



AUDITE SORELLE

Letter of the
General Ministers
of the First Order

on the occasion
of the Solemnity of St. Clare and the 8th
Centenary of the Canticle *Audite, Poverelle*

On the cover: Il Crocifisso e santi (Tiberio d'Assisi)

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Layout and graphic design: Communications Office of the OFM General Curia

To the Sisters
of the Order of St. Clare
of the Order of Urbanist Poor Clares
of the Capuchin Poor Clares

Dear Poor Sisters of St. Clare,
Ke de multe parte et provincie sete adunate,

We, the Franciscan General Ministers, wish for
The Lord to give you His peace!

In this Holy Year of 2025, we celebrate not only the 800th anniversary of the composition of the *Canticle of the Creatures*, but also of those “words with melody for the Poor Ladies of San Damiano,” known as *Audite, Poverelle*, which St. Francis of Assisi composed “for their greater consolation”¹ in the winter of 1225. The two texts are singularly close in time and are from the same period of Francis’ life. We can say that they almost chase after and illuminate one another.

Given the importance of this anniversary for the entire Franciscan Family, and even more so for you, we, the Franciscan General Ministers, address you together, “with great love,” offering you some insights inspired by Francis’ own words, convinced that, even after 800 years, they retain all their force and are of great relevance for your Franciscan contemplative Clarian life today.

¹ CAss 85:2

“Hear, O Poor Ladies called by the Lord”: **your identity**

With the first two words that embody the name to the entire poem, Francis, like a loving father and a wise teacher, invites the sisters of San Damiano to listen, that is, to welcome in the depths of their hearts the words with which “he wished to manifest to them briefly his desire, in the present moment and always”². And the first desire of Francis was to confirm the identity of Clare and her sisters, specifically as the “Poor Ladies,” called and brought forth in the Church by the Father “to follow the poverty and humility of his beloved Son and His glorious Virgin Mother”³. “Poor Ladies,” then, is an expression that well conveys your deepest identity, “of admirably summarizing a way of life, a way of standing before God and in the Church”⁴, in short, the essence of your form of life passionately lived out and defended by Clare throughout her life. And it is this identity of yours, that is, of Poor Sisters whose “true monastery is the humanity of the poor and humble Lord Jesus”⁵, of women totally dedicated to God in contemplation who are characterized above all by a life of humility and poverty lived in fraternity, which today must be ever more fully salvaged and reflected in the life of every sister, of every community and of your Orders. To this you have been called by the Lord!

² CAss 85:3

³ TestSC 46.

⁴ *Fonti Clariane*, edited by Giovanni Boccali, Portiuncula Ed., 2013, p. 1014.

⁵ Chiara Augusta Lainati, in *Fonti Francescane*, Franciscan Ed., 2004, note 27, p. 1770.

“Who are gathered from many parts and provinces”: **holy unity**

From its beginnings, the community of San Damiano welcomed women, nobility or not, not only from Assisi but also from different backgrounds,⁶ and sisters from very different cultures referred to it in writing, as evidenced by Clare’s correspondence with Agnes of Prague and Ermentrude of Bruges. We witness today with greater evidence a transformation of our Orders and yours into increasingly international and multicultural communities. Sisters from different parts of the same nation, from different countries, with varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds and from diverse social contexts now live together in a single community or federation. This diversity constitutes first and foremost a precious gift, as it enriches the expression of the common charism, which, rooted in the Gospel, is so rich and profound that it cannot be fully manifested from a single cultural standpoint. However, this reality also represents a significant challenge that invites us to a mutual and profound acceptance, integrating our differences and overcoming those prejudices that sometimes influence us without our awareness. It also pushes us to practice careful discernment by constantly evaluating how specific cultural elements are in harmony with the Gospel message. Therefore, we must never stop seeking and preserving at all levels the “holy unity,” which should never be confused with paring down to uniformity or with diversity at all costs, but which implies considering everything from that deepest bond that unites you: the divine inspiration that moved you to embrace the same Form of Life.⁷

⁶ As can be seen from the names of the witnesses at the canonization process of Chiara, for example: Benvenuti da Perugia, Francesca de messer Capitaneo di Col de Meçco, Lucia di Roma, etc.

⁷ Cf. RuleSC 2:1

“Always live in truth and die in obedience”: **the following of Christ**

In Christianity, truth is not simply a concept or a theory, but a person, Jesus Christ, who defines himself as “the truth”⁸, and with whom we are called to live a relationship, an experience of ever-deepening encounter and knowledge. To live “in the truth” means first of all to continually deepen that personal relationship with God - unique and irreplaceable - from which we discover our authentic identity, our deepest essence. It also means conforming to the truth of the incarnation of the Son of God, characterized by poverty and humility, always following “the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and His most holy Mother”⁹. Rather than a theoretical adherence to a set of dogmatic truths, living “in the truth” brings us back to the heart of Francis and Clare’s spirituality: following the poor and humble Christ, observing his Gospel in the different communal, cultural and social contexts in which we are rooted - in other words, in the concreteness and authenticity of our specific life situations. It clearly emerges that the life “in truth” of which Francis and Clare speak represents a profound acceptance of and total adherence to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, which requires a radical “obedience” to Him and His message. It is an obedience that must accompany us not only in living but also in dying, in which we persevere throughout our existence, observing “in perpetuity the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ and His most holy Mother and the holy Gospel”¹⁰, for “blessed indeed are those to whom it is given to walk in

⁸ Jn 14:6

⁹ Uvol 1-3

¹⁰ RuleSC 12:13

it and persevere to the end”¹¹. Here we touch upon the sensitive reality of requests from sisters and brothers to leave our Orders even after long years of consecrated life, which poses many questions with which we must seriously consider the quality of our fraternal life and the depth of our formation, especially as concerns our personal sense of belonging to the Lord and His Gospel.

“Do not look to the life outside, because that of the Spirit is better”: **authenticity of life**

We note first of all that Francis does not establish a simple opposition between the “external life” and the “internal life,” which, on a surface reading, could be interpreted as the contrast between the secular existence from which Francis departed with his conversion¹² and the cloistered experience lived by Clare at San Damiano. Francis, in fact, contrasts the “external life” with the “life of the spirit,” suggesting that the real distinction is not between “external” and “internal,” but between “living according to the flesh” and “living according to the spirit”¹³, between the “spirit of the flesh” and the “Spirit of the Lord”¹⁴. These are two fundamentally different existential modes: one driven by the dominance of the ego (flesh), the other by the primacy of God (spirit). These two perspectives also give rise to different approaches to Christian and religious life. As Francis explains, “For the spirit of the flesh wants and cares much about possessing words, but little about implementing them, and does not seek the inner religiosity and holiness of the spirit but wants and desires a religion and holiness that appears outside to men.”¹⁵

¹¹ TestSC 73

¹² 2Test 3.

¹³ Rm 8:5-9.

¹⁴ Cf. Earlier Rule 17:10-16.

¹⁵ Cf. Earlier Rule 17:11,14.

Therefore, the choice that we are continually called to confront is that between a superficial Christian and religious life made up of exteriority and formalism and an authentic and coherent Christian experience permeated by the paschal mystery of Christ—desiring above all “to have the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity”¹⁶. We must all therefore be vigilant against the risk of “spiritual worldliness,” which Pope Francis often denounced, which “hides behind appearances of religiosity and even love for the Church, and seeks, instead of the glory of the Lord, human glory and personal well-being”¹⁷.

“I beg you with great love to be discreet with the alms that the Lord gives you”: **continual discernment**

A clear indication of the journey according to the Spirit is the attitude of constant discretion and discernment that, in Clare’s case, Francis applied to the question of almsgiving, as her severe austerity led her to deprive herself even of the goods essential for survival. For this reason, “with great love” and concern for her health, Francis, together with the bishop of Assisi, commanded her “not to let a single day go by without taking at least an ounce and a half of bread as nourishment”¹⁸. This same discretion also warns us against the opposite excess: a permissiveness that leads to the waste of natural resources, yielding to hedonistic and consumerist temptations. In one of his Admonitions, Francis argues that where there is mercy and discretion, there is neither harshness nor

¹⁶ Later Rule 10:8

¹⁷ Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Rome 2013, No. 93.

¹⁸ RuleSC 18:7.

superfluity¹⁹. We can extend this recommendation to discretion/discernment not only to our relationship with material goods, but to all other “handouts,” that is, “to all the gifts we receive from the ‘great divine Almoner, beginning with the most precious: our vocation’²⁰. Since vocation is a gift that we continue to receive from Him, ongoing discernment, both personal and communal, becomes necessary to check how we are cultivating and responding to such a priceless gift. It also requires discretion in our interpersonal relationships, starting with those with sisters in the community, guarding against any form of abuse. The Church today asks us for special sensitivity in our relationships with all people, with attention also given to contacts that take place through new communication technologies. Indeed, today we are immersed in a digital culture, which requires proper formation and good discernment about its impact on contemplative life.

“Those who are burdened by infirmities and the others who are weary because of them, bear it all in peace, because you will sell this toil dearly”: **mutual forbearance**

Among the realities about which to have discretion, that is, which require good discernment from us is that of infirmity, which, in the San Damiano community was the order of the day, beginning with Clare herself, who was bedridden for long years. Even among us the reality of illness is always present, sometimes bringing great suffering to sisters and brothers facing very

¹⁹ Am 27:6.

²⁰ Cf. TestSC 2.

serious health situations. We witness the great fortitude of spirit of so many sisters in the infirmary who, despite their sufferings, maintain serenity and even joy in their hearts. These are sisters who live the charism in its fullness because they allow themselves to be transformed wholly into the crucified/resurrected Christ they contemplate. They are joined by many other sisters and entire communities who, not without effort, take turns in offering the sick the necessary care and, above all, fraternal affection and spiritual support. It seems to us that precisely because he saw this being fulfilled in the community of San Damiano, Francis, in the *Audite Poverelle*, broadens the beatitude found in the Cantic of the Creatures, where he referred only to those who sustain *infirmity and tribulation*²¹; here he includes those who toil for their infirmed sisters. Yes, sisters, you too are truly happy when, through the lens of faith, you live both in infirmity and care for the infirmed! However, in a sense, we can say that all of us are infirmed, that is, not firm (unfirm) and therefore, in need of being refreshed and sustained by others, because so many times we come to terms with our limitations, with our frailties, with our sins. These should be regarded by us as moments of grace, because they bring us back to our true condition: that of people always in need of God's strength and mercy, and also the forbearance of others, that is, for someone to help us carry the burdens of life. It is then that these situations become the privileged opportunity to fulfill the law of Christ²², and this not only within individual communities but also among the communities of your Federations and Orders, which requires many times the downsizing of presences in the different territories, so that all sisters are guaranteed the right to live, until the end, a full and dignified Franciscan contemplative life.

²¹ Cf. Cant 20-25.

²² Cf. Gal 6:2.

“Because each one will be a queen crowned in heaven with the Virgin Mary”: **eschatological hope**

The bliss of infirmity for one's sister and others, that is, being happy despite situations of great frailty, is only possible in view of a value greater than one's own personal health or well-being, something that gives true meaning to everything and for which it is worth offering everything. And for us Christians, that which can give true meaning to all the hidden treasure or that precious pearl for which it is worth selling everything²³ can be none other than the love of Christ that has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit²⁴, that is, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness²⁵. The Kingdom of God is in our midst²⁶ however not yet fully, it is in this world, but it is not of this world²⁷, it goes beyond, it has an eschatological dimension which, for you, according to Francis' perspective, has a strong Marian connotation. In fact, long before, in his first writing to the *Poor Ladies* known as the “Form of Life,” Francis considers the life of Clare and her sisters as a continuation of the experience of Mary: the daughter and handmaid par excellence of the Father, the Bride of the Holy Spirit and the most perfect disciple of Christ²⁸, in such a way that those who seek to persevere to the end in following the life and poverty of the most high Lord Jesus Christ and his most holy Mother²⁹, are destined to participate in the same destiny as the Mother of God: to become crowned queens in heaven with the “Holy Lady Queen”³⁰, the Virgin

²³ Cf. Mt 13:44-46

²⁴ Cf. Rm 5:5

²⁵ Cf. Mt 6:33

²⁶ Cf. Lk 17:21

²⁷ Cf. Jn 18:36

²⁸ Cf. Form of Life 1.

²⁹ Cf. Uvol 1.

³⁰ SalV 1.

Mary. Then, in eternity the transition from *Poor Ladies* to *Queens* is accomplished in the sisters' lives; here is the greatness of your vocation, here is the eschatological hope to which you are called! Dear sisters, may you renew your faith in this jubilee year of hope in this great hope of participating in the fullness of life in God, in which Mary preceded you, walking her own path in this world: that of obedience, poverty and service. And as we thank you for your witness to Franciscan contemplative life, your closeness to our Orders and your precious prayers, we invoke upon each sister and all your communities the most abundant blessings of the One who is our "Most High, all-powerful, good Lord"³¹ and who desires you all to be "queens."

Faternally,

Br. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM
Br. Carlos Trovarelli, OFMConv
Br. Roberto Genuin, OFMCap

Sanctuary of San Damiano, August 1st, 2025
Beginning of the Pardon of Assisi

³¹ Cant 1.

