

## HER SICKNESS AND PROLONGED ILLNESS

For forty years Clare had run the course of the highest poverty, when, preceded by a number of illnesses, she was obviously approaching the prize of her exalted calling.

Since the strength of her flesh had succumbed to the austerity of the penance she had practiced in the early years, a harsh sickness took hold of her last years, so that she who had been enriched with the merits of good deeds when well ... might be enriched with the merits of suffering when sick. *For virtue is brought to perfection in sickness.*

At this time, a vision was given to a certain servant of Christ, a virgin dedicated to God in the monastery of San Paolo of the Order of Saint Benedict. It seemed to her that she was together with the sisters in San Damiano assisting at the sickness of the Lady Clare, and that Clare was lying on a precious bed. However, while they were grieving at the passing of the blessed Clare, a beautiful woman appeared at the head of the bed and said to those who were weeping: "Do not weep, children, for her who is about to be victorious."

Her daughters, who would very soon be left as orphans, stood around the bed of their mother, a sword of sorrow piercing their souls. Among them was Agnes, the devoted virgin, filled with tears and begging her sister not to depart and leave her. Clare replied: "It is pleasing to God that I depart. But stop crying, because you will come to the Lord a short time after me. And the Lord will console you greatly after I have left you."

Clare was laboring for many days in her last agony during which the faith of the neighboring regions and the devotion of the peoples increased. She was honored daily by the frequent visits of prelates and even cardinals. What is truly remarkable to hear is that when she was not able to take any food for seventeen days, she was so invigorated by the strength of the Lord that she strengthened everyone who came to her in the service of Christ.

In fact, when a kind man, Brother Raynaldo, encouraged her to be patient in the long martyrdom of so many illnesses, she responded with a very unrestrained voice: "After I once came to know the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, through his servant Francis, no pain has been bothersome, no penance too severe, no weakness has been too harsh."

But since the Lord was very near and, as it were, already standing at the door, she wished the priests and spiritual brothers to stand by and read the Passion of the Lord and holy words.

Finally, she turned to her weeping daughters to whom she recalled in a praising way the divine blessings while entrusting them with the poverty of the Lord. She blessed her devoted brothers and sisters and called down the fullest graces of blessings upon the Ladies of the poor monasteries, those in the present and those in the future.

The most holy virgin, turning towards herself, silently addressed her soul. "Go without anxiety," she said, "for you will have a good escort for your journey. Go," she said, "for He Who created you has made you holy. And always protecting you as a mother her child, He has loved you with a tender love. May you be blessed, O Lord," she said, "You Who have created my soul!"

When one of the sisters asked her to whom she was speaking, she replied: "I am speaking to my blessed soul." That glorious escort was not standing far off, so turning to another daughter she said: "Do you see, O child, the King of glory Whom I see?"

The hand of the Lord was placed upon another and she, amid her tears, received a joyful vision with her bodily eyes. She turned her attention to the door of the house, and, behold, a multitude of virgins in white garments entered, all of whom wore gold garlands on their heads. – One, more splendid than the others, walked among them and from her crown, such splendor came forth that it turned the night within the house into daylight. She moved toward the bed where the spouse of the Son was reposing and, bending most lovingly over her, gave her a most tender embrace. A mantle, of

the most remarkable beauty, was brought by the virgins and with all of them working zealously, the body of Clare was covered and the bridal bed was decorated.

That most holy soul, therefore, departed to be crowned with an eternal reward; since the temple of the flesh was dissolved, the spirit passed happily to heaven. Blessed is that passing from the valley of misery that became for her the entrance to a blessed life. Now in the place of the farewell meal, she is rejoicing at the table of the heavenly citizens; now in place of the coarseness of ashes, she is decorated with a robe of eternal glory and is blessed in the heavenly kingdom.