

POOR CLARES IN DRUMSHANBO

CELEBRATE THE EIGHTH CENTENARY OF THEIR ORDER

Sr Mary Doherty (*Mercy Sister*)

FROM THE 20th MARCH, Palm Sunday 2011 to the 11th August 2012, the Poor Clare Order of nuns all over the globe celebrated the 800th Anniversary of their founding. Nuns, as distinct from sisters, live an enclosed life. Their ministry is confined to their convents. The life of a Poor Clare nun is one of prayer, self sacrifice and joy.

Why these two dates?

Clare was born in Assisi, Italy on the 16th July 1194. She was the eldest daughter of Favorino Scifi, Count of Sasso- Rosso, the wealthy representative of an ancient Roman family, who owned a large palace in Assisi and a castle on the slope of Mount Subasio. Her mother Ortulana, belonged to the noble family of Fiumi and was noted for her zeal and piety. Clare had two sisters, Catherine and Beatrice. In 1198 after Assisi destroyed the Hohenstaufen fort (Rocca Maggiore), tension between the citizens (minors) and the aristocracy (majores) surfaced. Most aristocrats, Clare's family among them, fled to their castles in the countryside and to Perugia. In November 1203, a peace agreement was made between the fighting factions. The destroyed towers in the upper town were rebuilt and the aristocracy gradually returned to Assisi.

In 1206 a merchant's son, Francesco di Pietro di Bernardone severed ties with his father, his guild and the city to follow in Christ's footsteps in penitence and poverty. Clare was in her late teens



Poor Clares in Prayer in the Convent Chapel

when Francis came to preach the Lenten Mission in the Church of San Giorgio at Assisi. The inspired words of the "Poverello" kindled a flame in the heart of Clare; she sought him out secretly and asked him that she too might live after the manner of the holy gospel. On the night of Palm Sunday, March 18th 1212 Clare secretly fled her father's home, accompanied by her aunt Bianca and another companion and went to the humble chapel of the Portiuncula, where Francis and his disciples met her bearing lights in their hands. Clare then laid aside her rich clothing and after St Francis had cut her hair, she was clothed in a rough tunic and veil. In this way, the young heroine began her own journey, following Jesus. Shortly afterwards, her sister Catherine and other young women joined her. Despite much opposition, she established a new form of monastic life for women, in which the whole community lived in

poverty. Clare spoke of "Lady Poverty" as being her constant companion, revealing her complete and utter dependence on God's Divine Providence for her well being, both spiritual and temporal. The community lived over the small Church of San Damiano. Clare was the first woman in history to write a rule for her community. It was approved by Pope Innocent IV just before her death. Clare died on 11th August 1253.

In art form, Clare is often depicted holding a monstrance. This has its origin in Clare's miraculous intervention during the attempted invasion of Assisi by the army of Frederick II in 1234. The soldiers preparing an assault on Assisi scaled the walls of San Damiano by night, spreading terror in the community. A sickly Clare calmly rising from her bed took the monstrance from the little chapel, adjoining her cell and proceeded to face the invaders at an open window against which they had already placed



Sr Judith, Mother Angela, Abbess, Sr Raphael, Sr Dominic and Sr Ann Kilonzo from Kenya and a member of the African congregation, 'The Little Sisters of St Francis'. Sr Ann spent her sabbatical year with the community in Drumshanbo. During her stay Sr Ann endeared herself to many and she was a constant reminder to us of the internationality of the Franciscan Family.

a ladder. It is said that as she raised the Blessed Sacrament and prayed: "O Lord protect the Sisters whom I cannot protect," the soldiers, who were about to enter the monastery, fell backwards as if dazzled and the others who were ready to follow them, took flight.

We, in Drumshanbo, are very fortunate that in 1864, one hundred and forty eight years ago, the Poor Clare nuns graced this countryside with their presence, offering to all the privilege of unbroken adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and the service of a listening ear, consoling words and prayer, in times of anxiety bringing consolation to all, through their empathy and prayer.

St Clare became a living model of the poverty, humility and mortification of St Francis. Her devotion to the Blessed Eucharist has been passed on to every generation of Poor Clares. The Poor Clares in Drumshanbo offer all the

opportunity, to participate in their devotional liturgies. The Convent Chapel is open to the public daily from 6am. The Prayer of the Church, Matins, Lauds, Terce, Sext, None, Evening and Night Prayer are celebrated at the appropriate hours. Other daily devotions include the Rosary which is recited twice daily and The Office of the Dead which is prayed in the late afternoon. The sisters launched a website this anniversary year. It can be viewed at: www.poor-clares.com/drumshanbo Here you will find full information about their lives and ministry.

It was significant that the 800th anniversary celebrations coincided with the Church's preparation for the Eucharistic Congress. On Thursday July 21st 2011 the sisters welcomed the Congress Bell, and the Convent Chapel remained open all night so that parishioners could come and pray. A Bell is very much part of convent life—a

gentle reminder to leave all aside and come to pray. Every hour, the Convent Bell tolls three times, assuring all who hear it, that the sisters are in prayer.

Since the millennium, the sisters open their garden to the people twice during the year. On Good Friday the Stations of the Cross are prayed. This is always a lovely family occasion. On Easter Sunday Morning, Dawn Mass is celebrated; this too has over the years drawn many people. As well as these two special occasions, there were many other opportunities during the year to join the sisters in prayer.

On Thursday, April 26th a day of prayer in preparation for the Eucharistic Congress, was held in the Adoration chapel from 10.00 am-10.00 pm. This was organised by the Parish Pastoral Council. This day of Prayer involved the school communities in the area and the members of every organisation in the parish visiting the Chapel and spending

time in prayer. Hundreds of parishioners attended and recorded their names in a special visitors' book for the occasion. It was a very memorable day.

Tuesday May 28th was an occasion of great joy as parishioner, Tony Gilhooly, having been ordained to the ministry of Diaconate in Maynooth on Sunday 26th, officiated for the first time at Evening Mass in the Convent Chapel.

On Sunday June 10th, Corpus Christi, when the traditional Eucharistic Procession is held, the oldest parishioner in the Parish of Murhaun, Mrs Mary Ann Heron, raised the Eucharistic Congress flag in the Convent grounds, to the joy and delight of all present. Praying the congress prayer, we united ourselves with all those gathered in the RDS for the opening ceremony of the congress. Mary Ann has been a most faithful adorer of the Blessed Sacrament in the Convent Chapel through the years.

Continuing their solidarity with all present at the Eucharistic Congress, from Monday June 11th until Friday June 15th parishioners gathered in prayer in the Convent Chapel at 10pm each night for night prayer and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Again a great number of people attended. On Friday 15th following Evening Mass, a procession from the Convent Chapel to the Famine Graveyard was led by Fr Peter Burke and the Parish Pastoral Council members with participants returning to the Convent garden for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and afterwards Night Prayer. Beautiful banners, the work of the nuns, depicting their life and work over the years, were carried in procession. This was a fitting

reminder of the service the nuns have offered and continue to offer. Despite black clouds floating in the evening sky, the sky obliged and not a drop of rain fell.

During the first three days of August, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, as is the tradition, the Portiuncula Mission was conducted by Fr Ulic Troy, OFM. The privilege of having this yearly mission in the Parish, is because the Convent Chapel is named, "The Chapel of St Mary of the Angels". It is only in chapels which bear this name that the Portiuncula Mission is held. August 2nd is the Feast of St Mary of the Angels. This was a great occasion of prayer in this special year.

The first Sunday of August is traditionally our Parish Cemetery Sunday. Because 2012 was the 800th Anniversary of the Poor Clare Order the sisters invited the parishioners to their cemetery for Sunday Mass. The beautifully kept cemetery, the final resting place of 117 sisters, "Ag seo fód m'aiseiri" (Here the place of my resurrection) and the recently restored Oratory in the Cemetery provided the perfect setting for Holy Mass which was celebrated by Fr Peter Burke, and assisted by Rev Deacon Tony Gilhooly. The adult choir added to the solemnity and prayerfulness of the Liturgy.

This Liturgy coincided with an historic event which was taking place later that afternoon in the ancient and beautiful Franciscan Friary in Multyfarnham, Co Westmeath. Four sisters from Drumshanbo joined over two hundred members of the Franciscan Family in Ireland to celebrate the life and charism

of St. Clare. The Franciscan Family consists of Friars, Poor Clares, Franciscan Sisters and secular Franciscans. The day consisted of seminars, social interaction and a sung Concelebrated Mass in honour of St. Clare. It was the first time ever for all the Franciscan Families to gather together in one place. Afterwards, in keeping with their lives of poverty the groups ate a packed lunch and headed back to the four corners of the country, full of joy.

On August 11th the final day of celebration of the 800th Anniversary of the Poor Clare Order dawned. It was the Feast of St Clare. At dawn that morning, in a simple liturgical ceremony, a young woman donned the habit of the Poor Clare Nuns and was received into the Order and given the name, Sr Mary Clare. The community was delighted. At noon, Bishop Colm O'Reilly, assisted by Fr Peter Burke PP and eleven other priests, celebrated the Mass of St Clare. The chapel was packed to capacity. There was a palpable joy in this holy place, because of Sister Mary Clare's reception into the Order. It was a fitting conclusion to a memorable year.

We are most grateful to the sisters for their great generosity, and I conclude with words of St Clare, used on the final day of the novena.

"I bless you as long as you live and beyond that. I bless you as much as I can and more than that, with all the blessings with which the merciful Father has blessed me and will bless his sons and daughters, and with all the blessings with which a spiritual father or a spiritual mother has blessed and will bless their spiritual sons and daughters. Amen!"