

# ST. CLARE AND ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

## A TIME LINE

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This time line is offered as a way to see many of the important aspects of Clare's life in chronological order with the addition of aspects of Francis' life right along with Clare's. Hopefully, this attempt to put events from both of their lives in this order will help the reader to see more clearly the lives of these two influential saints from Assisi.

1181 or 1182                      Francis Bernadone is born in Assisi of the merchant, Pietro di Bernardone and his wife, Pica.

**1193 or 1194**                      Clare di Favarone of the Offreducio family is born in Assisi. Clare's parents are of the wealthy class. Clare's mother's name was Ortulana. A witness at Clare's canonization process testified under oath that Ortulana, Clare's mother, was experiencing "apprehension" as the birth of her child drew near.

"Ortulana frequently visited a nearby church, the witness states, and one day heard a response to her prayer for the safe delivery of her child. 'O lady,' a voice told her, 'do not be afraid, for you will joyfully bring forth a clear light that will illumine the world.' Within a short time, a female child was born to Ortulana and her husband Favarone, and was named Chiara or Clare, the clear or bright one."<sup>2</sup>

Clare's biographer wrote of Clare: "The Spirit worked within and formed her into a most pure vessel . . . so that she began to be praised by her neighbors . . . and the report of her goodness was noised about among the townspeople.' Other qualities included docility to her parents, generosity and compassion for the poor, dedication to daily prayer."<sup>3</sup>

"Caught in the difficulties of the time resulting from the rise of the merchant class in Assisi, Clare's family fled to Perugia when she was still a child, and returned to Assisi in 1205, when she was about twelve years old. That was the same year in which Francis of Assisi renounced his father and received official recognition of his life as a penitent."<sup>4</sup>

1199-1200                      Francis "participates in the struggle between the *maiores* and *minores* of the city."<sup>5</sup>

1202                                  Francis was taken prisoner following his involvement in the war against Perugia

- 1204 First step of Francis' "conversion." He hears a voice asking, "Is it better to serve the lord or the servant?"<sup>6</sup>
- 1205** Clare's family returns to Assisi.
- 1205 Francis experiences the invitation of the San Damiano crucifix to rebuild his church.
- 1206 Francis has a significant conversion experience by embracing a leper.
- 1206 Francis renounced his father and officially was recognized as a *penitent*.
- 1209 Francis gains his first followers.
- 1208 After Francis heard a sermon on Matthew 10:7-9, he responded: " 'This is what I wish; this is what I seek.' He removed his sandals and tunic right there and embarked on a life of total poverty and preaching."<sup>7</sup>
- 1209 Band of twelve travel to Rome to seek approval for their way of life.
- 1211-1212** Secret meetings between Francis and Clare
- 1212** On Palm Sunday, Clare, with the blessing of Bishop Guido, was taken to meet Francis and his brothers. She left her home "through the bricked-up "Door of the Dead."<sup>8</sup> Francis cut her hair and dressed her in a plain tunic, marking her as being a *penitent* and under the protection of the Church."<sup>9</sup>
- 1215** Clare is named *Abbess* of the monastery at San Damiano.  
 "Clare's idea of structure is horizontal rather than vertical, collective rather than hierarchical . . . the abbess 'stands in the midst of the community rather than above it.' "<sup>10</sup> "[Clare] wanted and expected to live the same type of life and achieve the same goals as the friars."<sup>11</sup>
- "The physical hardships of Clare's ideal life seemed excessive even in the penitential mood of the thirteenth century. Clare and her sisters, believing that women were as tough as men, saw no reason why they could not share all the austerities endured by their brother Franciscans."<sup>12</sup>
- "Life at San Damiano was rooted in the sacramental life of the Church. . . Poverty of spirit, that is, generosity in word, action, and prayer, became hallmarks of the 'life'. . . Clare embodied the teaching of Jesus: 'What you do for the least of these, you do for me' (Matt. 25:40)."<sup>13</sup>
- 1219** Clare and her community received the *Rule of St. Benedict* as the *Rule* they were to follow. For Clare and her sisters at San Damiano "two central points were missing from [this] *Form of Life*: the pursuit of the Gospel poverty inspired by Francis and dependence on the Lesser Brothers. And so a struggle began for Clare that was to continue throughout the remainder of her life."<sup>14</sup>
- 1219 Francis visits Sultan Al-Melik near Damietta in Egypt

- 1223 Official recognition of the *Rule* for the Friars Minor by Pope Honorius III
- 1223 First Christmas Crib at Greccio
- 1224 Francis receives the Stigmata
- 1224** Clare “fell victim to a long illness from which she never fully recovered.”<sup>15</sup>
- 1225 Francis composed the *Canticle of Brother Sun*
- 1226 Francis dies on the evening of October 3.
- 1226** Clare’s mother, Ortolana, joined the Poor Clares at San Damiano
- 1228 Francis is canonized by Pope Gregory IX on July 16.
- 1229** Clare’s sister, Beatrice, joined the women at San Damiano
- 1235** Clare writes the *Second Letter to Agnes of Prague*, in which she advised Agnes to “gaze, consider, contemplate, as you desire to imitate your Spouse.”<sup>16</sup>
- 1240** Clare saves the Sisters and the surrounding area from the Saracens. “Even as Clare is speaking, the Saracen bowmen suddenly turn and leap back over the wall more quickly than they had entered, leaving the courtyard to the morning sunlight and the cooing of the doves. Gradually, the sisters recover from their shock and realize that they have been miraculously preserved from a fate worse than death.”<sup>17</sup>
- 1247** Pope Innocent IV “replaced the *Rule* of St. Benedict with that of Francis as the canonical basis for the life of Clare and her sisters.”<sup>18</sup> “The poverty that Clare and Francis espoused was absolute.”<sup>19</sup>
- 1253** Clare’s *Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague* in which she continues and expands the concepts set forth in the *Second Letter* (1235).
- Gaze upon that mirror [Jesus] each day, and continually study your face in it, that you made adorn yourself within and without with beautiful robes. . . Look at the border of that mirror. . . At the surface of that mirror, consider. . . Then, in the depth of this same mirror, contemplate . . . While “mirror literature” was quite popular among the religious of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, Clare adds significantly to it by developing its Christological and feminine qualities . . . Clare goes beyond suggesting the mirror as an image of Christ; she offers it as a means of growing in a likeness of the Incarnate Word.<sup>20</sup>
- 1252** Clare experiences Christmas Midnight Mass, even though she is physically not present.

**1253**

All the sisters could see that while Clare's own physical strength was ebbing, she seemed to draw renewed vitality from the springs of prayer, a joyous strength which she shared with all of them. Thomas of Celano summarized their feelings thus:

When Clare returned with joy from holy prayer, she brought with her burning words from the fire of the altar of the Lord, which enkindled the hearts of the sisters. They marveled indeed that such sweetness came from her lips while her face shone more radiantly than usual. For "God in his kindness provided for the poor one" and let her soul, which had been filled with his true light in prayer, be reflected out-wardly in her body. Thus in this changing world Clare was joined unchangingly to her noble Spouse and found her constant delight in the things that are above. Thus in the turning wheel of time she stood fast in solid virtue and, though hiding the treasure of glory in a vessel of clay and remaining here below in body, in mind she dwelt on high.<sup>21</sup>

**1253**

In April, Pope Innocent IV visits Clare at San Damiano.

**1253**

First week in August, Clare prays,

Our Lord bless you and keep you.

May he show his face to you and be merciful to you.

May he turn his countenance to you and give you peace . . .

On earth, may he increase [his] grace and virtues among [you] . . .

In heaven, may he exalt and glorify you . . . among all his saints.

I bless you in my life and after my death as much as I can and more than I can with all the blessings with which the Father of mercies has and will have blessed his sons and daughters in heaven and earth . . .

May the Lord be with you always, and where you are, may you be with him always.<sup>22</sup>

**1253**

On August 10, Clare received papal recognition of the *Rule of Clare*. "Hers was the first approved *Rule* written by a woman."<sup>23</sup> "To date, the Poor Ladies are the only order of women to be so encompassed by papal protection."<sup>24</sup>

**1253**

Clare dies on August 11, twenty-seven years after Francis' death.

"Imperceptibly, as the eastern sky begins to brighten behind Monte Subasio, a last sigh escapes Clare's lips. Thus Clare passed from this life to God shining indeed without a shadow, without any stain of sin, entering into the eternal light."<sup>25</sup>

**1255**

Clare is canonized.

And so, this Clare, whom people often see in the *shadow* of Francis, is indeed her own light.

## ENDNOTES

1. Sister Karen Karper, PCPA, *Clare: Her Light and Her Song*, (Chicago: Franciscan Press, 1990), xi.
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3. Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap and Ignatius Brady, OFM (Translation and Introduction), *Francis and Clare. The Complete Works*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 170.
4. Roberta A. McKelvie, OSF, Ph.D., *Clare of Assisi: Her Life and Writings*, (Loretto, PA: Institute for Contemporary Life, St. Francis University, 2008), Lesson One, 3.
5. Damien Dougherty, OFM, SSL, STD, *The Spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi*, (St. Louis: On-line Course for Paul VI Institute, 2003), Syllabus, 3.
6. William Short, OFM, *The Franciscans*, Chapter 1: "The Founders, Francis, and Clare", (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1989), 7.
7. Patricia Ranft, "The Appeal of the Vita Apostolica," *Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe*, (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 65.
- 8 Elizabeth Petroff, "A Medieval Woman's Utopian Vision: The Rule of St. Clare of Assisi," *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 68.
- 9 Short, "The Founders, Francis and Clare," 12.
10. Petroff, "A Medieval Woman's Utopian Vision: The Rule of St. Clare of Assisi," 73.
11. Ranft, "The Appeal of the Vita Apostolica," 65.
12. Petroff, "A Medieval Woman's Utopian Vision: The Rule of St. Clare of Assisi," 65.
13. McKelvie, *Fran 206: Clare of Assisi: Her Life and Writings*, Lesson Three, 12.
14. Armstrong, *The Lady Clare of Assisi. Early Documents*, 18.
15. McKelvie, *Fran 206: Clare of Assisi: Her Life and Writings*, Lesson One, 5.
16. Short, "The Founders, Francis and Clare," 18.
17. Karper, *Clare: Her Light and Her Song*, 302.
18. Short, "The Founders, Francis and Clare," 18.
19. Petroff, "A Medieval Woman's Utopian Vision: The Rule of St. Clare of Assisi," 71.
20. Armstrong, *The Lady Clare of Assisi. Early Documents*, 21.
21. Karper, *Clare: Her Light and Her Song*, 286-287.
22. *Ibid.*, 388-389.
23. Armstrong, *The Lady Clare of Assisi. Early Documents*, 27.
24. Ranft, "The Appeal of the Vita Apostolica," 66.
25. Karper, *Clare: Her Light and Her Song*, 390-391.