

A Fresh Perspective on the Life of St. Clare

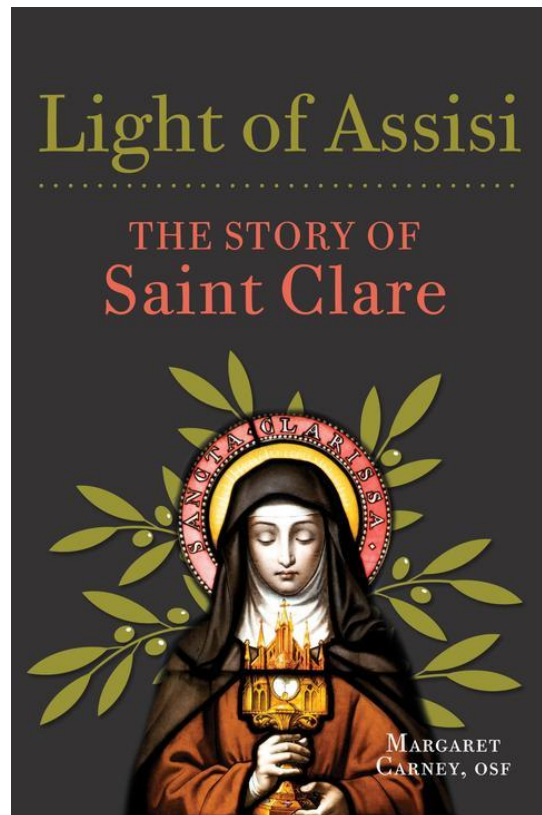
By Sister Louise Bernier

Each of us has been exposed to bits and pieces of the life of St. Clare of Assisi. Factual information about Clare is in short supply, but there are new translations of good source material.

Just in time for her feast day, I am recommending a new book, *Light of Assisi: The Story of Saint Clare* by Sister Margaret Carney, a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities. At 136 pages, this biography has short chapters which put order into the chronology of Clare's life; how it connects to the life of Francis; changes in the world in which each had been reared; and the formation of the Franciscan order.

Where source information does not exist, Sister Margaret raises questions about what the possibilities of life-actions might have been. This occurs throughout the book and could be very helpful for reflection, particularly as we move our thoughts to actions in terms of re-understanding the vocation of associates.

This biography is not cluttered with myth and judgments about Clare's spirituality based on current understandings of spirituality. It is unfair to judge Clare by the theological information available to us today. It is awesome, however, to experience how Clare in her time influences us in our times. This being the case, it becomes clear that the revolution in the development of religious life that Clare is a part of has parallels for us which will further our growing understanding of associate vocation.



In Sister Margaret's book, we glimpse Clare as a person in dialogue with her rapidly changing culture. For example, Clare and Francis could read and write in Tuscan Italian at a time when Latin was still the language of the educated and used in the circles of power. How different is this from how we interact (or fail to) with the digital revolution today through social media?

At one point, the author raises a question about how Clare and Francis actually spent time with each other. How did they, in their 15-year relationship, share the ups and downs of the formation of a new way of religious living? It raises the question: How do we, sisters and associates, share our lives, and to what end?

By the way she writes her book, Sister Margaret expects us, the readers, to work with what she has discovered and writes about. Regarding the Fourth Lateran Council, for example, she writes, "...the ground beneath Francis and Clare begins to shift in this program of Church reform." Truly, the ground is still shifting – back and forth—in our lives today as we negotiate the maze left to us by Vatican II.

Sister Margaret raises questions and makes comments that encourage us to reflect on possibilities, thereby deepening our relationship to one another and to Clare and Francis. It is very likely that each one who reads this book will have had a different experience of religious life, the institutional Church, and spirituality. This could make for some really interesting conversations.

Light of Assisi: The Story of Saint Clare, by Margaret Carney, OSF

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