

# The Spirit of Secular Franciscan Life

Newsletter for Secular Franciscans - Assumption BVM Province

August 2007 - No. 11

## Spirituality and the Places of Our Lives PORTA MOIANO That First Step: Risking All for the Gospel



Cathedral of San Rufino - Clare's Paternal Home was just to the left.

On August 11 every year we celebrate the Feast of St. Clare, often referred to as co-founder of the Franciscan movement. Reflections in this edition of the Newsletter consider the first moments of her decision when she chose to leave all and join Francis in following the Gospel.

The actual happening took place on Palm Sunday night in 1212. It was as if Clare was responding to a dare that changed her life forever. She dared to listen to the inspiration of God; she dared to accept the Gospel as her only treasure; she dared to embrace a vision of life that Francis held out to her. The Legend of Saint Clare describes the event briefly.

On that night, preparing to obey the command of the saint, she embarked upon her long desired flight with a virtuous companion. Since she was not content to leave by way of the usual door, marveling at her strength, she broke open with her own hands that other door that is customarily blocked by wood and stone. (*Clare of Assisi, Early Documents, 286*)

To help us understand the profundity of this step, consider for a moment the scene in Matthew's Gospel of Jesus walking on water and inviting Peter (14:22-33) to come to him. We know the story: Jesus just fed five thousand; he dismissed the crowds, sent the disciples on their way

across the sea, went off to pray, and then came walking on the water towards them as they battled a storm. This occasioned an encounter with Peter who said: "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Peter dared Jesus and Jesus dared Peter to see and believe. He simply said, "Come, walk on water." And that's exactly what Peter did. He stepped out of the boat and began to walk across those rolling waters with his eyes fixed on Jesus. Imagine that first step! Imagine the risk and the courage, fleeting as it may have been.

I think of Clare's first step out of her home as she left to join Francis. Not knowing what was to happen she made the decision to risk all and trust in a future based on God's promises. God in effect said to Clare: "Come, walk on water, trust my word." And that's what Clare did. Imagine her first step!



Entrance to Clare's paternal home

The scene in the Gospel also called forth faith from Peter. At first glance Peter failed miserably. Why? He was already halfway to Jesus when he took his eyes off Jesus and looked instead at the crashing waves and heard the roaring wind, and

then said to himself, "This is crazy. I can't walk on water." He sank like a rock. But he had indeed walked on water. He had been able to do the impossible, because his eyes were fixed on Jesus, and because his heart, his whole heart was fixed on Jesus too. Walking on water only became impossible for Peter when he looked away from the Lord.



Clare must have had moments of doubt about her decision in the years that followed. We know, however, how steadfastly she maintained her gaze upon Jesus, always finding in that gaze clarity of purpose and conviction in her chosen path. The good news about Peter is that doubt did not lead to drowning but deeper faith. Likewise for Clare.

Like Peter and Clare Jesus is inviting us to walk on water and do the impossible: to build wonderful lives and wonderful friendships, not off in some safe, other-worldly haven, but here and now in the midst of all the troubles and tragedies that life can serve us. The reason so many of us sink and are drowned in our troubles, or sink beneath the waves and turmoil of our difficulties is we take our eyes off Jesus and begin to rely only on ourselves.



Porta Moiano leading outside the city.



Francis cutting Clare's Hair at the Porziuncola.

Clare's paternal home. From there until the Porta Moiano, one of the eight gates of the city, we wend our way through Assisi in the dark, making six or seven stops to reflect on what might have been going on in Clare's heart and thoughts. She made

the momentous decision to leave her home and join Francis's movement as the first Franciscan woman. Imagine the blackness of night; imagine the firmness of her decision; imagine the trepidation and fear that also must have filled her spirit, imagine her first step. But Clare, with a trusted companion, silently made her way to the ancient Porta Moiano, a departure from the city of her birth. Some of the brothers were waiting just outside the gate with torches to take her to Francis at the Porziuncola below.

## Circle Rocking "S" Children's Farm

Take US 31 to Fountain Rd,  
Go East 2 Miles - See Signs  
5487 Tuttle Road • Free Soil, MI 49411  
231-462-3732

You and your pets are invited to the...

## Blessing of the Animals

Farm Olympics & Silent Auction  
Sunday, September 16, 2007  
at 1:30 Sharp, Rain or Shine

How do we find the power to walk on water and do the impossible? Exactly as Peter and Clare did, by keeping our eyes and hearts fixed on Jesus. He will show us where to walk, and will give us energy and courage. We will not falter or sink into the sea as long as our eyes and hearts are set on him. And he promises more than mere survival as the waters rage and the winds howl around us. He promises us joy and peace, even while life is battering us.

On many of the Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs the group is led in a touching and powerful ritual. We call it *Clare's Ritual of Departure*. Shortly after dusk has fallen we gather in the Piazza of San Rufino near what would have been

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