AUGUST 7, 2016 – TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (C): CLARE, ABBESS AT ASSISI

Saint Clare, born Chiara Offreduccio in 1194, founded what become the Order of Saint Clare (the Poor Clares), a monastic religious order for women in the Franciscan tradition. She wrote the order’s rule of life, believed to be the first set of monastic guidelines written by a woman.

Saint Clare was born in Assisi, the oldest daughter of Favorino Sciffi, Count of Sasso-Rosso, and his wife Ortolana. Clare's father was a wealthy representative of an ancient Roman family and her mother, Ortolana, belonged to a noble and devoutly Catholic family.

As a child, Clare was devoted to her faith and prayer life. At the age of 18 she heard Francis preach and begged him to allow her to join his order. The following Palm Sunday, Clare met Francis at the chapel of the Porziuncula where her hair was cut and she placed her possessions on the altar as an offering.

Francis placed Clare temporarily in a convent of Benedictine nuns. When her friends and family heard about her actions, they attempted to force her to return home.
However, she clung to the altar of the church, threw aside her veil to show her cropped hair, and proclaimed that she would have no husband but Jesus Christ. Francis soon assigned her to a small dwelling beside the Church of St. Damian at Assisi to house what became known as the "Poor Ladies of San Damian." As women continued to join Clare, they embraced the Franciscan rule of absolute poverty, engaging a life of begging and works of mercy for the poor and the neglected. Clare soon accepted the role of Mother Superior and for the next 40 years served as a servant to the poor and her sisters, ready to do whatever Francis directed.

After Francis's death in 1226, Clare continued to promote the growth of her order, writing letters to abbesses in other parts of Europe and thwarting every attempt by each successive pope to impose rules on her order that mitigated the radical commitment to corporate poverty they had originally embraced.

Clare died 1253. She was canonized by the Catholic Church in 1255 and is commemorated in The Episcopal Church on Thursday, August 11.

O God, whose blessed Son became poor that we through his poverty might be rich: Deliver us from an inordinate love of this world, that we, inspired by the devotion of your servant Clare, may serve you with singleness of heart, and attain to the riches of the age to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sources: Holy Women, Holy Men, Lesser Feasts and Fasts, wikipedia