

## Convent 2016

Most of what I know of St. Clare I have learned through Clare's daughters, the sisters at Oxford. I think that is a great compliment that after eight centuries, the Poor Clare's still reflect what Clare wrote in her Second Letter to Agnes: "Always be conscious of your beginnings." This is as true for us today as when it was written.

Clare's beginning was to choose to leave her "comfortable life", and follow the mendicant life of St. Francis. Yet, when she approached Francis, he did not see her becoming a mendicant, as were the friars. Could he not envision a new way for women to minister like he and the friars, or did he see a greater need for prayer? Personally, I think it was some of both. Clare brought Francis' vision to another level of spirituality, and commitment to a radical concept of the Gospel way of life.

Francis always said that he did not seek brothers, but was given them by God. He probably thought similarly about beginnings of Clare and her sisters, as she and they discerned their calling from God. Clare and Francis both trusted completely in God. In their rules, both embraced a singular way of life: Observing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Did Francis see in Clare the contemplative life he sought for himself in his early discernment of God's will? Francis and Clare both knew the importance of prayer, both for the Church and the world, to praise God, and petition for God's guidance and grace in our world. This need hasn't changed.

In our world today, some see the contemplative life as “doing nothing,” but we know better. Through Clare’s letters, we see that she positively engaged the world. Her monastic life was not simple passivity. When her monastery was attacked, Clare responded in an unexpected way — not hiding away, but opening the gates and confronting the enemy, with her faith in the power of Jesus in The Blessed Sacrament.

Clare teaches us to pray, to be engaged with the world, to find Gospel, and make faith responses to today’s issues and problems.

She challenges us to:

1. “always be conscious of your beginnings”,
2. to live always, “keenly observing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”