

For the year 1884, God has appointed

ST. CLARA

our patroness. This great saint is our first protectress in entering upon the second half of our Order's Centennial. Let us well understand the design of God in this dispensation! From the very picture of the saint her spirit beams upon us. Clothed in the coarse garb of the poor for Christ's sake, she carries in her hand the Divine Redeemer in the sacred mystery of His love. Hence we see most fervent love to Jesus Christ, based upon perfect contempt of the world, is the spirit, the interior life of our holy patroness. This highly favored spouse of the Lord appears to have received already with the grace of baptism, a special love of poverty. When but a little child, she felt a great repugnance to wear the attire becoming to her rank, and in that tender age gave all she could dispose of to the poor. She distributed her own meals among them, and preferred to suffer hunger herself rather than to see others in want of food. St. Francis, the apostle of holy poverty, found in her a most docile pupil. After her first interview with the Saint, she desired nothing more in this world than a perfect contempt of all earthly things, in order to follow her Saviour on the Way of the Cross.

Notwithstanding the indignation and opposition of her family, she took the vow of strictest poverty, choosing forever a life of utmost privation and want. As the disciple of Jesus in his poverty, she became the teacher and mistress of numerous souls whom our Lord placed under her direction and the mother of a large religious community whose members she gave the name of "Poor Sisters."

With astonishment the Christian world regarded this hitherto unknown mode of life adopted by these spouses of Christ. The head of the Church himself hesitated to sanction a life of such abnegation for delicate females. He was inclined to release St. Clara from her vows; but enlightened by God, the holy virgin importuned him to impose any punishment for her sins, but to allow the continuance of her life of poverty. She gained her object and maintained the strict observance of poverty; for the evangelical virtue she considered the foundation-stone upon which alone she could raise the edifice of religious perfection. And this she did, indeed, in the strength of holy poverty, elevating herself step by step, nearer to her God. Evermore did she advance in the depths of contemplation and intimate union with her Divine Lord, consuming her life in the exercises of holy love and oftentimes even miraculous dispensation of spiritual and corporal benefits to her fellow-men, till she exchanged the privations of poverty with the treasures of heaven, and her coarse habit with the glorious rube of those who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.

As our Lord so decidedly points out St. Clare for our veneration and imitation, it is clear He would remind us that holy poverty, too, is the greatest treasure of our

religious life and the term "Poor School Sisters" the most significant in our title. He would admonish us, moreover, to comply with the designs of our blessed founders, above all, in this regard, with inviolable fidelity. It was the will of our sainted Father Job, as he himself expressly declares, that poverty should be the foundation, - the fundamental trait of our community. Referring to the words of the Apostle, "Christ being rich, became poor for your sakes, that through his poverty you might be rich," he remarks: "He alone that joyfully embraces poverty as his nurse and companion for life, may claim the discipleship of Jesus in a higher, stricter sense of the term, and be enlisted among the number of co-laborers and instruments in the erection of the living Temple of God. It was by the poor, and not by the rich, that even to this day the kingdom of God has been spread and extended upon earth. Whoever seeks aught save bread and raiment, while sojourning on earth; whosoever devotes herself to the service of God and His Church, 'Putting hand to the plow and looking back, is not fit for the kingdom of God'. In this regard also, the maid and servant should not fare better than her Lord and Master, but should rejoice to share His lot." And again: "Laborers in the vineyard of the Lord, the chief design of this Congregation requires, but such laborers thrive most securely under the shelter and at the frugal table of poverty."

Furthermore: "The example of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, under whose special patronage the Poor School Sisters are placed, invites us to poverty. A poor mother and rich daughter, a poor lady and rich servants and clients, how can this be consistent? Only poor virgins, loving and practicing poverty, are true daughters and handmaids, true clients and imitators of Mary. Poor virgins alone may securely reckon upon her protection." Let us receive these words with joyful heart, confidently expecting great gain, yes, every good, from the practice of poverty. Infallible are the words of Jesus: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," - -- not only in the next life, but even here below. The religious that wholly divests herself of earthly things, gains Jesus Christ Himself, as her portion. This perfect divestment requires a full determination, a strong will and holy vigilance, combined with zeal for prayer, more especially of meditation and Holy Communion. Our most generous Jesus offers us all His treasures --- the entire wealth of His Sacred Heart. Let us yield ourselves captives to the sweet might of His love, that, bound to Him, we may happily attain to self-detachment, mortify our inordinate self-love, faithfully practice charity towards our neighbor, prudently regulate our interior and exterior senses, guard against curiosity, love to learn silence, make any sacrifice for the love of sweet peace, deny ourselves in cheerful subjection to authority, persevere in patient endurance of hardships and trials, show ourselves forgiving, meek and humble in suffering injuries --- by means of all which, we shall imbibe the spirit of Jesus Christ, and acquire a firm, thoroughly religious character, as worthy fruits of our Holy Communion. St. Clara despises the world and is, therefore, found worthy to carry her Heavenly Spouse in her hands, and still more in her heart. Let us follow her example, and we, too, shall gain Jesus Christ. He will abide in us, enlighten and direct, assist and console us, elevating our spirits more and more, to unite us to Himself. The love of poverty, as in the saints of God, will also increase in us the love of the poor --- the very element of life in our Order. To devote to the poor (and is not

every child poor) our labors, pains and sacrifices, in order to gain them for Christ, is indeed our vocation, our sacred duty, our most solemn engagement with God himself.

Let us then, dedicate this year to the special veneration of St. Clara! Following her example, we will make it our aim, during its course to love and practice holy poverty. May all the Sisters consider well what our holy rule prescribes in regard to this matter and conscientiously put it into practice. Thus with the weapons of poverty, we shall gain the kingdom of God for ourselves and for many others.

Saint Clara, pray for us!

With most heartfelt wishes for a Happy New Year --- and maternal greeting and blessing +++

MOTHER CAROLINE