



ORDO FRATRUM
MINORUM

CLARE WOMAN OF PEACE

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Franciscus

Eight Hundredth Anniversary of the Death of St. Francis

Letter of the Minister General to the Poor Ladies
on the Solemnity of Saint Clare 2026

Saint Mary of the Angels, August 1, 2026
Feast of the Pardon of Assisi

My Dear Sisters,

The Lord give you peace!

As we celebrate eight hundred years since the blessed *Transitus* of Saint Francis, an evangelical man and preacher of reconciliation, the world continues to be torn apart by wars, divisions, and polarization, with little to no understanding of the Good News of “peace.” We feel this reality with great sorrow, as it is a challenge to all Christians but particularly to religious. And so we seek a word of hope, some light to shine and help us navigate through this time. This annual celebration of Saint Clare, “*handmaid of Christ and of the Poor Sisters and little plant of our holy father*,”¹ affords us the opportunity to revisit her story: a woman of unity and peace, promoter of reconciliation, especially in times of conflict.

Clare embraced Francis’s charism and lived it out with her own style, witnessing to it daily. Listening to her, especially this year, helps us to hope that the life and death of the little poor man of Assisi still has much to say to the people of our times, so in need of Franciscan wisdom. Shortly before his death, Francis wrote his Last Testament for Clare and her sisters. Clare faithfully transmits it in her Rule and, after the death of Francis, she and her sisters treasured it.² Let’s listen to her voice:

*Consider, my sisters, our lofty call and the command we received from so holy a father, even in our fragility. We mourn the death of our holy father Francis – who was our pillar and our only consolation and support after God. Yet, even more profoundly now we voluntarily commit ourselves to our lady, most holy poverty, and after my death, may my present sisters and those who will come after us, have the strength to embrace her and not ever stray from her in any way.*³

On one side of her story, we see Clare’s awareness of her lofty vocation, the challenge to live with nothing other than the Gospel. On the other side, we see Clare’s awareness of her own limitations, her weakness. The “we” of Clare’s words with her sisters resonated with a particular clarity in the years that followed Francis’ death,

¹ *Testament of Saint Clare* (=TestsC), 37.

² *Rule of Saint Clare* (=RsC), 6,7-9.

³ TestsC, 38-39.



which for the community of San Damiano was a profoundly challenging time. In their time of transition and loss, they clung even more tightly to the ideal of their unity around highest poverty. At the very time when the sisters were most hurting, they opened themselves all the more to the heart of the vocation they had received through Blessed Francis. They recognized and confronted their fragility but also reaffirmed what was essential: maintaining their fidelity to Christ, the poor one, with docility to the Spirit of the Lord, who is the Spirit of peace. From there arises their unified life that preaches reconciliation: Clare, a woman centered in the Lord, speaks also to us and to the world today, during these times when words like peace, mercy, and reconciliation are in fact empty to many and contradicted by many more.

This year, as we consider Francis as a man of peace, let us look also to Clare who teaches us even more about the gift of peace that we have received from the Risen One, who reconciles us to God and with our brothers and sisters.

1. Clare on the Path of Reconciliation and Peace

“All good springs from the Eucharist including the joyful experience of receiving forgiveness from God which finds its fullest expression in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. From these Sacraments, we receive the grace to become prophets and ministers of mercy as well as instruments of reconciliation, forgiveness, and peace for others; we become the prophets and ministers that our world particularly needs today.”⁴

The call to be peacemakers is inherent in the Christian vocation. In his Testament, Saint Francis recounted how it was *revealed* to him that he should begin encounters saying: *“The Lord give you peace!”*⁵ This gift of peace entrusted to him became a responsibility and a primary way that he would fulfill the command to repair the temple and house of the Lord, which is not only the ecclesial Church but is also the human heart, the works of creation, and all around us in the entire world.

Clare *“was attentive to keep her monastery and the Order and herself free from all the contagions of sin.”*⁶ Vigilant guardianship is the first step of love and peace: protect the heart of each person and the community from sin, which causes division and leads to resentment, bitterness, greed, the desire to possess, and ultimately violence. We know from experience that *“evil actions come from a heart where evil thoughts have been cultivated.”*⁷

⁴ Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere*, June 29, 2021 (=VDQ), n. 23.

⁵ *Testament of Saint Francis* (=2Test), 14.

⁶ *Process of Canonization* (= Proc), 13,17.

⁷ Mk 7, 21.



And so, caring for and protecting others is possible only when we rise up again, go beyond our sins, and stop worrying about being “*miserable sinners*.”⁸ It is a call that we embrace gradually, as it touches the will, the heart, the intentions, and reveals our desire to live as resurrected and redeemed. Consider that Clare’s journey had no peace in it during her time at Sant’Angelo in Panzo. It wasn’t until making the move to the poverty of San Damiano that she finally felt secure and peacefully rooted. San Damiano was a place of a great many mystical events, beginning with Francis hearing “*a voice coming from the wood of the cross*.”⁹

Clare contemplated that same cross for many years, with the crucified and risen Christ upon it. Her sisters too would daily hear the echo of the call that still came from the poor and crucified Christ, who desired to be their source of peace, calling them to walk in His footsteps. The sisters would learn that following Christ unfolded in daily life: in everyday relationships, in conflict resolution, in mutual care, and in prayerful intercession for the world. “*Through your prayers, God will heal the wounds of many*.”¹⁰ “*Therefore the sisters discovered that contemplation and intercession go hand in hand*.”¹¹ Peace is the fruit that comes about when a group decides to follow the Lord personally and intercedes for the world communally.

2. Gazing into the Mirror: Contemplation leading to Peace

In the mirror of the Poor Christ, Clare recognizes and invites Agnes to contemplate three distinct aspects:¹²

- ♦ **The Beginning:** the poverty of the one who is placed in a manger.
- ♦ **The Means:** his holy humility, blessed poverty, labors and sufferings.
- ♦ **The End:** the ineffable charity, for which He chose to suffer on the tree of the cross.

She is, therefore, suggesting a path of transformation in and through the Poor Christ: “*transform yourself entirely, through contemplation, into the image of his divinity*.”¹³ It is He who has abolished every wall of separation and every enmity and frees us from what causes conflicts.

⁸ *Rule of 1221* (=Rnb), 23, 5.

⁹ *Legend of St. Clare* (=LegsC), 10.

¹⁰ VDQ 16.

¹¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2016, 281.

¹² St. Clare, *Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague*, (= 4Lag), 18-23.

¹³ St. Clare, *Third Letter to Agnes of Prague* (= 3Lag), 13.



In her Rule, Clare warns and exhorts her sisters:

*“In the Lord Jesus Christ, let the sisters guard themselves from pride, vanity, envy, greed, care and concern of this world, slander and murmuring, discord and division.”*¹⁴ Clare adds these words to Francis’s Rule, thus expressing her particular sensitivity to discord and division within her sisterhood.

And she strongly requests that *“they should always be diligent in preserving their unity by loving each other, which is the bond of perfection.”*¹⁵

In addition, *“to preserve the unity of mutual charity and peace, all those responsible for the offices of the monastery should be elected by the common consent of all the sisters.”*¹⁶

Here we find three key concepts: vigilance, solicitude, and guardianship. All three are necessary to walk together and allow true peace to grow in and among any group. When manifested among them, these concepts reveal the sisters’ communion with God, which is what they are ultimately called to:

*“And by loving one another in the charity of Christ, you will show outwardly through your works the love you have within, so that, inspired by this example, the sisters may always grow in the love of God and in mutual charity.”*¹⁷

Clare calls this path the *“honesty of holy living together”* (*honestatem sanctae conversationis*), which consists precisely in a life unified in that mutual charity and obedience that inhabit the peaceful heart because it trusts, in meekness and humility. Where does this path lead? Clare shows us in the days leading up to her death, when she commends her soul to God with a heart full of peace: *“Go, my soul, in peace, for you will have good company, for the one who created you has sanctified you and called you home...”*¹⁸ Clare expresses here the interior confidence of one who feels *“watched over, like a mother watches her beloved child.”*¹⁹ This childlike confidence in God is the source of her inner peace. It is at the core of the holy unity of the sisters, which does not exist because of carefully planned human strategies, but comes about when a group honestly walks the path of transformation together.²⁰

¹⁴ RsC 10, 6.

¹⁵ RsC 10, 7.

¹⁶ RsC 4, 22.

¹⁷ TestsC 59–60.

¹⁸ Proc 11, 14–15.

¹⁹ Proc 3, 20.

²⁰ See Is 49:15–16. Is 66, 13 and Psalm 131.



Here then, “*holy living together*” becomes a challenge to the world in a time marked by the craving for power, loyalty to ideologies, and a generally distracted, distrustful public who do not notice the other and have forgotten God.

3. Francis and Clare: Two different Paths towards the same Peace

His greeting, «*the Lord give you peace,*” which Francis receives as a revelation, becomes in Clare a blessing that knows no boundaries of space or time. If Francis radiates peace while walking the streets of the world, Clare transforms the monastery of San Damiano into a place radiating with peace. These are two different paths that have the same objective: to follow in the footsteps of Christ, poor and crucified, and utterly beloved. Francis seeks to meet the Saracens in Damietta; Clare defends Assisi from the Saracens with her prayer before the Eucharistic Lord. Francis brings peace to the town of Gubbio by taming a wolf, who is the symbol of the aggression that wounds all of creation. Clare makes her home a place where hearts are tamed and healed one at a time and peace reigns through reconciliation. Both saints show us how Gospel peace is possible in all situations, it heals conflict with love and conquers hatred because it transcends it.

Faithful to the Gospel, Francis tells the friars that “*they should not fight evil, but if someone strikes them on the right cheek, they should turn and offer the other also.*”²¹ He himself was man “*of gentle character, calm disposition, affable in speech, cautious in admonishing.*”²²

Clare, for her part, was “*gentle with her words, sweet in her actions, and in everything amiable and pleasant*”²³ and “*always joyful in the Lord, and never seemed troubled.*”²⁴

From her inner peace, Clare shows herself attentive to her sisters’ hearts: as she especially “*had great compassion for the sick; she was kind and generous toward all the sisters.*”²⁵ We know that “*the number of the sick and those afflicted by various maladies in the monastery was great.*”²⁶ Clare “*provided for her sisters’ needs with discretion*”²⁷ with the tree of life (the cross) planted in her heart. From

²¹ Rnb 14,4.

²² Thomas of Celano, *Legend of Blessed Francis* [First Life], 29, 83.

²³ *Bull of Canonization of St. Clare* (=BolsC), 14.

²⁴ Proc 3, 6.

²⁵ Proc 11, 5.

²⁶ LegsC 35.

²⁷ Proc 9, 5.



her beautiful heart, the tree grew with leaves and fruits that refreshed the soul and provided the medicine of peace and healing.²⁸

Thus we see in Francis that «*even the cruel elements became gentle with him.*»²⁹ Peace manifested itself everywhere. His “path of peace” flourished in service. Of Clare we read: “*that the humility of this blessed mother was such that she put herself last, placing herself in service to the other sisters, making herself inferior to all, serving them, washing their hands and feet, and cleaning the mattresses of the sick sisters with her own hands.*”³⁰

In Francis and Clare, we see two different ways to bring peace. No matter the internal or external situation, Christ is our peace, and so it is always possible to bring him into a situation and to start anew. Christ has the power to unite different people into one body and to eliminate hostility.³¹ He give us his Spirit, that we may be patient in working with others towards peace and unity.

4. Forgiveness and Guarding the Heart

As we patiently work for unity in whatever concrete reality we find ourselves, there will be obstacles. Clare speaks of avoiding that which might «ensnare” the heart, such as grudges.³² Francis takes up this theme in his *Audite Poverelle* letter, inviting the sisters to “*live always in truth,*” freely following the footsteps of the poor Christ. Forgiveness is needed to promote unity as we strive to follow Christ.³³ Community reconciliation is an ongoing journey. Since sin severely wounds “the body” of the *fraternitas*, the entire community shares this burden together; no sister is left out or allowed to be concerned only about herself. In Chapter 10 of her Rule, Clare offers the most common, concrete example of two sisters clashing by way of harsh words or gestures. Clare begs whoever it might be who knows in her heart that she has initiated the conflict to take the first step. She is to go immediately to seek reconciliation, “before offering the Lord the gift of her prayer” — because there is no authentic prayer while one holds on to a rift with a sister. The gesture she proposes is challenging: the sister should prostrate herself at the other’s feet asking for forgiveness; and then further ask her to intercede for her before the Lord. In this way, the one who was once your enemy becomes your intercessor before God,

²⁸ cfr. LegsC 35.

²⁹ Thomas of Celano, *The Memory of the Desire of a Soul [Second Life]*, 166.

³⁰ Proc 3, 9.

³¹ cfr. Eph 2, 14.

³² cfr. 3Lag 15.

³³ «*Listen Poor Little Ones*» (1225) (=Aud), 2.



for there is no one else more suitable for this role. And the offended one is called to forgive “with generosity,” remembering always the words of the Lord: “If you do not forgive others from the heart, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.”³⁴ Continual forgiveness lived out in this way is like a balm of peace that guards the heart from attacks and prepares the sister for one more step: offering full support to a struggling sister. Francis, in fact, invites the sisters: “*Those who are afflicted by infirmity / and those who are weighed down for their sake, / all of you, bear it in peace.*”³⁵

Here we may be catching a glimpse of Francis’ struggle with his own physical sufferings in the invitation to peacefully bear the burden of illness, to accept suffering without being crushed by its weight. Thus we find that forgiveness and peacemaking helped the Poor Man prepare himself for his encounter with “sister death,” just as it did for Clare. Because of these dispositions of heart, Clare could joyfully address her soul on her deathbed, commanding her soul to go gracefully and confidently to meet the Lord, who had created her and blessed her. The link between peacemaking and accepting death is more relevant than ever for us today, in a world that so often struggles with both these dimensions of life.

5. Stories of Peace Rediscovered

When a person’s heart is at peace, it often help others find the path of peace and harmony. In Clare’s *Process of Canonization*, for example, we find a story of reconciliation taking place between a man named Hugolino and his wife, Lady Guiduzia.³⁶ Clare’s active intervention leads to the healing of a difficult marital situation, concretely demonstrating that her charism of peacemaking impacted human relationships. The episode of the Saracen assault on San Damiano also shows Clare as a mediator of peace, even in situations of extreme violence.³⁷ Clare steps forward, becoming “eucharistically available” and offering herself like the Lord does in the Sacrament. She prostrates herself before the Lord, placing herself into His hands, and obtains liberation from danger, transforming a threat of war into an experience of divine protection.

When Assisi was besieged in 1241 by Vitale di Aversa’s troops, under the command of Emperor Frederick II, Clare trusted in the power of God and did not succumb to the fear that often fuels war. She called her sisters to prayerful inter-

³⁴ Mt 18:35.

³⁵ Aud 9-11.

³⁶ Proc 16, 10-15.

³⁷ Proc 9, 4-17.



cession and included the entire sisterhood in the penitential act of placing ashes on their heads as they prayed.³⁸ True peace requires the individual conversion of each member of a group, and prayer becomes a way of giving back what one has received. These episodes are not simply devotional anecdotes. They reveal a woman with deep inner peace who lives out that peace through difficult concrete actions: in reconciliation within a family; in the reconstruction of broken bonds; in the transforming trust shown during the violent assault of the Saracens; and in the disarming effect of her prayer that leads to conversion during the siege of Vitale. Clare is a generator of peace, as the *Bull of Canonization* also reminds us:

*«She was a vessel of humility, an ark of chastity, and a fire of charity. Her gentle sweetness gave her patient endurance. She was a mediator of peace and communion within relationships: gentle in words, sweet in action, and in everything amiable and pleasant.»*³⁹

The peace within Sister Clare permeated the little monastery on the hill of Mount Subasio, where she was called to live out all of her days. She was never there for isolation or escape, but to help the Lord create a place where peace would reign supreme and through prayer would reach to the end of the earth.

6. Clare, a Prophet of Peace for our Time

My dearest sisters, Clare was a woman rich with a peace that spread, embracing ever-wider horizons:

- ♦ **Inner peace:** the confidence that a daughter feels for her father, Clare had for God the Father, and it freed her from anxiety and fear.
- ♦ **Sisterly peace:** seen in the daily safeguarding she did of holy unity through charity, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
- ♦ **Ecclesial peace:** she helped repair the Church, by embracing a charismatic vocation lived out prayerfully.
- ♦ **Universal peace:** interceding for the world and offering the world a prophetic testimony of peace as a possible alternative in all circumstances.

³⁸ Proc 3, 19.

³⁹ BolsC 42.



Clare also teaches us that a peaceful life is neither stumbled upon randomly nor imposed on others. It arises from a radical choice: the choice to love and embrace “*most holy poverty*”⁴⁰ which frees the heart from all appropriation and possession. Where there is nothing to defend, to accumulate, or to control, peace reigns and understanding the other becomes a possibility. In these times of extreme polarization, you, dear sisters, are called to testify to the world that another way of living is possible, the way of embracing unity in diversity, of forgiveness that reconciles, and of prayer that transforms. Live your vocation to the full, dear sisters, I beg you, because we need you true and concrete gestures of forgiveness among yourselves, in your communities, and also between monasteries and Federations. I entrust these reflections to you with the very words of Saint Clare, that she continue to invoke upon you and the world the blessing of the Lord God that she has made her own:

*“May the Lord bless you and keep you. May He show His face to you and have mercy upon you. May He turn His face toward you and grant you peace, my sisters and daughters, and all others who will come and remain in our community, and all those, both present and in the future, who will persevere until the end in all the other monasteries of Poor Ladies... May the Lord always be with you, and now may you always be with Him. Amen.”*⁴¹

May this blessing of peace accompany your journey and, through you, reach the whole world that the Father loves and desires to save.

Offering my seraphic blessing and with my brotherly affection, I am yours,



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Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM
General Minister

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⁴⁰ Cfr. RsC 6,6; TestsC, 34.39. 42. 51; 1LagC, 6; 2LagC 7.

⁴¹ *Blessing of St. Clare*, 2-5, 16.