

## LOCKDOWN DAY 138 – 11 AUGUST 2020

Molweni dear family and friends of False Bay Diocese,

Scripture: Luke 12: 32-34

Hymn: *O God, you search me, and you know me*

Appropriately, in Women's Month and the Month of Compassion, we remember St Clare, the first woman follower of St Francis of Assisi and first Franciscan woman saint. Clare was born in 1194 in the noble family of Favarone at Assisi in central Italy. Her name, *Clara* in Latin and *Chiara* in Italian, means clear, shining, bright. One day, just before Clare's birth, her mother was praying before the crucifix in the monastery of Assisi for her child about to be born when she heard a voice telling her, "*Have no fear, woman; you will bear your child safely, and she will be a torch to give a clear light to the world.*"

At the age of 15 Clare was deeply impressed by the preaching of St Francis and wanted to follow him. Having no provision for any woman member in his Order, Francis kept her in suspense for three years. Then, on Palm Sunday, 18 March 1212, she went to Francis and begged him to admit her into his Order. Seeing her earnestness and determination, he agreed. As suggested by Francis, that night she, with her cousin Filippa, escaped from home by the door reserved for taking bodies of dead members out, and went to the church of St Mary of the Angels at Portiuncula which Francis had rebuilt. There, in front of the altar, she renounced her costly clothes and beautiful hair, and received from him the Franciscan monastic habit, and into his hands made the vow of absolute poverty and dedicated herself to following the poor and humble Christ. The thirty-year old Francis who had no money, no means and no canonical authority accepted spiritual and material responsibility for her. Like Clare, we are to look with **compassion** on the poor and humble who call to us for help. Even with limited means, who can we take spiritual and material responsibility for, especially during Covid 19?

Clare was temporarily accommodated at the neighbouring Benedictine convent. Clare's father and relatives protested angrily but she did not change her mind. Soon she was followed by her younger sister Agnes who too is a saint. Clare had won complete victory over her own egoism and the craving for earthly possessions. Soon she moved to another Benedictine convent but was unable to carry on under the Benedictine Rule.

Francis then made over to her the church and convent of San Damiano. There she was joined by her mother Blessed Ortolana, her younger sister Beatrice and her aunt Bianca, and several other women. Clare became the Superior and in 1215 Francis appointed her abbess. For thirty-nine years Clare lived in the enclosure of that Convent. Having chosen a life of radical poverty and obtained from the Pope the privilege of not possessing anything, she, together with Francis, founded the second Franciscan Order, the Clares. Clare wrote their Rule of Life, the first set of monastic guidelines to have been written by a woman. Following her death, the order she founded was renamed in her honor as the Order of St Clare, commonly referred to today as the Poor Clares.

All her life she never crossed the boundaries of Assisi where she lived in rigorous austerity, spending her time in prayer, penance and contemplation. God worked many miracles in answer to her prayers. Those of us who are not called to the monastic life, are asked today how we are carving out a contemplative space in the midst of each day's demands? We pray for the gifts of illumination, grace, and peace.

On two occasions this poor and bedridden nun put the advancing Saracen soldiers of Frederick II to flight and saved the city of Assisi. In 1240 she ordered a priest to show the Eucharistic ciborium from the window of the convent dormitory, against the marauders. A second time when they came in 1241 to loot the city; she asked the Sisters to pray. On both occasions, the convent and the city were spared. Let us never under-estimate the power of prayer.

In 1228, when Pope Gregory IX offered to absolve her from the vow of absolute poverty, she withstood the Pope saying, "*Holy Father, absolve me from my sins but not from the obligation of following the Lord.*" Her exceptional love of poverty was the fruit of her contemplation of the poverty, humility, and charity of Christ.

Clare was **fully convinced** that she had chosen the right path and **fully convinced** that she was going to eternal blessedness. From her deathbed she gave her blessing to her fellow sisters, *"I Clare, servant of Christ, a sapling of our holy father Francis, though unworthy sister and mother of yours and of other Poor Sisters ... bless you in my life and after my death as much as and more than I can."* Then she exhorted her own soul saying, *"Go in peace, since you have followed the good way; go confidently, since your Creator has sanctified you and guarded you unceasingly, loved you with all the tenderness of a mother for her child. O God, be you blessed for having created me."*

During the last illness of Francis, Clare sheltered him in a hut made of branches in the garden of San Damiano. It was there, having his last days, that he composed the *Canticle of Brother Sun*.

For nearly twenty-nine years Clare endured many illnesses and much physical and mental suffering. In 1253 she was in her last agony that lasted seventeen days. Then on 11 August 1253, at the age of 59, while listening to the reading of the Passion of the Lord according to St John, she left all her pains and entered eternal bliss. Her mortal remains, preserved in the church of *Santa Chiara* in Assisi, are still intact and visible to the public.

Clare fully realised the ideal conceived by St Francis. She lived the evangelical ideal without diluting it even a bit. Her example invites us to contemplate Christ, to love him dearly, to imitate him a bit more closely and to live the Gospel values a little more seriously in our daily lives.

Young people will do well to imitate the **earnestness and determination** of Clare. At the age of 15 she had made up her mind what she wanted to do with her life and no amount of hardship was going to distract her or detract from her goal. Some of you may know the legendary radio personality, Bob Mabena, who died of a heart attack yesterday at the age of 51. He was known to give others a hand up in life and said to them *"Go, take your wings and fly."* Young people of the Diocese, we believe in you, *"Go, take your wings and fly."*

Parents and Godparents, would you today pray before a cross or crucifix for your children and **listen** to what God is saying to you in your inner being. What is the message for you and your children? St Clare is watching over us in the communion of the saints, with all the company of heaven. Your children and grandchildren are your saplings as you are a sapling of the true vine and the branches.

On her death bed, Clare ends her prayer *"O God, be you blessed for having created me."* How grateful are we for the gift of life on earth and eternal life?

Today, please **reach out** to any member of St Clare of Assisi church, as also anyone who you may know bearing the name Clare, Clara, Chiara.

**We pray** that as Clare was inspired by God to accept her calling and vocation and became a shining light in the Church, that we too may be granted the same spirit of discipline and love to be on 'Fire for the Messiah.' Lord, please let women and men conscientize, organise and mobilise for gender healing, gender justice, gender freedom, gender equality. In this month of Compassion, we pray for those who are struggling alone in their efforts to survive. Help us to be in tune with your Spirit indwelling in us and use that power to save others from disaster, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

I am, Because We Are, Because God is ... Opening hearts to heal God's world. *What do we actually need?*