

The love between Clare and Francis of Assisi

Francis (d. 1226) and Clare (d. 1253), both of Assisi, are two of the most beloved figures of Christianity, of whom we can really be proud. The two were united in three great passions: for the poor and crucified Christ, for the poor, especially the lepers, and for each other. The love for Christ and the poor did not diminish at all the deep love that united them, showing that between people who dedicate themselves to God and serving others, there can be true love and relationships of great tenderness. Between Francis and Clare, there is something mysterious that unites Eros and Agape, fascination and transfiguration. The stories that remain from the time speak of the frequent meetings between them. However, "they controlled such meetings so that the divine mutual attraction might go unnoticed in the eyes of people, avoiding public rumors."

Logically, in a tiny town like Assisi everyone knew everything about everybody. So also the love between Clare and Francis. An ancient legend refers to it with very tender candor: "On one occasion, Francis had heard inappropriate allusions. He went to Clare and said: 'Did you hear, sister, what people are saying about us?' Clare didn't answer. She felt her heart would stop and that if he said another word, she would cry. 'It's time we parted,' said Francis. 'You go ahead and before nightfall, you'll have come to the convent. I will go alone and I will accompany you from afar, as the Lord leads me.' Clare fell to her knees in the middle of the road, shortly thereafter she recovered, got up and walked away without looking back. The path went through a forest. Suddenly, she felt powerless, without comfort and without hope, without a parting word before separating from Francis. She waited a bit. 'Father,' she said, 'when will we meet again?' 'When summer comes, when the roses bloom again,' replied Francis. And then, at that moment, something wonderful happened. It seemed as if summer had arrived and thousands and thousands of flowers burst forth in the snow covered fields. After the initial shock, Clare hurried to pick a bouquet of roses and put it in Francis's hands." And the legend ends by saying: "From that time on, Francis and Clare were never separated again."



We are in the presence of the symbolic language of legends. They are the ones that keep the meaning of the primordial facts of the heart and love. "Francis and Clare were never separated again", ie, they were able to join their mutual love with the love of Christ and of the poor so that it was one great love. In effect, they never left each other's heart. A witness at the canonization of Clare says with *grazie* that to her, Francis "seemed so clearly and luminously like gold that she also saw herself all clear and bright as if in a mirror." Is it possible to better express the fusion of love between two people of exceptional greatness of soul?

In their searching and doubt each consulted the other and sought a way through prayer. A biographical account of the time says: "Once, Francis, tired, came to a source of crystalline waters and leaned to look for a long while at that clear water. Then he came to himself and said cheerfully to his close friend, Brother Leo: "Brother Leo, lamb of God, what do you think I saw in the clear waters of the fountain?" "The moon that's reflected in there," Brother Leo answered. "No, brother, I didn't see the moon, but the face of our sister Clare, full of holy joy, so that all my sorrows disappeared."

Now in 2011 we celebrate the 800 years since the founding of the Second Order, the Poor Clares, by Clare. The historical account could not be more full of loving density. Francis made a pact with Clare that, beautifully dressed, on the night of Palm Sunday she would flee from home and come to meet him in the little chapel he had built, the Porziuncola. In fact, she ran away from home and came to the church where Francis and his companions were, with their torches lit. Joyful, they received her with applause and with great affection. Francis cut off her beautiful blond hair. It was the symbol of their entry into the new religious path. Now they were two in one and the same path and up to today "they have never been separated again."

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