

Chapter 3: Our Franciscan Roots

This Chapter offers an overview of Francis and Clare's lives, including a listing of books that guide our reflection on their legacy.



"San Damiano"
Artwork by Associate Karen Kietzman

St. Francis of Assisi

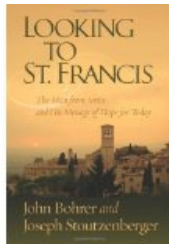


Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF

- 1181 or 1182 Born at Assisi in Umbria, son of Pietro and Giovanna Bernadone; baptized John and called Francesco.
- 1201-1202 Joined war between Assisi and Perugia; taken prisoner in the battle of Collestrada; ransomed by his father.
- 1205 Joined army; became ill in Spoleto; had a vision marking the beginning of his conversion; returned to Assisi; sought solitude; made pilgrimage to Rome; joined beggars at St. Peter's.
- 1206 Jesus spoke to Francis from the crucifix in San Damiano Church; his father, Pietro demanded restitution of money spent; Francis appealed to the Bishop of Assisi, assumed a hermit's habit and renounced his hereditary rights.
- 1207 Dedicated to prayer and solitude, Francis helped lepers and restored 3 churches (San Damiano, San Pietro, Portiuncula).
- 1209 During Mass in the Chapel of St. Mary of the Angels, the Gospel revealed Francis' task; the words of Christ became the Order's First Rule.
- 1210 Francis and eleven followers went to Rome; Pope Innocent III verbally approved the Rule.
- 1212 Francis received Clare's commitment to the Franciscan way of life.
- 1219-1220 Francis preached to the Sultan of Egypt; returned to Italy.
- 1223 Second Rule approved by Pope Honorius III.
- 1223 First crib was set up at Christmas midnight Mass in Greccio.
- 1224 Francis received the stigmata on Mt. Alverno.
- 1226 Francis returned to Assisi; composed the "Canticle of Creatures" as he was dying at the Portiuncula.
- 1226 Francis died on October 3 and was interred at the church of St. George.
- 1228 Francis was canonized in Assisi by Pope Gregory IX.

Sources: *The Francis Book* by Roy M. Gasnick, O.F.M.
The Life and Times of St. Francis by Augustino Ghiliardi

A Brief Review of Books on the Life of St. Francis

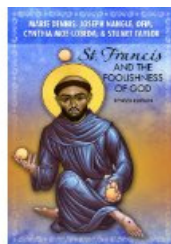


Bohrer, J. and Stoutzenberger, J (2014) *Looking to St. Francis: The Man from Assisi and His Message of Hope for Today*

This book connects two worlds: the medieval and the contemporary. The authors show the similarities between the two eras and brings relevant meaning to stories we know well. Francis wrote: “Preach the Gospel always. When necessary use words.” These words portray the Gospel through Francis’ eyes. In practical ways, the authors help us see how to apply Francis’ spirituality to issues we face. Its 192 easy-to-read pages include reflective questions after each chapter to help process its messages.



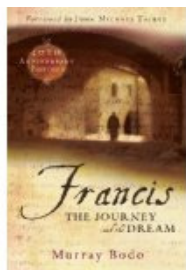
Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF



Dennis, M., Nangle, J., Moe-Lobeda, C. and Taylor, St. (1993). *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God*.

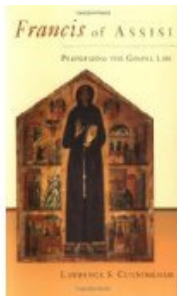
The audience, as the authors state, is “primarily the non-poor who wish to understand the meaning of Christian commitment in an increasingly impoverished world.” (p. 7) Their approach is framed by two realities: Francis the man of paradoxes: free and spontaneous, yet ever loyal to the institutional church, fully alive, yet embraced suffering, a true lover who chose celibacy, born in affluence, embraced literal poverty and Francis the sentimental and popular man who had joy, love for nature and familiarity with animals. (p.7) Although now an older book, it is used by some Congregations for their Associate Formation because, while describing Francis, it blends theological reflection with scripture, and adds reflective questions that guide one’s self-growth.

Bodo, M. (2011). *Francis The Journey and the Dream* (40th Anniversary Edition)



Another book used in Associate Formation is Bodo’s, *The Journey and the Dream*. Now over 40 years old, this book is probably the most known and favored story of St. Francis of Assisi. It simply tells stories from Francis’ life—often the romantic sides that have endured forever and helped establish the garden statues; it does not have the historical depth needed to be called a historical biography. It can be considered poetic prose, with the license of romanticism.

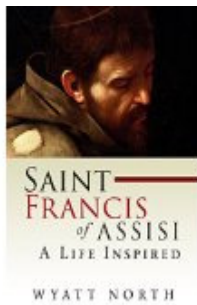
Critics have called it “profound and beautiful,” while others find it sappy and fanatical. Some chapters offer deep reflective thought on Francis’ simple yet complex dedication to Christ Jesus while others present Francis as almost simple-minded.



Cunningham, L.S. (2002) *Francis of Assisi Performing the Gospel Life*

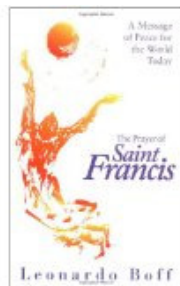
Cunningham, a theology professor at the University of Notre Dame, combines a scholarly and reflective view of Francis of Assisi. He avoids the sensationalism and romanticism of Francis found in some books which create a simple-minded and a naively focused fanatic. His writing is intellectual and periodically Cunningham uses theological and obscure language to describe basic principles from which Francis lived.

His description of the word *spiritual* might be questioned by some. He believes those who call themselves *spiritual* are types who favor concrete statues of Francis found in garden centers.



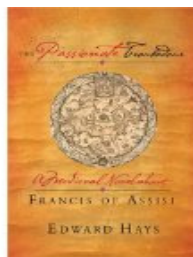
North, W. (2014). *Saint Francis of Assisi, A Life Inspired*

Similar in its straight-forwardness to Julian's book, North explores classic spiritual themes, blending the medieval world and the modern world. It is not a historical biography since its chapters dwell on themes and/or major events carried through in Francis' life rather than a series of chronological happenings. It ends with a discussion on the spirituality of Pope Francis and its contemporary application. It is a fast read with large print. (140 pages)



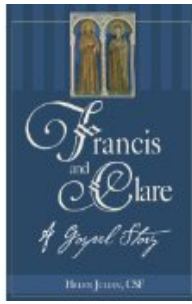
Boff, L. (2001). *The Prayer of Saint Francis: A Message of Peace for the World Today*

Specifically focused on the Peace Prayer of St. Francis, Boff titles each chapter with a line from the prayer. The chapters provide reflective reflections and end with a prayer. It provides meditative reading for anyone who values the message of the Peace Prayer.



Hays, E. (2004) *The Passionate Troubadour: A Medieval Novel about Francis of Assisi*

If you like historical novels and are intrigued by St. Francis, this work is a welcoming read. A 638 page narrative, it captures St. Francis as earthy and robust rather than a hermit-like fanatic. It is the story of a man with a human struggle—to find meaning in his life, facing real-life doubts about who he is and is challenged to become. It contains rich medieval detailing and a huge cast of supporting characters all of which brings depth to already known stories of St. Francis. Hayes takes creative license in detailing historical events and, for the most part, enhances rather than diminishes one's knowledge about the saint.



Julian, H. (2001) *Francis and Clare, A Gospel Story*

A straight-forward view of the lives of Francis and Clare, Julian intertwines their stories in a simple narrative, fast, easy and factual reading. Julian's work is not one of poetic language, nor does she offer reflective thought. It is a book of stories well known in Franciscan tradition of "God at work with his chosen people." She ends this short book of 133 pages with this quote from St. Francis, "I have done what was mine to do; may Christ teach you what you are to do."



Bodo, M. and Saint Sing, S. (1996). *Francis and Clare of Assisi: Following Our Pilgrim Hearts*

This book is organized as a seven-session retreat which could adapt well to regional group meetings or for private self-reflection. Bodo and Saint Sing place the voices of Francis and Clare as the retreat directors and lead readers down the medieval pathway of Assisi as they simulate images along this spiritual pilgrimage. Each chapter ends with reflective questions and a closing prayer.

Their reflections bring Assisi to life and inspire the pilgrim heart. For those seeking to learn about the *lives* of Francis and Clare, this book would not be fully satisfying; instead it brings the *heart* of Francis alive without the usual biographic and chronological pattern.

Francis and Clare is one in a series of "A Retreat With" books. Other books include Thomas Merton, Gerrard Manley Hopkins, Therese of Lisieux and Pope John XXIII.



"Backyard in Assisi"

Artwork by Associate Karen Kietzman

St. Clare of Assisi

HIGHLIGHTS IN THE LIFE OF CLARE

1193-4 - 1210. Birth and Young Life

Clare of Assisi was the first of three daughters born to Favarone and Hortulana of the noble clan of Offreduccio. Unlike Francis, whose father was a merchant, Clare belonged to the *maiores*, the wealthy class of nobility. Her family was well known and respected. Her father was a knight and her mother was known for her pious practices and her care for the poor. Clare was expected to prepare herself for a suitable marriage within her own class. Growing up, Clare showed signs of religious fervor and openly deflected the pursuits of her suitors. At some point she sold her inheritance and gave everything to the poor.



Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF

1211. Meeting and Following Francis

In the early part of this year Clare, always with a companion, began to meet secretly with Francis. He instructed her to go to the Cathedral Mass on Palm Sunday, dressed in her finery. Later she was to come to him and the Brothers down to their little chapel, the Portiuncula. In the darkness of an Italian night, Francis received her vows, tonsured her, and sent her to a nearby Abbey. It didn't take long for her family to come after her but they were not able to prevail against her. In fact, her sister soon joined her, not without a struggle from the family.

1212 - 1215. The Early Years at San Damiano

Francis soon provided for Clare and her sister, Agnes, to live at San Damiano. Their example of holiness and poverty quickly inspired women to follow them. Even young men were amazed at the rigorous life of these women and began to join the Brothers. At the insistence of Francis, Clare accepted the office of abbess at this time. In the older traditions of monastic life the women religious were usually wealthy and often had servants. The monasteries owned land and employed servants and farmers. But the Poor Sisters owned nothing and depended on the work of their hands and whatever food the Brothers could spare. San Damiano was situated at a busy crossroad outside the walls of Assisi. Soon the people came to ask for prayers and Clare became known as a healer.



Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF

1215 - 1220. The Middle Years

Francis returned from the Holy Land in 1220. Not too much is recorded about the contacts Francis and Clare may have had during this period, but some major changes occurred in both Orders, one of which was that Clare received from Pope Innocent III the *Privilege of Poverty*. This was a significant accomplishment that set her way of life apart from the traditional monastic life of the times. The male clerics could hardly believe that women could live this kind of radical poverty. Clare, with love and compassion, directed her Sisters who came from different political cultures and both high and low states of life, to create a community of mutual love according to the Gospel.

1221 - 1224. The Later Years of Francis' Life

Both Orders were growing rapidly. Among the Brothers there was controversy and disagreement about the meaning of Poverty. Appropriate relations between the Brothers and the Sisters became an issue since there was the possibility that scandal might be given. The Poor Sisters longed for spiritual direction and preaching from the Brothers, particularly from Francis himself. One story tells how Francis finally consented to "preach." The Sisters arrived to hear his sermon. Francis sat down and had the Brothers sprinkle him with ashes as he prayed the *Miserere*, Ps 51. The Sisters got the message. Another time the Brothers had stopped coming to give them spiritual support, and only left loaves of bread at the door for them. Clare sent the bread back with the message that if they refused the Sisters spiritual support, the Sisters would not accept material support from them. These stories give us some idea of the holy tensions springing from these new ways of living the Gospel in community. It is also clear that Francis and Clare were equal partners, led by the Spirit in this new endeavor.

1224 - 1226. The Final Years with Francis

Almost at the same time that Francis received the Stigmata, Clare contracted a debilitating illness that never left her. As Francis' bodily health deteriorated he was moved to a hut near San Damiano. Here he wrote and sang the glorious Canticle of Brother Sun. Feeling the love and concern of the Sisters for him, he also composed a song for them. Clare sent word and begged to be able to see him one more time. He agreed but she would "see" him only after he died as his body was carried in procession past San Damiano for burial. That vision would sustain her through the next twenty seven years of her life as she courageously and lovingly carried out the common vocation she and Francis shared.

1227 - 1253. Clare of Assisi, Co-foundress of Franciscan/Clarean Spirituality

In the coming years, though suffering from illness and the austerity of her form of life, Clare remained strong in spirit and faithful to the original call of the Poor Christ. The communities she formed included women from all social classes of the time and they were all expected to treat and love each other with a love greater than a mother's love. Clare modeled this for them, finding no task too lowly, from washing their feet, caring for them when they were ill, and tending their wounds. From this humble position, she debated with and counseled prelates and Popes, as well as Elias, the first successor to Francis. The fame of her holiness spread beyond Italy to other countries of Europe. All this time she interacted with Popes, mainly, but not exclusively, over the Rule she was writing and revising. The controversy about the Rule centered on the degree of Poverty that the Poor Sisters could sustain. Back and forth they went until finally, two days before she died, Pope Innocent IV approved her Rule, the first Rule written by a woman for women. On August 11, 1253, surrounded by her Sisters, she became one with the Poor Christ of the Incarnation, the Passion and Resurrection, and entered into eternal life. Her Sisters kept her last words in their hearts, words that can grace all of us today:

"Go securely and in peace, my blessed soul. The One who has created you and made you holy has always loved you tenderly as a mother her dear child. And You, Lord, are blessed because You have created me."

August to October 1255. The Canonization of Clare

Canonization took place sometime between these dates although the process began three months after she died. Pope Innocent was ready to canonize her immediately after her death at her funeral Mass but was convinced to adhere to the process of the time.

Even so, this was completed much sooner than was common in the thirteenth century. It attests to the cry of the people that Clare was their "saint" already.

—Compiled by Associate Jeanne Foley

SOURCES FOR THE TIMELINE

Carney, M. (1993). *The First Franciscan Woman, Clare of Assisi & Her Form of Life*, Franciscan Press, Quincy, IL.

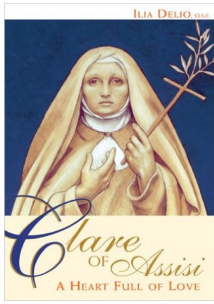
Cavazos-Gonzalez, G. (2010) *Greater Than a Mother's Love, The Spirituality of Francis and Clare of Assisi*, University of Scranton Press.

Bartoli, M. (2010) trans. Sister Frances Teresa Downing, OSC, *Saint Clare, Beyond the Legend*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati, OH.



Photo by Sr. Marianne Saeig, OSF

Additional Books On Clare



Delio I. (2007). *Clare of Assisi, A Heart Full of Love*, 2007, 129 pp.

This book takes you deep into the prayer, contemplation and spirituality of St. Clare as it can apply to us in today's world. The chapters are fairly short and lend themselves to personal and group reflection. Each chapter is followed by Questions for Reflection. This book is to be read very slowly and prayerfully!



Ledoux, C. 2003) trans by Colette Joly Dees, *Clare of Assisi, Her Spirituality Revealed in Her Letters*, 125 pp.

Clare probably wrote many letters to the Poor Sisters' convents that sprang up all over Europe, but the only letters that have been preserved are the ones to Agnes of Prague, daughter of the King of Bohemia, who had many suitors but chose to live religious life as Clare. Ledoux opens with a timeline and summary of Clare's life. The author's reflections on these letters are divided into two parts: who we are as human beings and how we can be united to God through The Poor Christ.

Miller, R. and Peterson, I. (1994) *Praying with Clare of Assisi*. 114 pp.



These two well known Rochester Franciscans wrote eleven meditations on subjects such as: Service to Others, The Privilege of Poverty, Spiritual Friendship, The Strength of the Eucharist, to name a few. Directions are given at the beginning as to how to engage in prayer as Clare would, both for yourself personally, or with a group. Highly recommended for regional groups, face to face or by phone. This is a companion book to *Praying with Francis of Assisi* listed in the books about Francis.



*Fresco of Saint Clare and Sisters of her order,
Church of San Damiano, Assisi*

Reflecting on Francis and Clare

Have you a favorite book about Francis and/or Clare?

How familiar are you with their life stories?

Which events stand out for you? Why are you attracted to them?

How relevant are they for our modern world?

If you have had contact with other Orders such as Benedictines, Dominicans, Carmelites, etc., what differences do you know about their cultures and spirituality?



Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berrger, OSF