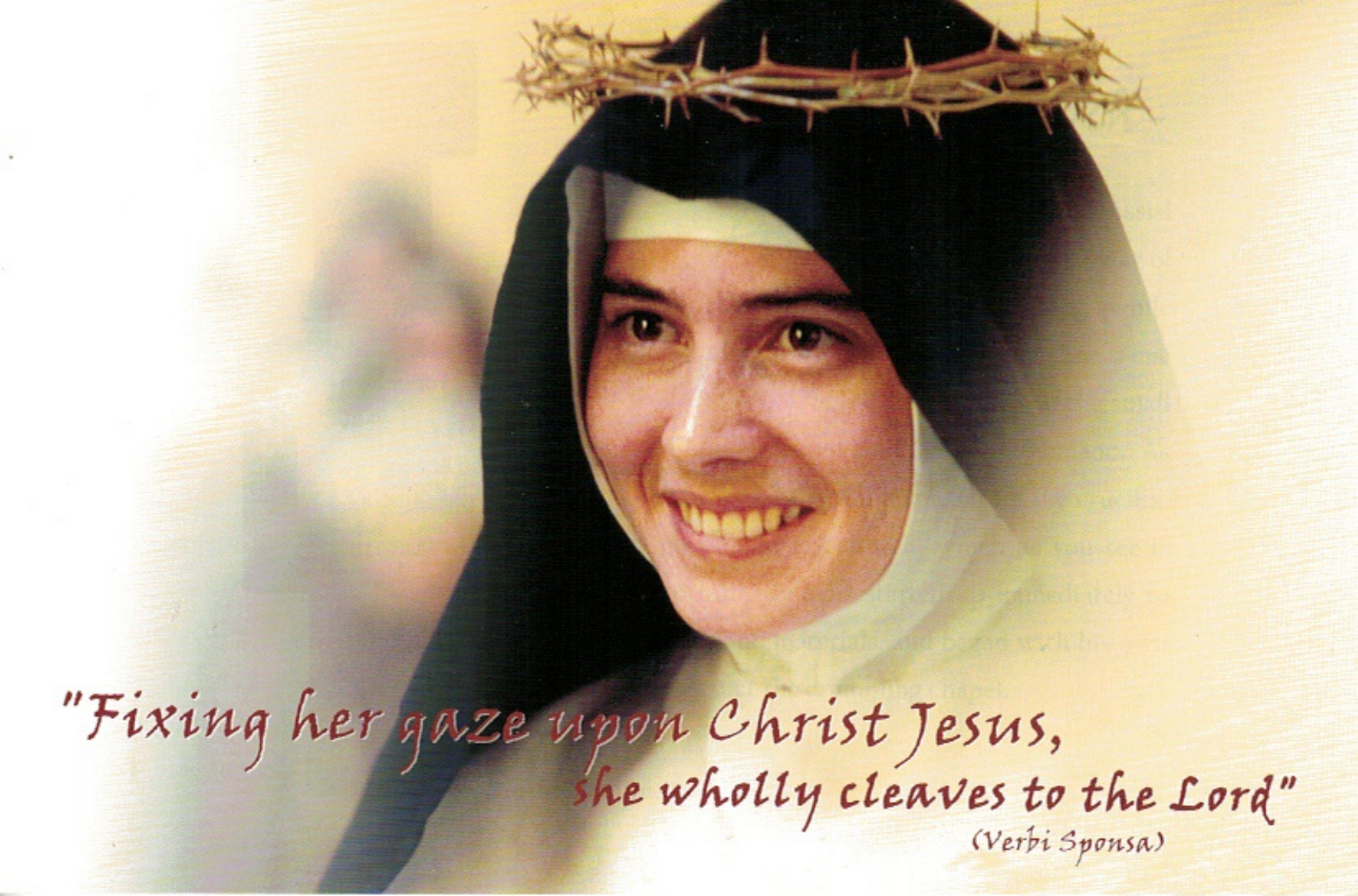




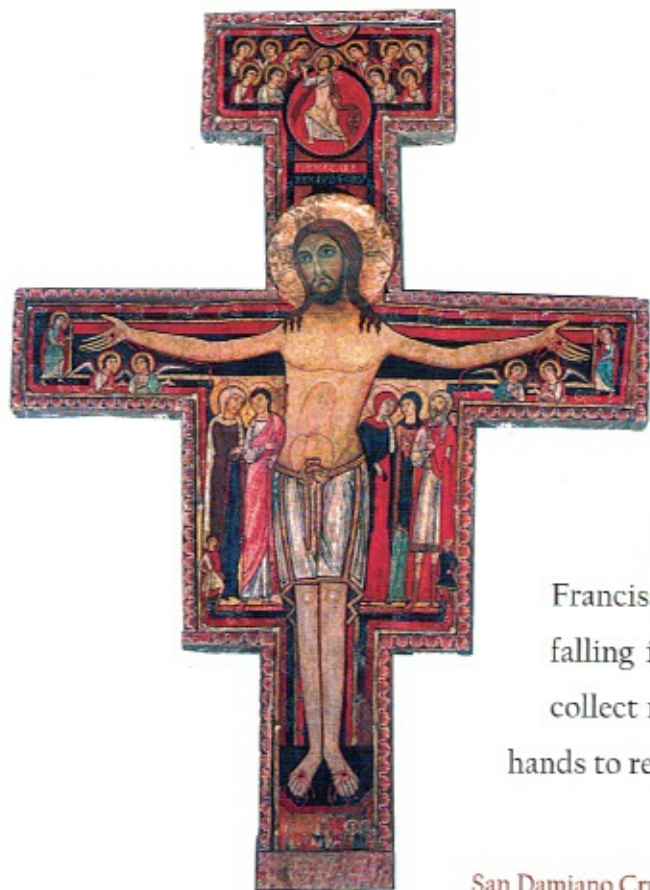
*The Cloistered
Poor Clare Nuns*



*"Fixing her gaze upon Christ Jesus,
she wholly cleaves to the Lord"*
(Verbi Sponsa)

Among the other favors which we have received and daily receive from our Benefactor, the Father of mercies, for which we ought to return the more thanks to that glorious Father, outstanding is our vocation.

Testament of Saint Clare



San Damiano Crucifix

Rebuild My Church -

After the young Francis of Assisi had resolved to follow the way of the Poor Christ, but was tarrying awhile in the way of the world, he knelt one day before the icon crucifix in the small dilapidated church of San Damiano. As he prayed, he heard a voice from the crucifix: Francis, go rebuild my church, which as you see is falling into ruin. Francis started up immediately to collect money and materials, and began with his own hands to reconstruct the crumbling chapel.

In hindsight, this work of rebuilding one small church by the impetuous Francis is seen as a misunderstanding of the Lord's much broader meaning. Francis was to be the founder of a vast and flourishing Order of poor, itinerant preachers of penance and peace, who would 'rebuild' the Church by their Gospel form of life. The Franciscan Order is the largest in the Church today, and God Himself promised Francis that it would endure to the end of time.

*"... in this place later on
will be ladies by whose
renowned and holy way
of living our heavenly
Father will be glorified
throughout all His holy
Church"*

- St. Francis

Yet hindsight here should not cloud the immediate meaning of the command from the crucifix, which Francis heard and obeyed. There is deep significance in

the reconstruction work on the church of San Damiano. Francis knew it to be a true response to the words of the Crucified. He set about working, impelled by great joy, and uttered a prophecy which the Lord later fulfilled. As St. Clare herself would one day write: 'At that time, climbing up on top of the wall of that church, he called out in a loud voice to some poor people lingering nearby: Come and help me in the work of the monastery of St. Damian, for in this place

later on will be ladies by whose renowned and holy way of living our heavenly Father will be glorified throughout all His holy Church.'

Indeed the whole Church was to be "rebuilt" by the total gift of self which St. Clare and her followers would make to the Crucified Bridegroom by their hidden life of prayer and penance. When one belongs totally to Christ, all that she is and does becomes a channel of His unseen grace which flows out over the world and touches souls that can be touched in no other way. When one's only mission is to belong totally to Christ, one rebuilds the Church. Burning like the lamps before the San Damiano crucifix, the cloistered Poor Clare nuns who had their beginnings in the little chapel



Church of San Damiano, Assisi, Italy

rebuilt by Francis, have never ceased to let the Light of Christ shine through their lives to give light to all in the House.

St. Clare ~



Clare was seventeen when she heard Francis preach penance and the love of God with such burning sincerity that those whose hearts were not likewise enkindled, promptly dubbed him mad. But Clare's heart heard in the appeal of Francis the voice of the Holy Spirit, enlightening her to do penance and inviting her to be His. This young noblewoman, who was not only rich but sought after, saw what the world calls 'everything' as being too little. Her heart could not be filled with less than God. She would belong utterly to Him.

This desire in the heart of every contemplative is quite understandably misunderstood, even by many whose values are Christian. It requires a grace from God Himself not only to live the contemplative life, but even to understand it. St. Clare herself was opposed by relatives, suitors,

