

## **THE SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT CLARE OF ASSISI**

### Introduction:

People often ask to know more about the spirituality of Saint Clare of Assisi. This is not unusual, since people of all walks of life have been drawn to follow Saint Clare of Assisi. We would like to try using our blog page to talk about this.

Clare lived the gospel of Jesus Christ in its transcendent dimension and in doing so opened the way for countless women who have followed her. And Clare attracted both women and men who did not join her in the little monastery of St. Damian. There were many who saw Clare as their spiritual leader and accepted her teaching as a guide to live the Gospel of Jesus. Clare lived in God's Presence and taught others how to know God's presence within themselves, and in all creation, and how to make God's love come alive for our world.

Surrounded by a cruel and endless civil war, Clare, a woman of peace, lived peace and made peace between enemies. By proclaiming the treasures of the human spirit and the joy of a life centered in God, Clare opened to people her way to happiness. She revealed the struggle for power and wealth in all its futility. She convinced people of the folly of one day finding themselves approaching their time to leave our beautiful earth and becoming suddenly aware that they had missed the whole point of why they were here.

Clare is a good model for today, too, because we are all on the same journey into God, and we do so in a time of war and terrorism with no peace in sight, as she did. Blood runs in our streets as it did in hers. By sharing the wisdom of Clare's spirituality with our web friends we hope you will find nourishment and inspiration.

### **Part I. GOD IS ALL THERE IS**

Chiara de Favarone de Offreduccio was the daughter of a noble and powerful Lord, in a family of powerful knights who plundered the poor and took over their lands. She did what women did in their situation at home. She kept apart from the men's war-talk and gathered ladies together to pray and help the very people her family harmed by sending food to them, even sharing her own portions. On the outside she had to dress according to her station and wear beautiful silk and satin gowns. But she also wore a coarse vest next to her skin in solidarity with the rough clothing worn by the poorer classes. But all this was not enough.

Clare was only eleven when she first saw Francis. A year later she saw Francis renouncing his father and the family inheritance in front of the whole town. He was revered by the people now as a lover of God who left his comfortable life to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the vernacular so the poor could understand, and care for the lepers no one else would touch. Then one day Clare heard him preach. His words touched her deeply. It was as if there was a light inside her own heart, and she knew it wasn't from herself.

The search for God spurs us on as it did Clare until we come to a point where we want to know what it is that keeps drawing us in a particular direction. When the grace of the Spirit of Jesus touches us, through someone/something, the reality of that experience is something that never leaves us. It seems as if our spirit is born in that moment. Once this happens we cannot remain as we were. Life cannot be the same. We are impelled to incarnate what we have come to believe.

And so it was with Clare. She had it all - but it wasn't satisfying her inner longing. She was like someone always searching, always listening for something that would connect with what she was reaching out for. Saint Francis was God's messenger to her. Then she became this light for others.

Clare, too, had to get in touch with her true self, submerged under the strong egos we have to use to survive in the world. Francis' message had awakened her deeper self and she could never return to the way of life she had known among her upper class family. Woven throughout her letters to Agnes of Prague, one of her earliest followers, are traces of what she had found. Clare likened her new life in the Spirit to "...an incomparable treasure hidden in the field of the world and in human hearts" (let 4), A treasure so precious that it is worth selling everything else one has to obtain for oneself "that which is the source of all things."

Clare and the women who soon joined her had to suffer abuse, hunger and hardships. Making a new start in life is never easy. Throwing away all that this world values has to be a daunting endeavor. The spiritual life is essentially our effort to clear away everything that prevents us from seeing the whole picture of who we really are in God. Society demands that we cultivate a strong ego self to survive. We're trained to be #1. To let all that conditioning go in order to allow our spirit self to grow stronger so that we can live what Jesus taught us, is a real death, but it's worth it. Then we become truly free. Free to know that God is all there is.

### **Creation Reveals God's Love**

How did Clare arrive at this kind of knowledge of the unseen God? As a start it helps to look at our world. All creatures reveal God's love and speak of that love. Clare urged her sisters "to praise God when they saw beautiful trees, flowers, peoples and creatures." (Proc 14.9) Clare was a nature mystic like Francis. She had a favorite spot in the garden where she went to pray. Clare invites us to take time to get in touch with the signs of God's love around me: In the sky, the birds, the shades of green on each tree, each plant, the endless variety and beauty of flowers, in the sunrise, in the simple wonder of water.

Most of all God's image is impressed in our humanity although it may seem harder to find. Since our human nature is basically ego centered, left to ourselves we only do what is selfish, what is comfortable or useful to us. Any kindness we do for others or receive from another has to be of the Spirit of God. Jesus showed us how to live according to the Spirit so we become able to think of the good of others. A loving smile, a

thoughtful gesture to someone in need - that's God in action! Look around at these many revelations of God around you every day.

Clare had to grow in her ability to see God just as we do. Above all God's creatures we can certainly find God's love in people just as Clare did in her sisters and in the people of her little city. God is love, and all goodness is a spark of God in us. Clare wrote: "O God, You are every good. ...You are tenderness. ...You are the gift of Wisdom. ...You are the splendor of eternal glory. ...the Lord of heaven and earth."

Besides sharing her discovery of God with Agnes, Clare expressed her own faith and experience of God's love for her: "O gracious God, may I cling with all my heart to You Whose beauty all the blessed hosts of heaven unceasingly admire, Whose affection excites, Whose contemplation refreshes, Whose kindness fulfills, Whose delight replenishes, Whose remembrance delightfully shines..."

### **The Struggle to Let Go**

Clare's response to the signs of God's love all around her was a greater desire to do God's will. But that entailed a struggle within herself and with her family. Wealth, marriage, noble standing - Clare had to let go of all of these. It is in dying to the domination of my ego that I become fully alive to the Spirit of God within me and more open to the prompting of that Spirit. A person really has to believe in God's love so they can trust God in whatever situation or need they find themselves.

Clare sold her paternal inheritance and gave the money to the poor. By that act she closed the door to any future noble marriage. Why does it have to be so hard to give yourself to the God you love? Clare knew she had to surrender everything so she could be free of whatever she relied upon. Only then could she depend totally on God. It wasn't easy. Clare was human and accustomed to the best life had to offer. One of Clare's suitors testified: "Because she was beautiful a husband was considered for her. Many begged her to accept them as a husband."

### **Acceptance of God's will.**

Clare had to open her heart wide to accept God's love and will for her as it was made known in the day to day moments. She removed her beautiful gown and let Francis cut her long golden hair. Clare would find that choosing God's will would be different from what anything she expected. It required continuing effort to hear what the Lord wanted. It meant living with uncertainty all her life and accepting many changes in her plans.

Clare taught her sisters to pray that their entire being be transformed into the image of the Godhead Itself. This was the reason for the life of poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure she had chosen to live. Clare wanted her sisters after her to be models for the people beyond their walls who could not leave their responsibilities, and

who struggled to live with God in difficult circumstances.. Although all cannot make as radical a break with material things as Clare did, you need to de-centralize your lives from many things that can be barriers to your spiritual freedom. Needing less, sharing what you have, and above all making spaces in your day to listen to what is deep inside yourself - that spark of God in Whose image we are made.

Clare wanted her sisters to live as joyful reminders to the people that a life with God is possible, that it is real, and that it alone can bring them the happiness for which alone they have been created.

“May God always be with you, and may you always be with Him.” (St. Clare of Assisi)