

LETTER OF THE MINISTER GENERAL
TO THE POOR SISTERS FOR THE SOLEMNITY
OF OUR MOTHER SAINT CLARE, 2022

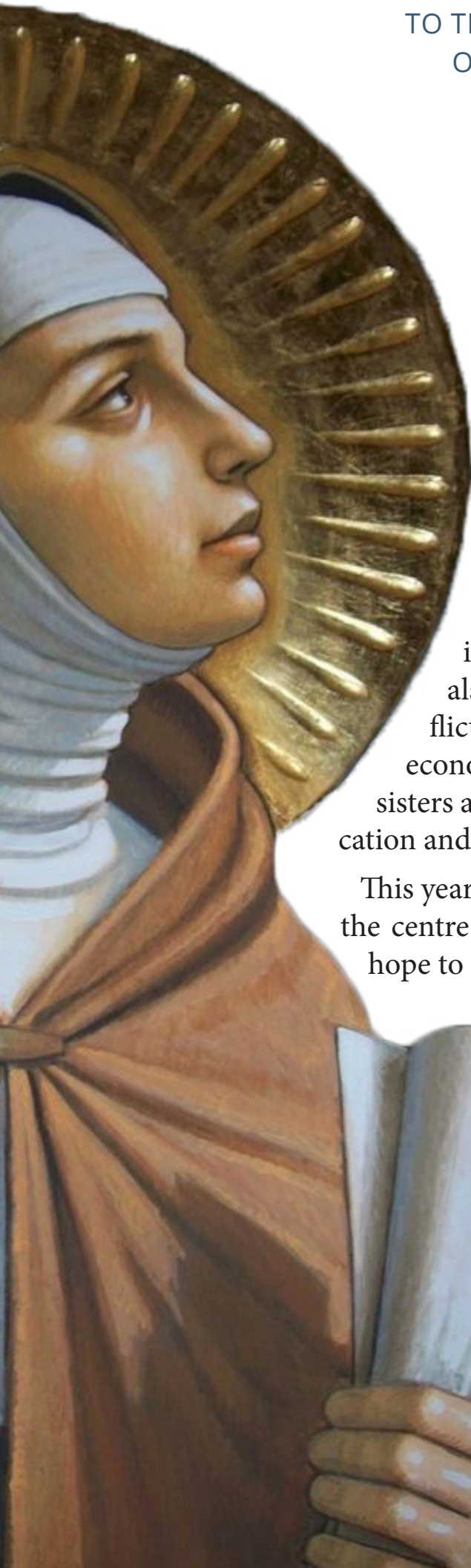
GRATEFUL TODAY FOR THE GIFT OF YOUR VOCATION!

Dear Sisters,
May the Lord give you peace!

The solemnity of our mother, St Clare, returns in this year marked not only by the pandemic but also by the war in Ukraine and other forms of conflict. There are also social tensions and climatic and economic crises in so many countries, where you poor sisters and we friars minor are present and live out our vocation and choice.

This year too, we are challenged to ask ourselves again what the centre of our vocation is and how it can give light and hope to this difficult time.

For this reason, I have returned to the Testament of St Clare through prayerful reading. I would like to collect with you some of its passages that seem to me to help us to say an important word to seek a point of synthesis that allows us to unify the different elements of the vocation and choice received. This point seems to be summarised as follows: “take care”, that is, live the gift received with vigilance and attention, let it grow for the good of the Church, pilgrim among humankind. In the Testament, Clare gives us some words for this “taking care”.



“Among the other gifts that we have received and continue to receive from our magnanimous Father of mercies and for which we must express the deepest thanks to our glorious God, there is our vocation”. (Test 2)

Clare expresses her gratitude to the Father through Francis for the vocation, which she welcomes with her sisters as a gift from above.

I wonder with you how much this awareness of the gift received and to be returned to the Father through a life of mercy and joy is alive in us. Are we aware that we are responding to a gift received, which we do not give ourselves, but which we welcome and are called to welcome and return in gratitude and joy in the different places we live? In the areas that have the gift of vocations and those that do not, in the more tranquil situations and in those that are tenser on a social level, where we are caught up in the repercussions of an ever more profound cultural change of mentality? This availability opens the way for us to keep our vocation alive and fruitful today.

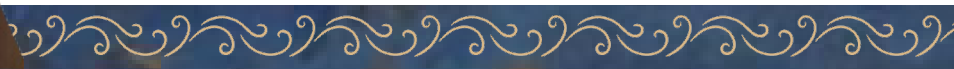
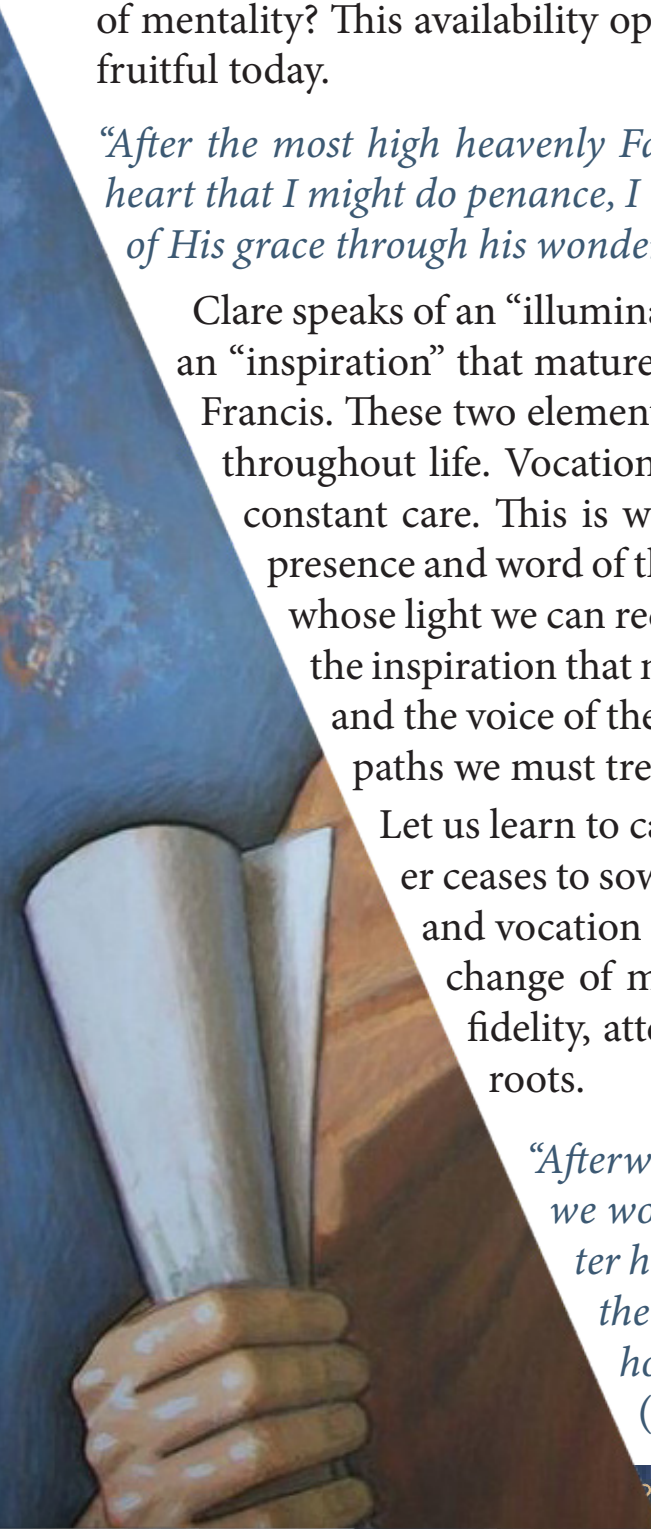
“After the most high heavenly Father saw fit in mercy and grace to enlighten my heart that I might do penance, I might do penance [...] as the Lord gave us the light of His grace through his wonderful life and teaching”. (Test 24. 26)

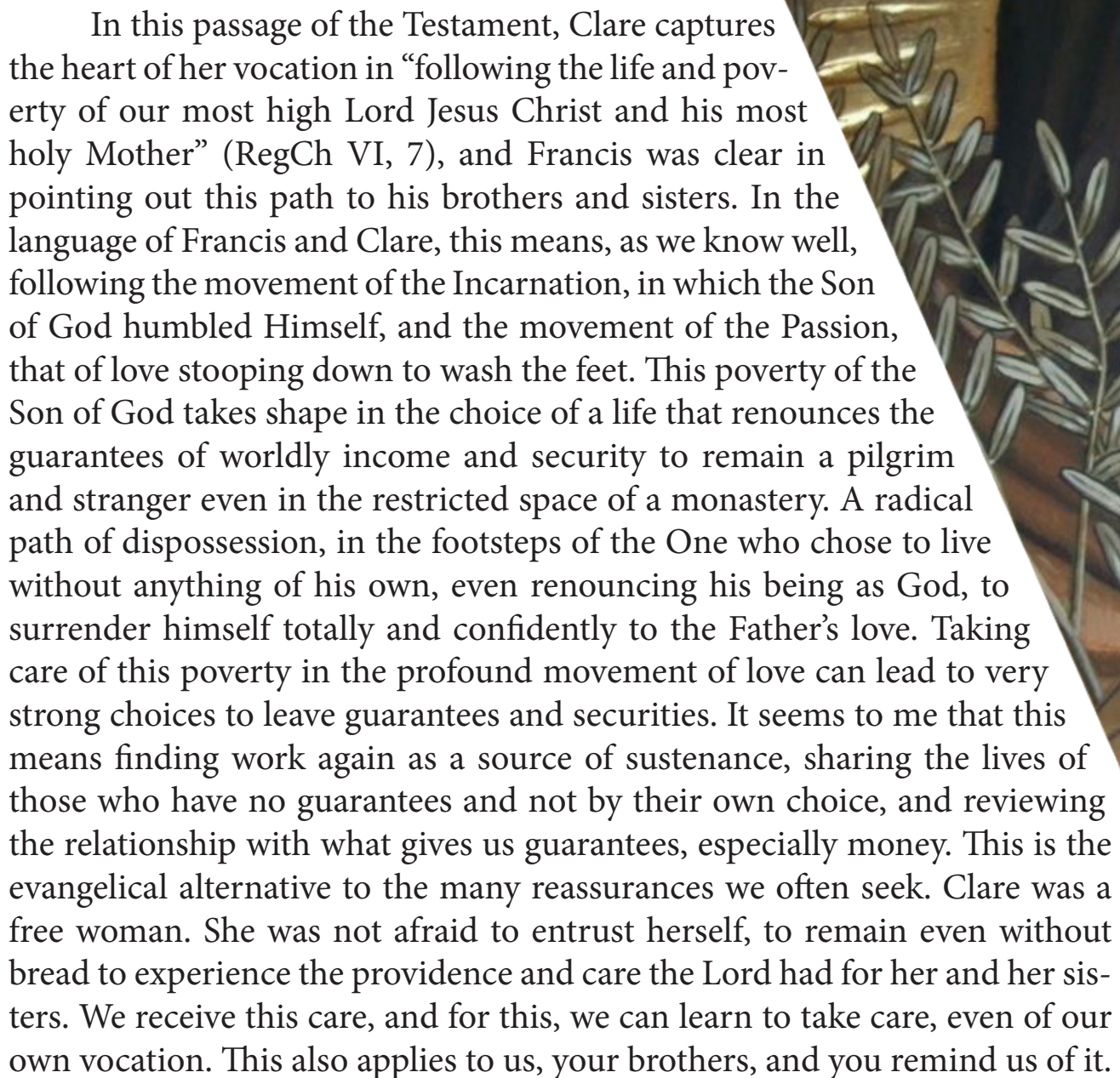
Clare speaks of an “illumination of the heart” received from the Father and of an “inspiration” that matured through the example and word of her father, St Francis. These two elements, essential in every vocation, are to be cherished throughout life. Vocation is a gift not once and for all but grows through constant care. This is why we need to continually open ourselves to the presence and word of the Lord to receive this illumination of the heart, in whose light we can recognise the truth of the life to which we are called, the inspiration that moves it. To have care means to guard the presence and the voice of the Spirit of the Lord in us, to remain attentive to the paths we must tread to live our vocation today in a dynamic way.

Let us learn to care for the light and inspiration that the Lord never ceases to sow abundantly among us. Let us not reduce charism and vocation to a series of rules to be observed or a continuous change of modalities and expressions because care demands fidelity, attention, growth in-depth, and nourishment of the roots.

“Afterwards, he wrote a form of life for us, especially that we would always persevere in holy poverty... so that, after his death, we would in no way turn away from it, as the Son of God never wished to turn away from this holy poverty while He lived in the world”.

(Test 33-34)





In this passage of the Testament, Clare captures the heart of her vocation in “following the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and his most holy Mother” (RegCh VI, 7), and Francis was clear in pointing out this path to his brothers and sisters. In the language of Francis and Clare, this means, as we know well, following the movement of the Incarnation, in which the Son of God humbled Himself, and the movement of the Passion, that of love stooping down to wash the feet. This poverty of the Son of God takes shape in the choice of a life that renounces the guarantees of worldly income and security to remain a pilgrim and stranger even in the restricted space of a monastery. A radical path of dispossession, in the footsteps of the One who chose to live without anything of his own, even renouncing his being as God, to surrender himself totally and confidently to the Father’s love. Taking care of this poverty in the profound movement of love can lead to very strong choices to leave guarantees and securities. It seems to me that this means finding work again as a source of sustenance, sharing the lives of those who have no guarantees and not by their own choice, and reviewing the relationship with what gives us guarantees, especially money. This is the evangelical alternative to the many reassurances we often seek. Clare was a free woman. She was not afraid to entrust herself, to remain even without bread to experience the providence and care the Lord had for her and her sisters. We receive this care, and for this, we can learn to take care, even of our own vocation. This also applies to us, your brothers, and you remind us of it.

Clare entrusts this custody to the Church, to Francis and his successors. She knows that alone, the sisters alone, cannot guard such a great gift. And in the same way, we, your brothers, cannot do it alone because we need a greater belonging to the Church, the people of God and our whole family. This is why I think it is important for preserving your vocation and poverty to belong to the Order, to be in communion with the other sisters through the federation and the Order as a whole.

No one is saved alone, we are interconnected, as Pope Francis’ *Laudato si’* made clear to us, and all this takes the name of custody and care for the most precious gift we have, that of our vocation and choice.

This care of the gift of vocation is not only for us who live today but, as Clare says, for the sisters who will come. A vocation is a gift we receive not just for us in the few years we are given, nor just for this or that monastery. It is a gift that has preceded us and will live after us, and it is not tied to the walls or even to a community but to the form of life. Today when not a few mon-





asteries must close their doors, often after centuries, let us trust! We are entrusted to the Father of mercies who remains faithful. The gift of vocation is alive, and all the good that the community has done will remain after it is no longer there and will live with and in other sisters. Let us think of the monasteries that are opening and flourishing in different countries of the world: our vocation is alive!

How much freedom this openness of heart gives us, how much it teaches us to live without anything of our own and to return to the Father what we have received!

“And loving one another with the love of Christ, may you demonstrate without in your deeds the love you have within so that, compelled by such an example, the sisters may always grow in the love of God and in mutual charity.” (Test 59-60)

Clare points the sisters to the path of love and mutual care as the sure way to cherish the gift of vocation and choice. You live, dear sisters, a very strong and concrete reality of fraternity. You share everything for a lifetime. You learn to know each other and carry the life, the search, the daily life of each sister. How much you have to teach us in this! This fraternal love must be cherished because its root is theological and not reducible to human sympathy or affinity. This love is made up of concrete gestures, daily care and custody, and today in a special way. It also demands of us attention to each sister’s human, emotional, and spiritual experience. We are much more aware today of the complexity of what is human, which is why we know that we are called to care for the whole person, in their integrity. This is true during the time of initial formation and especially throughout the journey that each sister goes through in the different ages of life.

I conclude what I wanted to say to you this year with the words of Clare that close the Testament, which are a prayer and exhortation. In prayer, we entrust everything with Clare to the Father of the Lord



Jesus through the Virgin Mary, the form of life of the Poor Clares, with our gaze turned to Francis, who continues to protect our vocation. In this gratitude, Clare exhorts us to grow and persevere in the good, that is, to remain open and active in responding to our vocation. We know well that every life, and therefore also life in the Spirit and in vocation, if it does not grow, it stops and dies. Therefore, the care we learn to live towards one another aims to ensure that we all respond energetically according to God's desire to the most precious good we have received, that of our vocation and choice.

And to stay on this path seems to me the truest way to get through this difficult time, where everything seems to be collapsing and extinguishing the future. Instead, Clare invites us to look ahead, not to stop. If we grow in this hope, we are leaven in the world, which needs this hope more than ever.

With this prayer, and with the blessing of Clare herself, I leave you and wish you to celebrate her feast in a luminous and intense way, in the powerful intercession addressed to the Father for the Church, for the world, for peace, for our family, which so much needs to be confirmed and to grow in the gift of its vocation.

“For this reason, I bend my knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ so that, through the prayers and merits of the glorious and holy Virgin Mary, His Mother, and of our most blessed father Francis and of all the saints, 78th Lord Himself, Who has given a good beginning, may give the increase and may also give final perseverance. Amen” (Test 77-78).

I confirm my closeness and brotherly care for you with my affectionate greeting and the blessing of St Francis.



Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, ofm

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Minister General