Monastery of Lusaka, Zambia.

1st Councillor: *Sr. Mary Rose Aghanu*, Abbess of the Monastery of Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria.

2nd Councillor: *Sr. Catherine Kalima*, Abbess of the Monastery of Songea, Tanzania.

3rd Councillor: *Sr. Immaculate Ayebare*, Monastery of Mbarara, Uganda.

4th Councillor: *Sr. Regginah Kisaka*, Superior of the Fondation of Myanga, Kenya.

Federal Bursar: *Sr. Lubingu Lunsonga*, of the Monastery of Lusaka, Zambia.

Sr. Tumelo Limata, osc
Secretary of the Assembly





“Regina Ordinis Minorum” Federation, Italy

On 21st May 2025, during the Federal Elective Assembly of this Federation, at the Guest House of the Convento SS. Trinità in Baronissi, Italy, were elected for the six-years period 2025-2031:

President: *M. M. Bernardetta Daraio*, Monastery of Potenza.

1st Councillor: *M. Angela Chiara Telesca*, Monastery of S. Lucia di Serino.

2nd Councillor: *M. Myriam Sagnotta*, Monastery of Nocera Inferiore.

3rd Councillor: *M. Chiara Rosaria Coppola*, Monastery of Pignataro.

4th Councillor: *M. Nunzia Emmanuela Sodano*, Monastery of Napoli.

Federal Bursar: *Sr. M. Virginia Vistocco*, Monastery of S. Lucia di Serino.

Federal Secretary: *Sr. Chiara Bernardetta Colangelo*, Monastery of Potenza.

sr. Chiara Teresa Marotta, osc
sr. Gabriella Chiara De Angelis, osc
Secretaries of the Assembly





“S. Chiara e S. Agnese d’Assisi” Federation, Italy

On 29th May 2025, at the Casa Divin Maestro in Ariccia (Rome), the Federal Ordinary Assembly of the “S. Chiara e S. Agnese d’Assisi” Federation, presided over by p. Luca Paraventi, ofm, Federal Assistant, elected the Federal President and her Council for the six-years period 2025-2031, as follow:

President: *M. Chiara Cristiana Mondonico*, Monastery of Gubbio.

1st Councillor: *Sr. Chiara Amata Ruggiero*, Monastery of Orvieto.

2nd Councillor: *Sr. Sara Donata Isella*, Monastery S. Agnese of Perugia.

3rd Councillor: *Sr. Chiara Damiana Galimberti*, Monastery of Foligno.

4th Councillor: *Sr. Chiara Ester Mattio*, Monastery of Città della Pieve.

Federal Bursar: *M. Ester Cristiana Bracchi*, Monastery of Trevi.

Federal Secretary: *Sr. Chiara Noemi Bettinelli*, Monastery of Cademario.

Sr. Chiara Noemi Bettinelli, osc
Secretary of the Assembly





**We invite
the Federations celebrating
their Elective Assemblies
to send us the names
of the elected Sisters
and their Monasteries,
so that we can publish them
in our magazine
and in *Acta Ordinis*.
Thank you!**

◆ ***For your kind attention***

Payment for the FONDO CLARISSE **by transfer.**

For accounting purposes, please send a copy of the bank movement **by fax to 06 68491414,** or **send an e-mail to: moniales@ofm.org**

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Communion and Communication

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