

«I WILL ALWAYS DEFEND YOU» SAINT CLARE OF ASSISI AND THE EUCHARIST

Noel Muscat OFM

The iconographic representations of Saint Clare of Assisi (1193-1253) often show her carrying the monstrance with the Eucharist. This act of the *pianicella*, or little plant, of Saint Francis, refers to the episode of September 1240, when the Saracen mercenaries of Emperor Frederick II attacked the unprotected small monastery of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano. Clare is often portrayed as lifting up the monstrance while standing at the dormitory door and striking the troops below with the brilliance of the Eucharist. This representation has popularized the image of Saint Clare as one of the many saints who showed particular devotion towards the Eucharist. We all know that the iconographic details of this event were introduced very late, since the monstrance for Eucharistic exposition as we know it today was introduced after the Council of Trent in the 16th century. The episode, however, is a proof of the intense love which Clare had towards the sacrament of the Eucharist. After having seen the Eucharistic spirituality of Saint Francis of Assisi in his life and writings, we shall follow the same methodology in the case of Saint Clare, with the aim of outlining the particular notes of the style of her devotion towards the Eucharist. Our analysis will involve a study of the writings of Saint Clare and the medieval documents of her life,¹ which provide the historical background for her unique expression of the Gospel way of life which she embraced following the example of Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano.

The Eucharist in the Writings of Saint Clare

The Letters written to Saint Agnes of Prague are a masterpiece of Christological mysticism. Clare expresses the relationship between the consecrated virgins at San Damiano and Prague with the divine spouse Jesus Christ in terms which prove her deep sense of mystical union with the mystery of the Incarnation. There are no direct references to the Eucharist as such, but some expressions are certainly full of a eucharistic content, when they are seen against the typical Franciscan background of fusion between the mysteries of Incarnation-Redemption and the Eucharist as the ongoing representation of the same mysteries in the life of the Church.

The First Letter to Agnes of Prague was written shortly after 1234, when this noble princess of the Bohemian royal family entered the monastery which she herself had

¹ We shall quote the writings and medieval lives of St. Clare from: *Clare of Assisi. Early Documents*, Revised and Expanded by Regis J. Armstrong OFM Cap, Franciscan Institute Publications, Saint Bonaventure University, Saint Bonaventure, NY 1993 [abbreviated as CAED]. *Clarae Assisiensis. Opuscula*, Introduzione di E. PAOLI, in *Fontes Franciscani*, a cura di E. Menestò e S. Brufani, Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi 1995, 2221-2507; OMAECHEVARRIA I, *Escritos de Santa Clara y Documentos contemporáneos. Introducciones, traducción y notas*, Madrid 1970 (1982²).

founded and modelled upon that of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano. In this letter Clare speaks about the experience of mystical espousals with Christ.

“You took a spouse of a more noble lineage, Who will keep Your virginity ever unspotted and unsullied, the Lord Jesus Christ. When You have loved [Him], You are chaste; when you have touched [Him], You become more pure; when you have accepted [Him], You are a virgin ... If so great and good a Lord, then, on coming into the Virgin’s womb, chose to appear despised, needy, and poor in this world (cf. 2Cor 8:9), so that people who were in utter poverty, want and absolute need of heavenly nourishment might become rich in Him by possessing the kingdom of heaven, be very joyful and glad.”²

The insistence upon the physical union with Christ as expressed in the mystical experience of virginity, as well as upon the poverty of the Son of God in the mystery of the Incarnation, participated to all those who are poor, expresses very well the theme of spiritual nourishment which the poor disciples gain from their union with Christ in the Eucharist. The Eucharist for Clare is a “heavenly nourishment”, which enriches the poverty of Christ’s followers by making them rich in the kingdom of heaven.

The Second Letter to Agnes of Prague refers to Christ’s humility in the passion and death on the cross, and to the need that a virgin like Agnes should experience a mystical union with Christ’s sufferings through her self-offering.

“But because *one thing is necessary* (Lk 10:42), I bear witness to that one thing and encourage you, for love of Him to Whom you have offered yourself as a holy and living sacrifice (Rm 12:1), that you always be mindful of your resolution ... But as a poor virgin, embrace the poor Christ. Look upon Him Who became contemptible for you, and follow Him, making yourself contemptible in this world for Him ... O most noble Queen, gaze upon [Him], consider [Him], contemplate [Him], as you desire to imitate [Him]. If you suffer with Him, *you will reign with Him* (Cfr. Rm 8:17). [If you] weep [with Him], you shall rejoice with Him; [If you] die with Him on the cross of tribulation, you shall possess heavenly mansions in the splendor of the saints and, in the *Book of Life*, your *name* (Cfr. Rev 3:5) shall be called glorious among men.”³

These expressions convey the depth of an experience of adoration and prayer. Clare uses latin verbs which are linked with mystical union: *intuere* (to gaze upon), *considerare* (to consider), *contemplare* (to contemplate). She invites Agnes to offer her whole self as a living sacrifice to Christ. In this way, the Eucharist becomes the sublime moment in which Agnes receives Jesus Christ in order to offer herself to him, in union with the sacrificial aspect of his passion and death on the Cross, which is re-enacted in a sacramental way during Mass.

The Third Letter to Agnes of Prague is rich in eucharistic content. It contains some of the most sublime expressions of mystical union with Christ in the Writings of Saint Clare, particularly regarding the theology of the indwelling of Christ in those who follow in His footsteps along the road of poverty and humility of the Incarnation.

“Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the brilliance of glory! Place your heart *in the figure of the divine substance* (Cfr. Heb 1:3). And *transform* your entire being

² EpAgn I,7-8; 19-21 [CAED, 35; 37]. The original texts in latin can be found in: *Claire d’Assise: Écrits*. Edited and translated by Marie-France Becker, Jean-François Godet, Thaddée Matura, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1985. The underlined expressions in the English quotations are our own.

³ EpAgn II,10-11; 18-22 [CAED 40; 42].

into the image (Cf. 2Cor 3:18) of the Godhead Itself through contemplation. So that you too may feel what His friends feel as they taste the hidden sweetness (Cfr. Ps 30:20) that God Himself has reserved from the beginning for those who love Him. And, after all who ensnare their blind lovers in a deceitful and turbulent world have been completely sent away, you may totally love Him Who gave Himself totally for your love, Whose beauty the sun and the moon admire, Whose rewards and their preciousness and greatness are without end; I am speaking of Him Who is the Son of the Most High, Whom the Virgin brought to birth and remained a virgin after His birth. May you cling to His most sweet Mother who gave birth to a Son whom the heavens could not contain. And yet she carried Him in the little enclosure of her holy womb and held Him on her virginal lap ... Indeed, it is now clear that the soul of a faithful person, the most worthy of all creatures because of the grace of God, is greater than heaven itself, since the heavens and the rest of creation cannot contain their Creator and only the faithful soul is His dwelling place and throne ... [He Who is] the Truth has said: *Whoever loves me will be loved by My Father, and I too shall love him, and We shall come to him and make Our dwelling place with him* (Jn 14:21,23). As the glorious Virgin of virgins carried [Him] materially, so you, too, *by following in her footprints* (Cf. 1Pt 2:21), especially [those] of poverty and humility, can, without any doubt, always carry Him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body.⁴

Among the various aspects of eucharistic devotion which underlie this text, we mention, first and foremost, Clare's understanding of mystical union with Christ as a "taste of His sweetness." Clare is thus faithful to the Franciscan theological tradition, present in Bonaventure, for example, which sees the gift of wisdom as a tasting of divine sweetness (*sapientia* in latin, from *sapere*, to savour). This idea is certainly linked to the reality of the Eucharist as spiritual food and drink for all those who want to taste the hidden sweetness of Jesus Christ in mystical union with Him.

A second aspect to be underlined in this text is the link between the Eucharist and the Incarnation. Just as the Virgin Mary carried Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, in the "enclosure" of her womb, the Poor Ladies carry Jesus Christ in the material enclosure in which they live, and particularly in the spiritual "enclosure" of their chaste and virginal bodies. The Blessed Virgin and the Poor Ladies become living tabernacles which carry in themselves the true body and blood of the Word made flesh.

This material dwelling place prepared for Jesus Christ is a sign of the deeper level of indwelling of the Son of God in the hearts and minds of all those who love him and are filled with His Holy Spirit. For Clare the soul becomes the privileged place for the indwelling of the divine Word, which is received by the Poor Ladies in their daily contact with the Word of the Gospel and with the Eucharist.

This mystical approach to union with Christ is even more developed in the following text taken from the Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague, which is a splendid expression of mystical contemplation. In this letter Clare calls Agnes "Bride of the Lamb", and describes the Poor Ladies as "most holy virgins before the throne of God and the Lamb [who] *follow the Lamb wherever He may go* (Rev 14:4)."⁵ The link between Christ, the Lamb who stands before God's throne, and the mystery of Christ, who offers himself as the Lamb who was slain in the Eucharist, is self-evident.

"You have been marvelously espoused the *the spotless Lamb, Who takes away the sins of the world* (1Pt 1:19; Jn 1:29). Happy, indeed, is she to whom it is given to share in this sacred banquet so that she might cling with all her heart to Him Whose beauty all the blessed hosts of

⁴ EpAgn III, 12-19; 21-25 [CAED, 45-46].

⁵ EpAgn IV, 2-3 [CAED 49].

heaven unceasingly admire, Whose affection excites, Whose contemplation refreshes, Whose kindness fulfills, Whose delight replenishes, Whose remembrance delightfully shines, by Whose fragrance the dead are revived, Whose glorious vision will bless all the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem: which, *since it is the splendor of eternal glory* (Cfr. Heb 1:3), is *the brilliance of eternal light and the mirror without blemish* (Cfr. Wis 7:26).

Gaze upon that mirror each day, O Queen and Spouse of Jesus Christ, and continually study your face within it, that you may adorn yourself within and without with beautiful robes, covered, as is becoming the daughter and most chaste bride of the Most High King, with the flowers and garments of all the virtues. Indeed, blessed poverty, holy humility, and inexpressible charity are reflected in that mirror, as, with the grace of God, you can contemplate them throughout the entire mirror.

Look at the border of this mirror, that is, the poverty of Him Who was placed in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. O marvelous humility! O astonishing poverty! The King of angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, is laid in a manger! Then, at the surface of the mirror, consider the holy humility, the blessed poverty, the untold labors and burdens that He endured for the redemption of the whole human race. Then, in the depth of this same mirror, contemplate the ineffable charity that led Him to suffer on the wood of the Cross and to die there the most shameful death ...

From this moment, then, O Queen of our heavenly King, let yourself be inflamed more strongly with the fervor of charity. As you further contemplate His ineffable delights, eternal riches and honors, and sigh for them in the great desire and love of your heart, you may cry out: *Draw me after you, we will run in the fragrance of your perfumes* (Cant. 1:3). O heavenly Spouse! I will run and not tire, until *You bring me into the wine-cellar* (Cant 2:4), until *Your left hand is under my head* and *Your right hand will embrace me* (Cant 2:6) happily, [and] *You will kiss me with the happiest kiss of Your mouth* (Cant 1:1)."⁶

The expressions of this text are among the best-known mystical words of Saint Clare. It is interesting to note how they are introduced. Clare says that happy is the virgin (Agnes) who is invited to take part in the sacred banquet, so that she may enter into mystical union with Jesus Christ, in the mystery of His Incarnation, His public life, and His Redemption on the Cross. The participation in the eucharistic sacrifice becomes the foundation of discipleship. Union with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is the basis for mystical union with Him in the various salient moments of His life in the Gospel. Thus the Eucharist for Clare is an experience of spiritual nourishment along the road of discipleship on the footsteps of the Incarnate Son of God. The end result is mystical union, the highest degree of perfection in the life of prayer. With the words of the Canticle of Canticles, Clare describes as best she can the ineffable joy of experiencing the loving touch of the heavenly Spouse.

This brief look at the Letters which Clare wrote to Agnes of Prague throws light upon her eucharistic devotion within the context of her Gospel experience in poverty and humility, in the enclosure of San Damiano, in her self-offering and consecration in virginity, in her mystical union with the Incarnate Word. Clare is nourished by the Eucharist in order to become so deeply involved in this loving encounter with Christ.

⁶ EpAgn IV, 8-23; 27-32 [CAED, 50-52].

We now turn to consider the Testament of Saint Clare, written shortly before her death in 1253. The Testament is a document of a highly autobiographical content, and is therefore precious in order to uncover the experience of the Gospel life which Clare committed herself to live, on the example of Francis of Assisi.

The Testament starts off with a note of thanksgiving for the gift of the Gospel calling of Clare and the Poor Ladies. It is a eucharistic experience of thanksgiving and praise, which expresses the deepest meaning of the term *eucharistia* according to Christian tradition.

“Among the other gifts that we have received and do daily receive from our benefactor, *the Father of mercies* (2Cor 1:3), and for which we must express the deepest thanks to the glorious Father of Christ, there is our vocation, for which, all the more by way of its being more perfect and greater, do we owe the greatest thanks to Him.”⁷

Clare begs the Poor Ladies to remain ever faithful to their calling in order to live the commitment of evangelical poverty in the service of the Church. The expressions she uses indicate a state of adoration and veneration which remind us of the Eucharist, more so because Clare speaks about the humility and poverty of Jesus Christ in the mystery of the Incarnation.

“On bended knees and bowing low with both [body and soul], I commend all my sisters, both those present and those to come, the holy Mother the Roman Church, the supreme Pontiff, and, especially, the Lord Cardinal who has been appointed for the Order of Friars Minor and for us, that out of love of the God Who was placed poor in the crib, lived poor in the world, and remained naked on the cross, [our Protector] may always see to it that his little flock (Cf. Lk 12:32), which the Lord Father has begotten in His holy Church by the word and example of our blessed father Francis by following the poverty and humility of His beloved Son and His glorious Virgin Mother, observe the holy poverty that we have promised to God and our most blessed father Saint Francis.”⁸

We shall now consider the Rule of Saint Clare, confirmed by Pope Innocent IV on 9th August, just two days before Clare’s death at San Damiano. Saint Clare speaks about the sacramental life of the Poor Ladies in chapter 3 of her Rule. Regarding communion, this is what she says.

“Let them receive Communion seven times [a year], that is, on Christmas, Thursday of Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, the feast of Saint Francis, and the Feast of All Saints. The Chaplain may celebrate within [the enclosure] in order to give Communion to the sisters who are in good health or to those who are ill.”⁹

In this practice Clare is echoing the teachings of the Church during the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. We have seen how Saint Francis modelled the sacramental and eucharistic life of the brothers on the Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents (for example, *Sane cum olim*). In the same way, Clare is presenting a very open-minded explanation of the decree of the Council, which stated that all Christians should confess

⁷ TestCl 2-3 [CAED, 56].

⁸ TestCl 44-47 [CAED, 59].

⁹ RegCl III, 14-15 [CAED, 68].

their sins and receive Holy Communion at least once a year. In the case of the Poor Ladies, Clare gives permission to receive Communion more frequently, particularly in the great festivities of the liturgical calendar. In order to understand the implications of this invitation in the Rule, one has to view it against the common ecclesiastical practice of the 13th century, where actual participation in Communion was very rare for ordinary Christians.¹⁰

The Rule also prescribes that the chaplain of the monastery may enter the enclosure with a companion for sacramental purposes:

“Let the chaplain not be permitted to enter the monastery without a companion. When they enter, let them remain in an open place, in such a way that they can always see each other and be seen by others. They may enter the monastery for the confession of the sick who cannot go to the parlor, for their Communion, for the Last Anointing and the Prayers of the Dying.”¹¹

The Writings of Saint Clare, as we have seen, contain very few explicit references to the Eucharist. However, a more profound analysis of their contents betrays a eucharistic spirituality which goes to the heart of Clare’s mystical experience. Some of the characteristic notes of this spirituality are the sense of profound thanksgiving and praise which are evident in Clare’s experience of prayer and in her Letters and Testament; her great reverence towards the poverty and humility of Christ in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption; her participation in the sacrificial aspect of Christ’s life through her self-offering; her mystical union with Christ expressed in the form of a spiritual nourishment and a grace of indwelling; her love of intimacy with the Lord presented with the same language which she uses to describe the enclosure; her open-mindedness in the sacramental life of the Poor Ladies, who are invited to receive Holy Communion more frequently than other Christians.

Our next step is to see various episodes of the life of Saint Clare which show her particular devotion to the Eucharist, and to all that which is bound in some way with the eucharistic sacrifice. We shall refer to the principal sources of the life of Saint Clare, as well as to the sources for the life of Saint Francis which speak explicitly about sister Clare and the Poor Ladies of San Damiano.

The Eucharist in the Life of Saint Clare

Among the various episodes in the life of Saint Clare, which show her particular devotion to the Eucharist, the most famous is the one of the invasion of the Saracens

¹⁰ The reference is to Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council: “All the faithful of both sexes, after they have reached the age of discerning, shall faithfully confess all their sins to their own priest at least once a year and perform the penance imposed to the best of their abilities, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the Eucharist.” Saint Francis also speaks about the sacramental practice of the brothers in chapter 20 of the Earlier Rule: “Contrite and having confessed in this way, let them receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ with great humility and respect” (*Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*, Edited by R.J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, W.J. Short, Vol. I: The Saint, New City Press, New York – London – Manila 1999, 78 [abbreviated as FAED I,78]. For Clare’s particular interpretation of the sacramental life of the Poor Ladies in her Rule, cf. Jean-François Godé, “A New Look at Clare’s Gospel Plan of Life,” *Greyfriars Review*, Vol. 5, Supplement (1991) 49-52.

¹¹ RegCI XII,8-10 [CAED, 79].

mercenaries of Frederick II in September 1240, when Clare and the Poor Ladies were miraculously freed from danger with the power of their prayer before the Eucharist. The account is to be found in various witnesses of the Process of Canonization. The following text is the most detailed among the accounts, and comes from the witness of Sister Francesca of Messer Capitaneo di Col de Mezzo.

“One time, when the Saracens entered the doister of the said monastery, the Lady made them bring her to the entrance of the refectory and bring a small box where there was the Blessed Sacrament of the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Throwing herself prostrate on the ground in prayer, she begged with tears, saying among other things: ‘Lord, look upon these servants of yours, because I cannot protect them.’ Then the witness heard a voice of wonderful sweetness: ‘I will always defend you!’ The Lady then prayed for the city, saying: ‘Lord, please defend the city as well!’ The same voice resounded and said: ‘The city will endure many dangers, but it will be defended.’ Then the Lady turned to the sisters and told them: ‘Do not be afraid, because I am a hostage for you so that you will not suffer any harm now nor any other time as long as you wish to obey God’s commandments.’ Then the Saracens left in such a way that they did not do any harm or damage.”¹²

This account has some interesting details. First of all, Clare asked to be carried to the entrance of the refectory on the ground floor of San Damiano. She was very ill at the time. In fact Clare lay ill in the dormitory of San Damiano from 1224 until her death in 1253. The door of the dormitory which overlooks the little piazza in front of the church of San Damiano was, therefore, not the place from where Clare would have gazed down upon the invading Saracens, holding a monstrance in her hand, as she is usually depicted in iconographical representations of the event. In fact, the witness says that she asked that those present bring to her a “small box”. This could probably have been the ivory box in which the Eucharist would be conserved. As we have already noted, the images depicting Clare with a monstrance are of a later date, and do not correspond to the actual practice in the medieval Church regarding the conservation and exposition of the Eucharist. In that dramatic moment, when the Saracen mercenaries were on the verge of going into the small monastery, whose low walls would certainly have been ineffective in protecting the Poor Ladies, Clare and the sisters huddled together prostrated themselves in prayer. It was at that moment that they heard the mysterious voice saying “I will always defend you” (*Ego semper vos protegam*). These words become truly the motto of the Order of Poor Ladies of San Damiano, and show the intimate link between the poverty and humility of Clare and the sisters, and the mystery of the body and blood of the poor and humble Christ in the Eucharist. The same episode is narrated with more vivid detail in the Legend of Saint Clare.

“I would like to recount the great things of her prayers with as much fidelity to the truth as they merit in veneration. The Spoleto Valley more often *drank of the chalice of wrath* (Rev 14:10) because of that scourge the Church had to endure in various parts of the world under Frederick the Emperor. In it there was a battle array of soldiers and Saracen archers swarming like bees at the imperial command to depopulate its villages and to spoil its cities. Once when the fury of the enemy passed upon Assisi, a city dear to the Lord, and the army was already near its gates, the Saracens, the worst of people, who thirsted for the blood of the Christians and attempted

¹² ProcCan IX,2 [CAED, 165]. The other texts regarding the same episode of the deliverance of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano through the power of the Eucharist are found in the same ProcCan III,18; IV,14; VI,10; VII,6; X,9; XII,8; XIII,9; XIV,3.

imprudently every outrage, rushed upon San Damiano, [entered] the confines of the place and even the enclosure of the virgins. The hearts of the ladies melted with fear; their voices trembled with it, and they brought their tears to their mother. Se, with an undaunted heart, ordered that she be brought, sick as she was, to the door and placed there before the enemy, while the silver pyx enclosed in ivory in which the Body of the Holy of Holies was most devotedly preserved, preceded her.

When she had thoroughly prostrated herself to the Lord in prayer, she said to her Christ with tears [in her eyes]: 'Look, my Lord, do you wish to deliver into the hands of pagans your defenceless servants whom You have nourished with Your own love? Lord, I beg You, defend these Your servants whom I am not able to defend at this time.' Suddenly a voice from the mercy-seat of new grace, as if of a little child, resounded in her ears: 'I will always defend you.' 'My Lord,' she said, 'please protect this city which for Your love sustains us.' And Christ said to her, 'It will suffer afflictions, but will be defended by my protection.'

Then the virgin, raising her tear-filled face, comforted the weeping [sisters], saying: 'My dear children, I guarantee, you will not suffer any harm. Just have confidence in Christ.' Without delay, the subdued boldness of those dogs began immediately to be alarmed. They were driven away by the power of the one who was praying, departing in haste over those walls which they had scaled."¹³

Besides this well-known episode, the main Sources for the Life of Saint Clare, namely the Acts of the Process of Canonization and the Legend of Saint Clare, contain some other indications regarding the devotion and love of Clare towards the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Process of Canonization speaks of this devotion in two instances, in

¹³ LegCl 21-22 [CAED, 276-277]. The same text is also to be found in a poetic form in the Versified Legend of Saint Clare, verses 703-709 [CAED, 208-209]. We quote parts of this text:

"The wild men climb into the enclosure of the church of Saint Damian
and immediately that abominable fury terrifies
Christ's servants and, with much confusion, makes them lose heart, ...
While they claim tears and cries as their arms,
so frightened, so dispirited, so trembling,
the Sisters turn their cries and tears to their mother.
The mother has pity on them, and although physically weak,
she directs them with an intrepid heart to bring her to the entrance.
She faces the enemy; she orders the Body of the Holy of Holies
enclosed in the golden pyx, to lead the way.
The virgin seeks the help of God alone, she prostrates herself
completely before Him, prays, cries and says:
'Must we not think that it pleases you, O Christ, to hand into
the hands of pagans these virgins whom I have nourished in love?
Protect them Lord. I beg you, let your grace save the young women
whom I am unable to save at this moment.'
Suddenly a voice as of a child speaks in her ears:
'I will always save you!' She quickly adds:
'Gentle Lord, I beg you, protect this land
which, for your love, has nourished us with great care.'
'This land,' it says, 'will suffer many more trials;
but my power will protect it.' Then the virgin lifts
her tear-filled face and speaks to the weeping Sisters.
She comforts them and promises them safety.
Suddenly that pack of dogs turns around
and flees in disarray, while the prayer of Clare forces it.
While she is praying in this way, the enclosed virgin shuts out the enemy."

the testimonies of Sister Benvenuta of Perugia and Sister Filippa of Leonardo di Ghislerio.

“[Sister Benvenuta of Perugia] said that the Lady Clare frequently confessed and, with great devotion and fear, frequently received the holy sacrament of the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, trembling all over as she did so.

[Sister Filippa] said the blessed mother had especially the gift of many tears, having great compassion for the sisters and the afflicted. She especially poured out many tears when she received the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁴

Saint Francis was always teaching the brothers and all clerics and custodians to show respect and reverence to the Body and Blood of Christ, and to all that which touches the sacrament of the Eucharist. In many of his “eucharistic writings” he recommended reverence towards the Eucharist, towards priests, and particular attention to the cleanliness of churches, altar linens, corporals, and sacred vessels. Clare becomes the female counterpart of Francis in showing this same degree of reverence, love and care, more so because she has her own typical female delicate style in doing it. The various Sources for her life speak about her care in weaving altar linens and corporals and sending them to poor churches in the countryside around Assisi. This act becomes a particular way of sharing actively in the evangelizing mission of the Friars Minor, on the part of Clare and the Poor Ladies.

“[Sister Pacifica de Gueluccio] said that when [Clare] was so sick that she could not get up from bed, she had herself raised to sit up and be supported with some cushions behind her back. She spun [thread] so from her work she made corporals and other linens for almost all the churches of the plains and hills around Assisi. Asked how she knew these things, she replied that she saw her spinning. When the cloth was made and the sisters had sewn it, it was hand-delivered by the brothers to those churches and given to the priests who came there.”¹⁵

“[Sister Cecilia] said Lady Clare, never wanting to be idle at any time, even during the time of her last illness, made herself rise, sit up in bed and spin. The soft doth made by her spinning she used to make many corporals and the cases to hold them, covered with silk or precious cloth. She sent them to the Bishop of Assisi, who blessed them, and, then, she sent them to the churches of the Assisi diocese. She believed they had been given to every church.”¹⁶

The testimony of Sister Francesca of Messer Capitaneo di Col de Mezzo mentions fifty corporals which Clare had spun and sent to the poor churches around Assisi. This witness also mentions a particular moment of ecstasy which Clare experienced once after receiving holy Communion.

“Concerning the corporals made by her spinning, the witness also said she herself had counted fifty sets distributed to the churches, as the other sister-witnesses have said before. She also said once, when the sisters believed the blessed mother was at the moment of death and the priest had given her the holy Communion of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, she, the witness, saw a very great splendor about the head of mother, Saint Clare. It seemed to her the Lord’s Body was a very small and beautiful young boy. After the holy Mother had received with great devotion and tears, as was her custom, she said these words: ‘God has given me such a gift today, that heaven and

¹⁴ ProcCan II,11 [CAED, 144]; III,7 [CAED, 148].

¹⁵ ProcCan I,11 [CAED, 139]; Cf. II,12 [CAED, 144].

¹⁶ ProcCan VI,14 [CAED, 160].

earth could not equal it.’ Asked if any other sisters had seen this, she replied she did not know, but knew well about herself. Asked when this was, she replied about the feast of Saint Martin three years ago. Asked at what hour, she replied in the morning after Mass.”¹⁷

These expressions are further proof of the link between the mystery of the Incarnation and the mystical union with Christ which Clare experienced in the Eucharist. The Legend of Saint Clare and the Versified Legend also provide us with further details regarding the particular female expression of Clare’s devotion towards the Eucharist.

“How great was Saint Clare’s affection and devotion to the Sacrament of the Altar is shown by their effect. In that serious illness that confined her to bed, she would sit upright and would be propped up and, sitting up [in this way], she made the most delicate cloth. From these she made over fifty sets of corporals enclosed them in silk of purple covers, and sent them to various churches throughout the plains and mountains of Assisi. When receiving the Body of the Lord, however, she at first shed burning tears and, approaching with trembling, she feared [Him Who was] hidden in the Sacrament no less than [Him Who was] ruling heaven and earth.”¹⁸

One of the most touching episodes in the Sources for the Life of Saint Clare is the account of how, during the Christmas night of 1252, when she was very ill at San Damiano and could not participate in the vigil celebration of the Nativity, Clare was miraculously transported in spirit to the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi, and took part in the solemn Matins celebration. The Eucharist is not mentioned in this account, but if one considers that Christmas was one of the days during which the Poor Ladies were invited to receive Communion at Mass, one can easily see the link between the mystery of the Incarnation and Clare’s devotion to the Body and Blood of the Lord.

“[Sister Filippa said] that Lady Clare also narrated how on the most recent night of the Lord’s Nativity because of her serious illness she could not get up from her bed to go to the chapel. All the sisters went as usual to Matins and left her alone. The Lady then said with a sigh: ‘Lord God, look, I have been left here alone with you.’ She immediately began to hear the organ, responsories and the entire Office of the brothers in the Church of Saint Francis, as if she were present there.”¹⁹

¹⁷ ProcCan IX, 10 [CAED, 167-168].

¹⁸ LegCl 28 [CAED, 282]. The text of the Versified Legend of Saint Clare is taken from verses 806-821 [CAED, 211]:

“The mind reveals itself by the fruit of its work, and its outward deed manifests its intention. Thus this virgin’s ardor, her devotion to Christ’s table upon which an officiating minister presents the holy offerings of an eternal pledge, the work of her hands declare, her fingers’ activity made public. When she was lying on her bed extremely sick, she raises herself up, supported by pillows, and as she sits, she spins cloth, cuts it into small palls and encloses them in silk or purple material, a noble deed for adorning the altar and the Sacrament. Once prepared, she distributes them throughout Christ’s churches with love. Finally, while receiving the Lord’s Body and Blood, she sheds burning tears, and not only fears and honors Christ hiding under the form of bread, but venerates Him ruling heaven and earth.”

¹⁹ ProcCan III, 30 [CAED, 152]. Cf. IV, 16 [CAED, 156]; VII, 9 [CAED, 162-163]. An interesting note in Sister Amata’s testimony (ProcCan IV, 16) concerns the fact that this witness “added she had heard from Lady Clare that, on the night of the Lord’s Nativity, she also saw the manger of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The same episode in the Legend of Saint Clare shows how the Lord had pity upon Clare in her illness, and that she was worthy of seeing the crib of the infant Jesus. In her Rule and Testament Clare, in fact, refers to “the most holy and beloved Child Who was wrapped in such poor little swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.”²⁰ This is the account of that Christmas vigil celebration of 1252, given by the anonymous author of the Legend of Saint Clare:

“Just as the memory of her Christ was present to her in her sickness, so too Christ visited her in her sufferings. At that hour of the Nativity when the world rejoices with the angels at the newly born child, all the ladies went to the oratory for Matins and left their mother alone weighed down by her illness. When she began to think about the Infant Jesus and was greatly sorrowing that she could not participate in His praises, she sighed and said: ‘Lord God, look at how I have been left alone in this place for You!’ Behold that wonderful concert that was taking place in the church of Saint Francis suddenly began to resound in her ears. She heard the jubilant psalmody of the brothers, listened to the harmonies of their songs, and even perceived the very sounds of the instruments. The nearness of the place was in no way such that a human being could have heard this unless either that solemnity had been divinely amplified for her or her hearing had been strengthened beyond human means. But what totally surpasses this event: she was worthy to see the very crib of the Lord! In the morning when her daughters came to her, blessed Clare said: ‘Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, Who did not leave me after you did. In fact, I heard, by the grace of Christ, all those solemnities that were celebrated this night in the church of Saint Francis.’”²¹

We have seen how Francis expressed his mystical union with the paschal mystery of Christ in the re-enactment of the Last Supper account with the brothers just before he

This detail shows striking resemblance to the Greccio account of the Nativity in the Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano and the Major Life of Saint Francis by Saint Bonaventure, where the manger is used as an altar for the celebration of Mass, and the hay becomes a symbol of the healing power of the Eucharist.

²⁰ RegCl II, 24 [CAED 67]; Cfr. TestCl 45 [CAED, 59].

²¹ LegCl 29 [CAED 282-283]. The parallel text in the Versified Legend of Saint Clare, verses 838-858 [CAED 212]:

“On this night the Sisters rise for Matins
that they might rejoice with Christ, leaving their sick mother alone.
While she recalls the Boy’s birth and is unusually sad,
so weak that she cannot be at His praises,
she complains to Christ, and with her heart’s humble voice
the bride addresses her Spouse, she sighs and says:
‘As you see, Lord, I am here alone for you.’
Not a moment’s delay. That marvelous harmony of Blessed
Francis resounded in the virgin’s ears; she hears the brothers
chanting. That place was not nearby because,
unless the organ had been brought by a heavenly
command, or her body’s hearing had been increased
by the gift of the highest power, it could never
have touched the virgin’s ears in a human way.
No less do I reflect upon this astonishing event; in fact,
I believe it to be even kinder, because the lonely woman deserves
to see Christ’s manger for her sweet consolation.
Afterwards, on the following morning,
she presents this to her companions: ‘Blessed be God!’
He did not leave me alone. His grace enabled my ear to hear
all the solemnities which the choir sang in the church of Saint Francis.’”

died. We have a similar episode in the case of Clare, which touches her innermost experience of mystical union with Jesus on the Cross, but which is also linked to the Eucharist in the account given to us by the Legend of Saint Clare.

“Once, the day of the most sacred Supper arrived, in which *the Lord loved His own until the end* (Jn 13:1). Near evening, as the agony of the Lord was approaching, Clare, sad and afflicted, shut herself up in the privacy of her cell. While in her own prayer she was accompanying the praying Saviour and when saddened even to death she experienced the effect of His sadness, she was filled at once with the memory of His capture and of the whole mockery and she sank down on her bed. All that night and the following day, she was so absorbed that she remained out of her senses. She seemed to be joined to Christ and to be otherwise totally insensible, always focusing the light of her eyes on one thing. A certain sister close to her often went to see if she might want something and always found her the same way. But with Friday night coming on, the devoted daughter lit a candle and, with a sign not a word, reminded her mother of the command of Saint Francis. For the saint had commanded her that no day should pass without some food. With that [sister] standing by, Clare, as if returning from another world, offered this word: ‘What need is there for a candle? Isn’t it daytime?’ ‘Mother,’ she replied, ‘the night has gone and a day has passed, and another night has returned!’ To which Clare said: ‘May that vision be blessed, most dear daughter! Because after having desired it for so long, it has been given to me. But, be careful not to tell anyone about that vision while I am still in the flesh.’”²²

Considering that one of the days during which the Poor Ladies were allowed to receive holy Communion was that of Holy Thursday, it is fairly easy to see the link between the eucharistic sacrifice on the actual day of its institution and Clare’s mystical rapture during the following night and all through Friday of Passion week.

As in the case of Francis, also in the life of Saint Clare we can note the link between the Eucharist and the commitment of evangelical poverty of the Poor Ladies, particularly in the daily dependence upon divine providence. In the life of Saint Clare we have some episodes centred upon God’s mercy and kindness towards the Poor Ladies of San Damiano, in providing their daily bread through the merits of Clare and her power to pray and bless food. The first episode is that of the multiplication of bread, which is obviously reminiscent of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ miracle of the multiplication of loaves.

“[Sister Cecilia] said one day, when the sisters had only a half loaf of bread, the other half had been sent to the brothers who were staying outside, the Lady directed the witness to make fifty slices out of the half loaf of bread, and to bring them to the sisters who had gone to the table. The witness then said to Lady Clare: ‘The Lord’s miracle of the five loaves and two fishes would be needed to make fifty slices out of that!’ But the Lady told her: ‘Go and do as I have told you.’ And so the Lord multiplied that bread in such a way that she made fifty large and good slices and Saint Clare had directed her.”²³

The second episode regards the blessing which Pope Innocent IV asks Clare to impart upon the loaves of bread, in thanksgiving for God’s providence before the meal, when he visited San Damiano some time before Clare’s death in 1253. The loaves were miraculously marked by the sign of the Cross, when Clare blessed them in obedience to

²² LegCl 31 [CAED, 284-285]. Cf. ProcCan III,25 [CAED, 151]; LegVerCl, vv. 888-925 [CAED, 213-214].

²³ ProcCan VI,16 [CAED, 161]. Cf. LegCl 15 [CAED, 270]; LegVerCl, vv. 455-469 [CAED, 201].

the Pope's command. This episode is not found in any of the Sources of the Life of Saint Clare, but it is found in the Actus-Fioretti. Here we quote the account in the Fioretti:

“One time among others the Holy Father [Innocent IV] went to [Clare] at the monastery to hear her speak of heavenly and divine things; and as they were speaking together about various things, Saint Clare had the tables prepared and bread placed on them, so that the Holy Father might bless it. So, when their spiritual conversation was finished, Saint Clare knelt down with great reverence, and asked him to be kind enough to bless the bread placed on the table. The Holy Father replied: ‘My most faithful Sister Clare, I want you to bless this bread, and make over it the sign of the most holy Cross, to which you have given your whole self.’ And Saint Clare said: ‘Most Holy Father, forgive me, because I would be worthy of the greatest rebuke if in front of the Vicar of Christ I, who am a vile little woman, should presume to give such a blessing.’ And the pope replied: ‘So that this may not be attributed to presumption but to the merit of obedience, I command you under holy obedience to make the sign of the most holy Cross over this bread and bless it in the name of God.’ Then Saint Clare, as a true daughter of obedience, very devoutly blessed the bread with the sign of the most holy Cross of Christ. An amazing thing happened! Immediately the sign of the Cross appeared, beautifully cut into each loaf. And then some of these loaves were eaten and others were kept because of the miracle. And the Holy Father, having seen the miracle, took some of that bread and, giving thanks to God, departed, leaving Saint Clare with his blessing.”²⁴

On her deathbed Clare was visited by Pope Innocent IV, who approved her Rule just two days before she died. In the account of her *transitus*, modelled upon that of Saint Francis, Clare is surrounded by the Poor Ladies of San Damiano, and gives thanks to God for the visit of the Holy Father, and particularly for the gift of the Eucharist which she had just received as a *viaticum*. The episode marks the link between Clare's devotion to the Eucharist and her love for the Church and for Christ's vicar who approves the Gospel way of life of the Poor Ladies, modelled upon that of Francis and the Friars Minor.

“Lord Pope Innocent came to visit her since she was seriously ill. She then told the sisters: ‘My daughters, praise God, because heaven and earth are not enough for such a benefit I have received from God. Today I have received Him in the Blessed Sacrament and I have also seen His Vicar.’”²⁵

Clare's sense of obedience to the Pope, however, was also dependent upon her faithfulness to the Gospel calling she had received, together with the Poor Ladies of San Damiano. Faithful to Scripture which says that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God, Clare was courageous enough to send the brothers who begged alms for the Sisters, in reply for the Pope Gregory IX's prohibition for the friars to come and preach the Word of God in San Damiano, in the Bull *Quo elongati* of 1230. This episode shows a similarity between Clare and Francis in their respect for the Word of God as spiritual nourishment and, therefore, as part of the grace which Christ bestows upon his disciples in the Eucharist.

“Once when Lord Pope Gregory forbade any brother to go to the monasteries of the Ladies without permission, the pious mother, sorrowing that her sisters would more rarely have the food of sacred teaching, sighed: ‘Let him now take away from us all the brothers since he has taken away those who provide us with the food that is vital.’ At once she sent back to the minister all

²⁴ Fioretti 33 [FAED III,624]; Cf. Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Eius 42 [FAED III, 516-517].

²⁵ ProcCan III,25 [FAED 151]; Cf. LegCl 42 [CAED, 293]; LegVerCl, vv. 1275-1283 [CAED, 224].

the brothers, not wanting to have the questors who acquired corporal bread when they could not have the questors for spiritual bread. When Pope Gregory heard this, he immediately mitigated that prohibition into the hands of the general minister.²⁶

The material place where the Poor Ladies received holy Communion in the church of San Damiano is mentioned in the account of the funeral of Saint Francis. Thomas of Celano recounts how the procession stopped at San Damiano so that the Poor Ladies would see their founder and father for the last time, and how the dead body of the stigmatized Francis was placed in the Communion window of the small chapel which the *Poverello* himself had repaired, and where he prophesied that an Order of Virgins would be born.

“With the sons carrying their father and the flock following the shepherd who was hastening to the Shepherd of them all, he arrived at the place where he first planted the religion and the Order of the consecrated virgins and Poor Ladies. They laid him out in the church of San Damiano, home to those daughters he gained for the Lord. The small window was opened, the one used by these servants of Christ at the appointed time to receive the sacrament of the Lord’s body. The coffin was also opened: in it lay hidden the treasure of supercelestial powers; in it he who had carried many was now carried by a few.”²⁷

The scene of the dead body of Saint Francis placed in the small window through which the Poor Ladies received holy Communion is a moving tribute to the great love and devotion which the Seraphic Father and his *pianicella*, Clare of Assisi, both had towards the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Clare of Assisi stands out among medieval female saints for her outstanding charism. Although she considers herself as a *plantula*, or little plant, of Francis of Assisi, many scholars of Franciscan history today agree that Clare developed the call to the life of the Gospel in a unique way, although always in conformity to Francis’ own ideals of the evangelical life.²⁸ Clare is certainly a mystic in the full sense of the term, and merits

²⁶ LegCl 37 [CAED, 289-290].

²⁷ 1C 116 [FAED I, 285].

²⁸ Studies and articles regarding Saint Clare in English include the following: R.J. ARMSTRONG, “Clare of Assisi. The Mirror Mystic,” *The Cord* 35 (July-August 1985) 195-202; “Clare of Assisi, the Poor Ladies and Their Ecclesiastical Mission in the ‘First Life’ of Thomas of Celano,” *Greyfriars Review* [GR] Vol. 5, No. 3 (1991) 389-424; M. BARTOLI, “Historical Analysis and Psychoanalytic Interpretations of a Vision of Clare of Assisi,” GR, Vol. 6, No.2 (1992) 189-209; M. CARNEY, *The First Franciscan Woman. Clare of Assisi and Her Form of Life*, Franciscan Press, Quincy, USA 1993; A. FORTINI, “New Information about Clare of Assisi,” GR, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1993) 27-69; J.F. GODET, “A New Look at Clare’s Gospel Plan of Life,” GR, Vol. 3, Supplement; E. GRAU, “Saint Clare’s Privilege of Poverty,” GR, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1992), 327-336; L. IRIARTE, “Clare of Assisi: Her Place in Female Hagiography,” GR, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1989), 173-206; C.A. LAINATI, “The Endosure of St. Clare and the First Poor Clares in Canonical Legislation and Practice,” *The Cord* 28 (1978) 4-15; 47-60; P. VAN LEEUWEN, “Clare’s Rule,” GR, Vol. I (Sep. 1987) 65-77; JOAN MUELLER, “Agnes of Prague and the Juridical Implications of the Privilege of Poverty,” *Franciscan Studies* 58 (2000) 261-287; INGRID J. PETERSON, *Clare of Assisi. A Bibliographical Study*, Franciscan Press, Quincy, USA 1993; H. ROGGEN, *The Spirit of Saint Clare*,

a prominent place among the famous female mystics of the Middle Ages.²⁹ She is the spiritual mother of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano, and the influence of her evangelical calling was felt far and wide, as far as Prague, in Bohemia, where her faithful disciple and admirer, Princess Agnes, of the royal house of Bohemia, chose to enter into the cloistered life of a monastery modelled upon that of San Damiano.

Recent studies have shown that Clare's Gospel intuition was not always shared by the ecclesiastical authorities, who were sympathetic, but sceptical, regarding Clare's radical choice of life. It was as if Clare had to undertake an uphill climb to insist upon the validity of her evangelical way of life even in the case of consecrated virgins. In her writings and in the Sources for her life, we find ample witness of her success.

Among the characteristic notes of her spirituality, the devotion towards the Eucharist occupies a particular place in the life of Clare and the Poor Ladies. When one refers to eucharistic devotion, however, one has to be careful not to imagine a kind of devotion with which we are at home nowadays. We have seen how iconographical representations of Clare holding the monstrance in the episode of the Saracen invasion of San Damiano are out of place simply for historical reasons, and because they do not agree with what one finds in the Sources of her life. As in the case of Saint Francis, it is important to study Clare's devotion to the Eucharist within the context of Church reform in liturgical practice after the Fourth Lateran Council, as well as to situate it within the context of the Christological spirituality of Francis and his disciples.

We have seen how explicit references to the Eucharist in the writings of Saint Clare are fairly rare, and rather regard the practice of receiving holy Communion according to the Church's teachings. However, a closer look at the Letters which Clare wrote to Agnes of Prague, uncovers a deep mystical spirituality centred upon the figure of Jesus Christ in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption. Within this framework it is not difficult to discern many eucharistic traits in the spirituality of Saint Clare, particularly within the female context of mystical espousals with Christ, and within the theology of the indwelling of Christ in his disciples.

Clare's eucharistic devotion was the result of her absolute trust in the faithfulness of Christ's love towards her and the sisters. In the famous episode of the Saracen invasion of San Damiano, which has immortalized Clarian iconographical representations with the Eucharist, we find the secret of her intense mystical union with Christ present in the Eucharist: *Ego semper vos protegam*, "I will always defend you." It is the voice of the little child proceeding from the small ivory pyx containing the Eucharist, which confirms the absolute trust of Clare and the Poor Ladies in the loving presence of Christ in their midst. From the daily encounter with the Eucharist Clare drew all the necessary strength to remain steadfast and faithful to her evangelical calling, and in a particular way, to Lady Poverty. The various episodes of miracles concerning the multiplication of bread, or the blessing of bread with the sign of the cross, are signs of the intimate link between trust in God's providence and His loving care for the poor and humble. The

Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1971; MARIA PIA ALBERZONI, "Clare of Assisi and Women's Franciscanism," GR, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2003) 5-38.

²⁹ *Chiara di Assisi*. Atti del XX Convegno Internazionale (Assisi, 15-17 ottobre 1992), Spoleto 1993 (Atti del Convegno della Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani e del Centro Interuniversitario di Studi Francescani), Vol. 3.

Eucharist becomes the celebration of joy and thanksgiving at God's loving condescension and kindness towards the Poor Ladies.

Clare's delicate care of all that which touches the Body and Blood of the Lord is a typical element of her female eucharistic spirituality. She offers her time during sickness to weave corporals and altar linens in order to send them with the brothers to the poor churches in the countryside around Assisi. This touching attitude of Clare is a proof of her sense of active participation in the evangelical ministry of the Friars Minor, as well as a sign of faithfulness to the Church's directives regarding liturgical cult after the Fourth Lateran Council. We have referred to the same sense of obedience and collaboration on the part of Saint Francis. Indeed, this care for all that which pertains to the eucharistic sacrifice is a constant theme in the Sources for the Lives of Francis and Clare, and probably marks one of the typical aspects of their spirituality, linked with the human dimension of Christ's life in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption. The same can be stated regarding Clare's respect towards the ministers of the Word of God, who provided the spiritual nourishment for her and the Poor Ladies. Francis also wanted to show respect towards the written Words of Christ and towards theologians and preachers of the Word. For Clare, there could be no sense in sending out the friars to beg the daily bread for the Poor Ladies, if she could not ask also for the daily nourishment of the Word of God from the same brothers.

One of the most touching scenes of the life of Saint Clare is that which regards her sense of gratitude to God for the gift of her life and for her blessed soul. The Sources for her life give great importance to this event.

"The most holy virgin, turning towards herself, silently addressed her soul. 'Go without anxiety,' she said, 'for you have a good escort for your journey. Go,' she said, 'for He Who created you has made you holy. And, always protecting you as a mother her child, He has loved you with a tender love. May you be blessed, O Lord,' she said, 'You Who have created my soul.' When one of the sisters asked her to whom she was speaking, she replied, 'I am speaking to my blessed soul.' That glorious escort was not standing far off. So turning to another daughter she said: 'Do you not see, O child, the King of glory Whom I see?'"³⁰

The moment of the *transitus* of Saint Clare becomes a celebration of joy and thanksgiving for the gift of life, for the gift of her blessed soul. It is not hard to see in this episode another "eucharistic" moment in the life of Clare. Her prayer of thanksgiving and praise is an act of homage to the King of glory who came to take her with Him, and crowns her life-long commitment of mystical union with Christ. It is in this episode that we can understand the deep sense of devotion which Clare showed towards the Eucharist, seen as the sacrament of God's love for his poor ones, for those who follow the footsteps of Christ along the road of Gospel perfection. The voice of the small child from the ivory pyx in San Damiano is the proof of the illuminating power of Clare's Gospel charism, which finds its centre of attraction in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and among his poor ones: "I will always defend you."

³⁰ LegCl 46 [CAED, 296]; Cfr. ProcCan XI,3 [CAED, 172].