

THE TESTAMENT OF SAINT CLARE

In the name of the Lord! Amen.

Among the other gifts that we have received and do daily receive from our benefactor, *the Father of mercies* (2 Corinthians 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. Therefore the Apostle (writes): “Know your vocation” (1 Corinthians 1:26). The Son of God has been made for us *the Way* (cf. John 14:6), which our blessed Father Francis, His true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example.



Therefore, beloved sisters, we must consider the immense gifts that God has bestowed on us, especially those that He has seen fit to work in us through His beloved servant, our blessed Father Francis, not only after our conversion but also while we were still [living among] the vanities of the world. In fact, almost immediately after his conversion, when he had neither brothers nor companions, while he was building the Church of San Damiano, where he was totally visited by divine consolation and impelled to completely abandon the world, through the great joy and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the holy man made a prophecy about us that the Lord later fulfilled.

For at that time, climbing the wall of that church, he shouted in French to some poor people who were standing nearby: “Come and help me in the work [of building] the monastery of San Damiano, because ladies will again dwell here who will glorify *our heavenly Father* (cf. Matthew 5:16) throughout His holy, universal Church by their celebrated and holy manner of life.”

We can consider in this, therefore, the abundant kindness of God to us. Because of His mercy and love, He saw fit to speak these words through His saint about our *vocation and choice* (cf. 2 Peter 1:10) through His saint. And our most Blessed Father prophesied not only for us, but also for those who would come to this [same] holy vocation to which the Lord has called us.

With what eagerness and fervor of mind and body, therefore, must we keep the commandments of our God and Father, so that, with the help of the Lord, we may return to Him an increase of His *talent* (cf. Matthew 25:15-23)! For the Lord Himself has placed us not only as a form for others in being an example and mirror, but even for our sisters whom the Lord has called to our way of life as well, that they in turn might

be a mirror and example to those living in the world. Since the Lord has called us to such great things that those who are to be a mirror and example to others may be reflected in us, we are greatly bound to bless and praise God and be all the more strengthened to do good in the Lord. Therefore, if we live according to the form mentioned above, we shall *leave* others a noble *example* (cf. 2 Maccabees 6:28, 31) and gain, with very little effort, *the prize* of eternal happiness (cf. Philippians 3:14).

After the most high heavenly Father saw fit in His mercy and grace to enlighten my heart, that I should do penance according to the example and teaching of our most blessed Father Francis, a short while after his conversion, I, together with a few sisters whom the Lord had given me after my conversion, willingly promised him obedience, as the Lord gave us the light of His grace through his wonderful life and teaching. When the Blessed Francis saw, however, that, although we were physically weak and frail, we did not shirk deprivation, poverty, hard work, trial, or the shame or contempt of the world—rather, we considered them as great delights, as he had frequently examined us according to the example of the saints and his brothers—he greatly rejoiced in the Lord. And moved by compassion for us, he bound himself, both through himself and through his Order, to always have the same loving care and special solicitude for us as for his own brothers.

And thus, by the will of God and our most blessed Father Francis, we went to dwell in the Church of San Damiano, where, in a little while, the Lord, through His mercy and grace, made our number increase so that He would fulfill what He had foretold through His saint. In fact, we had stayed in another place (before this), but only for a short while.

Afterwards he wrote a form of life for us, especially that we always persevere in holy poverty. While he was living he was not content to encourage us with many words and examples to the love of holy poverty and its observance, but he gave us many writings that, after his death, we would in no way turn away from it, as the Son of God never wished to abandon this holy poverty while He lived in the world. And our most blessed Father Francis, having imitated His footprints, never departed either in example or in teaching from this holy poverty that he had chosen for himself and his brothers.

Therefore, I, Clare, a handmaid of Christ and of the Poor Sisters of the Monastery of San Damiano—although unworthy—and the little plant of the holy father, consider together with my sisters so lofty a profession and the command of such a father and also the frailty of some others that we feared in ourselves after the passing of our holy Father Francis, who was our pillar [of strength] and, after God, our one consolation and support. Time and again we willingly bound ourselves to our Lady, most holy

Poverty, that after my death, the sisters, those present and those to come, would never turn away from her.

And as I have always been most zealous and solicitous to observe and to have the others observe the holy poverty that we have promised to the Lord and our holy Father Francis, so, too, the others who will succeed me in office should be always bound to observe holy poverty with the help of God and have it observed by the other sisters. Moreover, for greater security, I took care to have our profession of the most holy poverty that we promised our father strengthened with privileges by the Lord Pope Innocent, during whose pontificate we had our beginning, and by his other successors, that we would never nor in any way turn away from her.

For this reason, 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. Luke 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. May he always encourage and support them in these things.

And as the Lord gave us our most blessed Father Francis as a founder, planter, and helper in the service of Christ and in those things we have promised to God and to our blessed father, who while he was living was always solicitous in word and in deed to cherish and take care of us, his plant, so I commend and leave my sisters, both those present and those to come, to the successor of our blessed Father Francis and to the entire Order, that they may always help us to progress in serving God more perfectly and, above all, to observe more perfectly most holy poverty.

If the sisters spoken of ever leave and go elsewhere, let them be bound, after my death, wherever they may be, to observe that same form of poverty that we have promised God and our most blessed Father Francis.

Nevertheless, let both [the sister] who is in office, as well as the other sisters, exercise such care and farsightedness that they do not acquire or receive more land about the place than extreme necessity requires for a vegetable garden. But if, for the integrity and privacy of the monastery, it becomes necessary to have more land beyond the limits of the garden, no more should be acquired than extreme necessity demands. This

land should not be cultivated or planted but remain always untouched and undeveloped.

In the Lord Jesus Christ, I admonish and exhort all my sisters, both those present and those to come, to strive always to imitate the way of holy simplicity, humility and poverty and [to preserve] the integrity of our holy way of living, as we were taught from the beginning of our conversion by Christ and our blessed Father Francis. May *the Father of mercies* (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3) always spread the fragrance of a good name from them (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:15), both among those who are far away as well as those who are near, not by any merits of ours but by the sole mercy and grace of His goodness. And loving one another with the charity of Christ, may the love you have in your hearts be shown outwardly in your deeds so that, compelled by such an example, the sisters may always grow in love of God and in charity for one another.

I also beg that [sister] who will be in an office of the sisters to strive to exceed the others more by her virtues and holy life than by her office, so that, stimulated by her example, they obey her not so much because of her office as because of love. Let her also be discerning and attentive to her sisters as a good mother is to her daughters, and let her take care especially to provide for them according to the needs of each one out of the alms that the Lord shall give. Let her also be so kind and available that they may safely reveal their needs and confidently have recourse to her at any hour, as they see fit both for themselves and their sisters.

Let the sisters who are subjects, however, keep in mind that they have given up their own wills for the sake of the Lord. Therefore I want them to obey their mother of their own free will as they have promised the Lord, so that, seeing the charity, humility and unity they have toward one another, their mother might bear all the burdens of her office more easily, and, through their way of life, what is painful and bitter might be changed into sweetness.

And because *the way and path is difficult and the gate through which one passes and enters to life is narrow, there are both few who walk it and enter through it* (cf. Matthew 7:14). And if there are some who walk that way for a while, there are very few who persevere on it. But how blessed are those to whom it has been given *to walk that way and to persevere till the end* (cf. Psalm 118:1; Matthew 10:22).

Let us be very careful, therefore, that, if we have set out on the path of the Lord, we do not at any time turn away from it through our own fault or negligence or ignorance, nor that we offend so great a Lord and His Virgin Mother, and our blessed Father Francis, the Church Triumphant and even the Church Militant. For it is written: *"Those who turn away from your commands are cursed"* (Psalm 118:21).

For this reason I *bend my knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. Ephesians 3:14) that, through the supporting merits of the glorious and holy Virgin Mary, His Mother, and of our most blessed Father Francis and all the saints, the Lord Himself, Who has given a good beginning, will also give the increase and *final perseverance* (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:6, 11). Amen.

So that it may be better observed, I leave you this writing, my very dear and beloved sisters, those present and those to come, as a sign of the blessing of the Lord and of our most blessed Father Francis and of my blessing, your mother and servant.