

## EXCERPTS FROM THE RULE OF ST CLARE

*Raynaldus, by divine mercy Bishop of Ostia and Velletri, to his most dear mother and daughter in Christ, the Lady Clare, Abbess of San Damiano in Assisi, and to her sisters, both present and to come, greetings and fatherly blessings.*

Beloved daughters in Christ, because you have rejected the splendour and pleasures of the world and, following the footprints of Christ Himself and His most holy Mother, you have chosen to live in the cloister and to serve the Lord in highest poverty so that, in freedom of soul, you may be the Lord's servants, we approve your holy way of life in the Lord and with fatherly affection we desire freely to impart our benign favour to your wishes and holy desires. Therefore, moved by your pious prayers and by the authority of the Lord Pope as well as our own, to all of you who are now in your monastery and to all those who will succeed you we confirm forever this form of life and the manner of holy unity and highest poverty which your blessed father Saint Francis gave you for your observance in word and writing. Furthermore, by the protection of this writing, we fortify this way of life which is the following:

The form of life of the Order of the Poor Sisters which the Blessed Francis established is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without anything of one's own and in chastity. Clare, the unworthy handmaid of Christ and the little plant of the most blessed Father Francis, promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and to his canonically elected successors, and the Roman Church. (from Chapter One)

After the Most High Celestial Father saw fit to enlighten my heart by His grace to do penance according to the example and teaching of our most blessed Father Saint Francis, shortly after his own conversion, I, together with my sisters, voluntarily promised him obedience. When the blessed father saw that we had no fear of poverty, hard work, suffering, shame, or the contempt of the world, but that, instead, we regarded such things as great delights, moved by compassion he wrote for us a form of life as follows: "Since by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and servants of the most high King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have that same loving care and special solicitude for you as (I have) for them." After that we might never turn aside from the most holy poverty we had embraced (nor those, either, who would come after us), shortly before his death he wrote his last will for us once more, saying: "I, brother Francis, the little one, wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy mother and to persevere in this until the end; and I ask and counsel you, my ladies, to live always in this most holy life and in poverty. And keep most careful watch that you never depart from this by reason of the teaching or advice of anyone." And just as I, together with my sisters, have been ever solicitous to safeguard the holy poverty which we have promised the Lord God and the Blessed Francis, so, too, the Abbesses who shall succeed me in office and all the sisters are bound to observe in inviolably to the end: that is to say, they are not to receive or hold onto any possessions or property (acquired) through an intermediary, or even anything that might reasonably be called property, except as much land as necessity requires of the integrity and the proper seclusion of the monastery; and this land is not to be cultivated except as a garden for the needs of the sisters. (from Chapter Six)

The sisters to whom the Lord has given the grace of working are to work faithfully and devotedly, (beginning) after the Hour of tierce, at work which pertains to a virtuous life and to the common good. They must do this in such a way that, while they banish idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all other things of our earthly existence must contribute. And the Abbess or her vicar is bound to assign at the Chapter, in the presence of all, the manual work each is to perform. The same is to be done if alms have been sent by anyone for the needs of the sisters, so that the donors may be remembered by all in prayer together. And all such things are to be distributed for the common good by the Abbess or her vicar with the advice of the discreet. (from Chapter Seven)

The sisters shall not acquire anything as their own, neither a house nor a place nor anything at all; instead, as pilgrims and strangers in this world who serve the Lord in poverty and humility, let them send confidently for alms. Nor should they feel ashamed, since the Lord made Himself poor for us in this world. This is that summit of highest poverty which has established you, my dearest sisters, as heirs and queens of the kingdom of heaven; it has made you poor in the things (of this world) but has exalted you in virtue. Let this be your portion which leads to the land of the living (cf. Ps 141:6). Dedicating yourselves totally to this, my most beloved sisters, do not wish to have anything else forever under heaven for the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His most holy Mother.

Each should make known her needs to the other with confidence. For if a mother loves and nourishes her daughter according to the flesh, how much more lovingly must a sister love and nourish her sister according to the spirit!  
(from Chapter Eight)

I admonish and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ that the sisters be on their guard against all pride, vainglory, envy, greed, worldly care and anxiety, detraction and murmuring, dissension and division. Let them be ever zealous to preserve among themselves the unity of mutual love, which is the bond of perfection. Let them devote themselves to what they must desire to have above all else: the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working, to pray always to Him with a pure heart, and to have humility, patience in difficulty and weakness, and to love those who persecute, blame and accuse us; for the Lord says: Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:10). But he who shall have persevered to the end will be saved (Mt 10:22).  
(from Chapter Ten)

The sisters are firmly obliged to have always that Cardinal of the Holy Church of Rome as our Governor, Protector, and Corrector, who has been delegated by the Lord Pope for the Friars Minor, so that, always submissive and subject at the feet of that holy Church, and steadfast in the catholic Faith, we may observe forever the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy Mother and the holy Gospel which we have firmly promised. Amen. (from Chapter Twelve)

Given at Perugia, the sixteenth day of September, in the tenth year of the Pontificate of the Lord Pope Innocent IV.