Saint Clare of Assisi: Witness of the Richness of Poverty

Saint Clare of Assisi

In previous newsletters we spoke about Saint Francis of Assisi and the connection between him and our patroness, Saint Gianna, who was born on his Feast Day and whose parents were Third Order Franciscans. In this newsletter we will talk about another Franciscan saint who worked closely with St. Francis himself and who can teach us many beautiful lessons about the value of prayer and sacrifice, and the gift and freedom found in living a life of poverty and detachment.

Saint Clare was born on July 16th, 1194, in Assisi, Italy. She was the oldest daughter of a wealthy count, Favorino Scifi, and his virtuous wife, Orolana. As a teenager St. Clare heard St. Francis of Assisi preach in the streets and confided in him her desire to live a life dedicated to our Lord. She longed to follow the life that he was leading. The two quickly became friends. In the meantime, St. Clare’s mother, wanting her daughter to marry, began arranging a marriage for her, so that St. Clare ran away during the night, taking her sister Agnes with her. The two found St. Francis and began their spiritual formation with him. They soon moved to the church of San Damiano, which Francis himself had rebuilt, and other women began to join them there, where they were known for their radically austere life of prayer and penance. St. Clare soon took on the role as abbess, a position she had for forty years. Working with St. Francis in establishing the Franciscan Order, St. Clare herself sought to imitate St. Francis’ profound life of virtue, so much so, that at times she was called alter Franciscus, another Francis. The spiritual friendship of St. Francis and St. Clare was a gift to both of them, as they encouraged and helped each other. St. Clare regarded St. Francis as her spiritual Father and took care of him at the end of his life when he was sick, until his death in 1226.

After the death of St. Francis, St. Clare encountered difficulties due to the misunderstanding of others regarding the mission the sisters embraced, especially their radical poverty. She worked hard to stay true to the charm that the Holy Spirit had placed on her heart and the heart of St. Francis. St. Clare defended the rules of her order and the gift of their poverty, even to popes who wanted the sisters to be more lenient and lax regarding how to live out this vow. In a letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague, a prioress in one of the communities St. Clare founded, St. Clare writes, “Behold Christ’s poverty even as he was laid in the manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. What wondrous humility, what marvelous poverty! The King of angels, the Lord of Heaven and earth resting in a Manger!”

St. Clare and her sisters did stay true to their original mission: a life of prayer and manual labor within an enclosure. Her order grew and flourished; her own mother eventually even joining her in her life of prayer and poverty. Many miracles are recalled by some of the sisters, for example, of multiplications of loaves and of bottles of oil, as well as healings of spiritual and physical ailments.

At the end of her life when St. Clare was too sick to attend Mass, she was able to see and hear the Mass on the wall of her room, a miraculous gift that inspired Venerable Pope Saint Pius XII to designate her as the patron saint of television in 1958. It is also noteworthy to know that the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) was founded by a Poor Clare nun, Mother Angelica.

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Saint Gianna’s Maternity Home

Serving the Body of Christ as a Pro-Life Home of Formation for Pregnant Women and their Children

Vol. 10 No. 1
Winter - 2011

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St. Clare is depicted in art in different ways, but probably the most significant and recognizable images of the saint are of her holding a monstrance with our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. These images of her recall a profound Eucharistic Miracle that God allowed through the intercession of this saintly nun. On a Friday in September in the year 1240, Saracen soldiers broke into the cloistered convent as they were about to seize the building and most of the city. St. Clare, with a fearless heart, took our Lord who was hidden in the poverty of the Eucharistic Host, prayed before Him and then asked Him to deliver her and her sisters, and all of Assisi, saying to Him, “Behold, my Lord, is it possible You want to deliver into the hands of pagans Your defenseless handmaids, whom I have taught out of love for You? I pray You, Lord, protect these Your handmaids whom I cannot now save by myself.” Suddenly a voice like that of a child resounded in her ears from the tabernacle: “I will always protect you!” St. Clare held the Blessed Sacrament before the soldiers who fled from the brave nun, and they were protected.

After her death the Order was called the Sisters of Saint Clare, or often simply, the Order of Poor Clares. Indeed St. Clare who had given up what most would consider a wonderful life, a life in a castle with all the goods of this world, found even more: she found the greatest gift of all through prayer and friendship with our Lord. In Him all her needs were taken care of, and she is now among the Blessed with Him for all eternity.

Although most of us are not called to live the same kind of life of radical poverty as St. Francis and St. Clare were called to embrace, we can learn a lot from them about trusting in the Providence of God for our daily needs and not in our own ability to provide for ourselves. Even if we have to go without things sometimes, our poverty, if we accept it without losing trust in God, is precious in God’s sight because it shows our love for Him above all things and our faith that Jesus will always protect us, just as He did the Poor Clares.

Saint Clare of Assisi pray for us!

It's a Boy

One of our residents, Colette, just had her first ultrasound and found out that she is expecting a little boy, Thomas Frederick, who is due mid-May.

Please keep Colette and Thomas in your prayers.
In the rite of Baptism one of the first questions that the priest asks the catechumen or the godparents is: "What do you ask of God’s Church?" The response is: “Faith.”

Emily came to us at the very beginning of November. She was referred by Christian Family Life Services where she was seeking adoption counseling. Emily was expecting a baby boy in December. The birth father of this little guy had been killed in a car accident in the spring. Emily already had 3 little girls and was feeling afraid, alone and also judged by others who did not understand her desire to place her baby for adoption – to be able to give him both a father and a mother. And so Emily came to Saint Gianna’s feeling sad and alone. Her story though does not end this way. Above our tabernacle in the Visitation Chapel are these words from Saint Luke’s Gospel: “The child in my womb leaped for joy”. And it is this joy—joy from the Lord—that we have been able, through the grace of God, to give to Emily in her short time with us. If we think about the times in our lives when we have felt joy, it is when we felt loved – by God and by others.

Saint Gianna’s truly is a place of peace and of love, filled with the love of God and supported by the prayers of many people throughout the country and even beyond. It is here in the presence of Our Lord that mothers are able to find His peace and His love, and so begin to feel strength and joy, which enables them to make decisions that are holy and unselfish for the good of their baby and themselves.

Emily’s desire for the Faith and for the Lord was inspiring. We talked to Father Christensen about Baptism so that Emily could receive the graces necessary to complete her beautiful and sacrificial choice of adoption for her child. We chose a date that worked into all of our schedules, not knowing at that time what the Lord had in store. Emily was baptized on the last day of the Church year– it was a most beautiful day, a day with so many graces. Emily’s great joy and excitement was very inspiring and moving to all present. It is not often one gets to witness an adult Baptism, and witnessing Emily receive this sacrament was truly a gift. On her Baptism day, Emily also got to meet Bishop Aquila, and she was blessed by him the next morning following Mass on the First Sunday of Advent. What a way to end and start the Church’s new year! We had hardly gotten back to Warsaw and Emily went into labor, so we quickly headed to Grand Forks where her precious son, Shane Michael, was born just a few hours later. He entered the world a bit early, but after a few days in the NICU, he was able to go home with his beautiful adoptive family, who had their new baby boy baptized on the last Sunday of Advent.

Emily went to court a few days later to finalize the adoption. It helped to be able to go to Mass first and also have Father Christensen’s blessing. Emily did an amazing job in the court room, where the process can seem cold and the words final, especially when a person is terminating parental rights forever. Emily had to answer questions about the birth father, too, which was difficult. She cried through most of it. In the end the judge asked if she had anything to say to the court, and Emily said in a loud, clear voice, “I love my son very much, and I am doing what is best for him.” Even the clerk was crying. Emily was indeed a witness of selfless love and the beautiful gift of adoption.

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In Saint Luke’s Gospel we hear the angel speaking to the shepherds with the words, “I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people.” These words seem to be appropriate again today as we announce the establishment of the Third Order Franciscans of Mary Immaculate. On May 31st, Bishop Samuel Aquila will establish a religious community of friars here in our community of Warsaw. The men in this new order, led by Father Joseph Christensen who is also spiritual director of Saint Gianna’s, will take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

This announcement truly is news of great joy to those of us involved in the work of Saint Gianna’s. Since we began the foundation of Saint Gianna’s Maternity Home, we have prayed the Visitation decade of the rosary daily, asking God to bless us by sending an order to be a part of our work, to help provide stability to our apostolate and also share some of the spiritual gifts of religious life. **We have prayed this prayer for ten years now – and in God’s time and in God’s way, it is being answered more fully and more beautifully than we could have ever hoped.** How good God is!

As stated in the article on Saint Clare, Saint Gianna was born on the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi (October 4th) and her parents were Third Order Franciscans. In addition, the day of the inception of this new order is May 31st – the **Feast of the Visitation**, which clearly shows the answer to our many years of praying this decade of the Rosary for this intention. I will admit that the prayers were for an order, but I thought that order would be sisters. But as we all know, God in His infinite wisdom always gives us more than we can ask for and imagine.

Father Christensen has been a beautiful addition to the work of Saint Gianna’s for four-and-a-half years. He has generously given of himself and his time and has touched the hearts of the residents and their children, as well as the staff and board of directors. Each time Father visits, he brings joy and peace to each of us at Saint Gianna’s. Father celebrates Mass when he is with us, and offers confession and spiritual direction; we also have a holy hour. Besides all this, he cooks and plays games with the residents. **It is very good for the women to have a loving Father figure in their life, and this is what Father has become for them.** Some of our former residents were disappointed in the news, saying they had moved out too early! Having additional friars in the order will be an incredible gift to all of us and an incredible boost to our spiritual life. One of the plans of the new order is to establish a lay group of Franciscans here in Warsaw, so we are very blessed and very excited.
Excerpts from a recent article by Father Christensen in *The New Earth*, December 2010:

Life for the friars will focus on prayer and more prayer, sacrifice and holiness of life, striving to emulate Saint Francis, who re-enacted the scene of Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus our Savior, in the hills of Greccio south of Assisi, in order to re-ekindle man’s heart, which had grown cold, partly from the Renaissance and partly from man turning in on himself and away from the need of God.

The apostolates, or holy works of the friars, will include a semi-contemplative way of prayer and life, with chanting of all of the Liturgy of the Hours, sung Liturgies of the Holy Mass, and a daily Holy Hour of Eucharistic Adoration, including silence, Rosary, Litany and Benediction.

As a Religious Community, we will live a life of Divine Providence, relying totally for our survival on the generous donations of others whom we pray for and make sacrifices for daily to God that He may bless and save them.

Religious life witnesses in a radical way to society, renewing it and constantly calling it to greater sanctity.

I myself really miss living religious life, which will not leave my heart. I am greatly drawn to this evangelical vowed way of life communally as a Franciscan. Saint Francis’ life of simplicity, humility, penance and great love of God and neighbor has been a tremendous inspiration. What better way to find union with God than following in the sandaled footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Our desire is to live poor and to die poor, in order to be rich in God’s grace, like Saint Francis. We wish to preach the Gospel, both by word and example, and to set people’s hearts on fire with Divine Love. And even though as friars we may not have much, we hope that in our poverty, like Saint Francis, we will be filled with great and perfect joy, in order to radiate that love of God - that we ourselves are touched with – to the world and to those we encounter. **We desire this Friary to be a powerhouse of prayer and humbly ask for prayers in this holy endeavor.**

"Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary, use words."

*Saint Francis of Assisi*
Emily has continued to grow and study in the ways of the Catholic faith, asking for Baptism for her oldest and youngest daughters who were not yet baptized. Therefore, on January 15th, Neriah (age 7) and Natana (age 3) received the sacrament of Baptism while Emily’s second daughter, Shayla (age 6), received the supply ceremony of Baptism. Shayla had received an emergency Baptism after being born prematurely. The supply ceremony gave Shayla the prayers and graces from the parts of the Rite that are omitted in emergency baptisms. The ceremony includes anointing with sacred Chrism, the lit candle symbolizing Christ our Light and exorcism prayers that accompany all baptisms. An abundance of graces were poured over all present for the beautiful occasion, most especially Emily and her three daughters.

Emily moved back home after only three months of being with us at Saint Gianna’s, but in that time God showered his grace upon her, her girls and all of us through Emily’s example and thirst for the truth and for the Lord. She continues to work with a priest and also one of our former board members, who support and mentor her in the faith. We hope to keep in touch with Emily and her daughters and ask your prayers for her as they begin the next step in their life, and in following the path that the Lord has for their new life in Him.

A note from Emily: “I would have never imagined what kind of journey the Lord had planned for me and I’m so very thankful He led me to this holy place that I have come to love. God’s blessings are always at the end of a long, hard road of difficult situations that require sacrifice. Being a single mother is very hard at times, but God has put me through many tests only to bring me closer to Him. He is the Great One who has guided me to this wonderful place of love, prayer, support, and most of all, the understanding shown to each of the unique residents here who come from different situations. I appreciate all the prayers and support I have gotten during my stay here and especially thank Father Christensen for bringing me and my three daughters closer to the Catholic Church. A special thanks to Mary Pat, the staff, and all the board members for making it possible for St. Gianna’s Maternity Home to stay open to women who need prayers and guidance in life.”

“Emily

The almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has caused you to be born over again, of water and the Holy Spirit and pardoned you all your sins. May He now anoint you with the Chrism that sanctifies in Christ Jesus our Lord, and bring you to everlasting life.

Matthew Kraemer
Theology III
North American College
Rome, Italy

On December 10th of this past year, I received a short but beautiful note from Matthew Kraemer who is a seminarian studying in Rome for the Diocese of Fargo. Matt is the son of Phil and Laurie from Grand Forks, ND, and he, along with his family, helped tremendously with the work of the renovation of the building we now call Saint Gianna’s Maternity Home. We are so grateful to Matthew and the Kraemer family for their great commitment to life and to our work in Warsaw. His letter is a gift to all of us who are a part of this work, and so it is shared below. Please keep Matthew in your prayers as he prepares to be ordained a transitional deacon on October 6th in Rome, Italy, and ordained to the priesthood in 2012.

Dear Mary Pat,
I thought I’d just drop you a note and tell you that I had the privilege to meet Pierluigi and Gianna Emanuela Molla last week. I know Pierluigi came to visit you last spring. They were here at the North American College to congratulate the newly named Cardinal Raymond Burke. When I mentioned the Saint Gianna Home to Gianna Emanuela her eyes really lit up. I think they are very proud of you and the work you do. Warsaw, North Dakota, may be geographically in the middle of nowhere, but it is at the center, or rather at the forefront of the battle for the dignity of life and motherhood. I just want to let you know you’ve got people thinking about you and praying for you on the other side of the ocean.

Sincerely,
Matt Kraemer

Matthew Kraemer
Theology III
North American College
Rome, Italy
In loving memory of...

+ANN ALLMARAS by Chuck & Kay Morehead
+JOE BECK by the family
+VERA BENSON, JANE WOYEN by Richard & Rae Ann Lynne
+MARY BROSSERT by Rose A. Schell
+ROBERT BURNS by Roger & Sandy Schuster
+PAUL CAMPBELL by Dan & Delores Burianek
+SYLEVO & CHARLOTTE CHAPUT by Steven & Denise
  Bielejeski, Robert & Carla Crockett, Robert & Sonia Heinle,
  David & Dorothy McCullough
+DONALD CHISHOLM, JAY ROBERT EBERTOWSKI by
  Francis & Paula Kilichowski
+SHIRLEY DOHERTY, KEITH CLOUTIER'S BROTHER, JUSTIN
  MIKKLESEN, JOSEPH SCHILL, IDA WOODBURY by
  Alfreda Sauer
+FRANCIS DREWNIAK, TEKLA HOFFART, COOPER OPPEN by
  Renee Laframboise
+DECEASED FAMILY MEMBERS by Wallace & Evelyn Feltman
+JULIE FISCHER by Norm & Joan Rheault
+DR. ARIE FISHBACH by Wayne & Sharon Johnson
+BRYAN GRABANSKI by Shannon O’Connor
+WALLACE CHRISTOPHER by Gary & Sally Gramm
+ISABELLE GRUBE by Joseph & Bethany Johnson
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+JANET HELBING by Doug Helbing
+SHIRLEY HOFFARTH by Don & Dorothy Jordan
+AL HOLWEGNER by Brenda K. Rohrich
+FRANK JAHNER by Fred & Pat Jahnner Family
+ROBERTA JOHNSON by Paul & Pauline Savageau
+GORDON KLABO by Laurence & Jean Charbonneau
+JOE & HELEN KREMER by Kevin & Ronda Throener
+ELEANOR MARSH by Fred & Pat Jahnner
+BRIDGET MCGURRAN (HAYES), BOB MCGURRAN by
  Mike & Rae Ann McGurran
+CHRIST MERCK by Daniel & Mickie Thomas
+CLARENCE & EVA MILLER by Eric & Suzanne Lahlum
+SUSAN MONDRY by Allen Mondry
+AUNT ELLEN NYGARD by Sherry Rekken
+DECEASED FAMILY MEMBERS by Mary Osowski
+BETTY PALMISCONO by Steven & Melissa Kuhlman
+NICHOLAS PICA by Steven & Christine Jensen
+GREG REGAN, RICHARD REGAN, JACQUE SCHWAB by
  Kevin & Brenda Regan
+FRANK RUDNIK by Dan & Lola Rudnick
+JOHN SAUER by the Schereshky Grandchildren
+MADELINE SCHANILEC by Don & Susan Barclay,
  Rod & Joan Schanilec
+SANDRA SCHUMACHER by Gerald Schumacher
+OLUS, HARRY & GENE by Rev. Bob Stone
+REBECCA JANE WALD by Molly Wald & Jacob Rodenbiker
+GEORGE & EMMA VANO by Dale & Theresa Telle
+DORIS WILEBSKI by Tom & Mary Dusek

In honor of...

Son, Shannon by Pat & Betty Lou O’Connor
Lea Waltz by Ken & Vickie Sims
New grandson, Christopher John Maas by Tom & Cindy Speltz
Luke Vetter (First Reconciliation) by Ryan & Kimberly Wilson
Isaac, Lilah, Asher, Micah by Dave & Kari Zavoral
Bruce & Cindy Geier by Audrey Geier
Dan & Helen Wombeke by Ben & Natalie Schrunk
Father Damian Hils by Theodore & Mary Ann Wartman
Daughter, Julia by Andrew & Mona Jordan
Pat & Betty Lou O’Connor by Shannon O’Connor
Father McDermott by Alfreda Sauer
Father John Kleinschmidt - religious education teacher of Leann
  Czapiewski
Robynne Sands & Todd Burianek – religious education teachers of
  Jamie Czapiewski
Mary Schuster – religious education teacher of Sara Czapiewski
Beverly Schons by Chris & Julie Kaspari
Father Gary Benz, Michael Pfaff, Graclain Elizabeth by Toni Hager

In celebration of...

Birth of nephew, Brayden Kaspari by Chris & Julie Kaspari
Babe Belzer’s birthday by Terry & Mary Ann McKenna
Susan Campbell’s birthday by Susan Ketchum Ttee
Ruth Jelinek’s birthday by Aileen Jelinek
Lori Sims’ birthday by John & Jan Klocke
Our 55th wedding anniversary by Ralph & Carol Tucker
Gene & Theresa Marcotte’s 54th wedding anniversary by
  Roger & Bernice Kram
James & Virginia Gerszewski’s 50th wedding anniversary by
  Kurt & Jennifer Kelley
Todd & Sue Klocke’s wedding anniversary by John & Jan Klocke
Maura Rose Brady’s baptism by Jack & Doreen Kennedy
Feast of Holy Innocents by Jacob Rodenbiker & Molly Wald
Birth of granddaughter, Daphne Mae Kram by Roger & Bernice Kram

In thanksgiving of...

Simak babies by Jim & Claudia Bosch
For my family by Alfreda Sauer
A safe delivery of our son and baby brother, Oliver Francis Alphonse
  Benedict Fewell by Jason, Teresa & Mary Catherine Fewell
Our grandparents’ help during Oliver’s birth & for mommy’s recovery by
  Mary Catherine & Oliver Fewell
For our families of moms & dads, brothers & sisters by Doug & Debbie
  Henke, Wilma Kappel, Doug & Renee Kappel, Dan & Deann Magrum,
  Gene & Denise Jordan, Bruce & Carol Henke, Chuck Henke, Brad &
  Marie Henke, Mike & Lynn Feininger

Drayers & Special Intentions

By Barbara Johnson
For a convert joining the church & another to return to the church by
  Chuck & Kay Morehead
By Jerry & Joanne Sandy
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"Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and know, I am with you always, even until the end of time." - Matthew 28:19-20

Love Life!