

Sr. Clare Maria of the Trinity and the Heart of Mary

Sr. Clare was born on **November 14, 1982**, in Derry, Northern Ireland. She entered the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother on **August 11, 2001**, at the age of 18. She took her first vows on **February 18, 2006**, taking the religious name of **Sr. Clare Maria of the Trinity and the Heart of Mary**. She took her perpetual vows on **September 8, 2010**. From the moment of her first vows, she served in the Servant Sisters' communities in Belmonte, Cuenca (Spain), Jacksonville, Florida (USA), Valencia (Spain), Guayaquil (Ecuador), and Playa Prieta, Manabí (Ecuador). She passed away during the earthquake in Playa Prieta on April 16, 2016.

Clare Crockett was born in a Catholic family. She received the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, but, during her teenage years, she no longer frequented the Church.

In Holy Week of the year 2000, at 17 years of age, she arrived at a Home of the Mother Retreat. She seemed both joyful and superficial. She was looking for sun and boys in Spain, and she found herself with a group of people who were celebrating intensely the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Our Lord.

That was not what she was expecting. From her childhood, **she had always dreamt of becoming a movie star, and she was working her way towards that dream. She knew that she had qualities:** a great artistic talent, a beautiful voice, an attractive physical aspect, and an astounding personality. At the age of 15, she had already been contracted to host a show for young people on Channel 4 – one of the biggest in the United Kingdom - and at the age of 17, the American channel Nickelodeon had shown interest in her.

She spent the first days of the Holy Week Encounter sun bathing and smoking. On Good Friday, someone said to her, “Clare, today you have to go into the chapel. It’s Good Friday.” She went into the chapel, but she stayed in the last pew. During the Good Friday liturgy, the faithful adore and kiss the Crucifix. Clare joined them. It was a simple gesture, but it was a changing point in her life. When the service was over, a sister found her crying as she repeated, **“He died for me. He loves me! Why hasn’t anyone ever told me this before?”** Clare had understood how much the Lord loved her and how much He had done for her. She understood that “Love is repaid by love alone,” and that the love the Lord asked of her meant a complete donation.

It was not easy to take the step. **When she went back to Ireland, she participated as a secondary actress in the filming of “Sunday,” directed by Charles McDougall. She got caught up again in the whirlwind of superficiality and sin that the world of cinema offered her.** She expressed herself in these terms, *“I lived very badly; I lived in mortal sin. I drank a lot, I smoked a lot, I began to smoke drugs. I continued with my friends, with my boyfriend. I continued in the same way. I didn’t have the strength to break with all this things, because I didn’t ask the Lord to help me.”*

However, the Lord insisted on “pursuing” her. One night, at a party, she exaggerated once again with the alcohol. When she was vomiting in the bathroom, she felt that Jesus said to her, *“Why do you continue to hurt me?”* God’s presence was so strong that she could not ignore it. Not long after, she was in her room in an important London hotel, reading her taping schedule for the next day. She felt such a great emptiness that she realized that her life had no meaning if she did not give it to Jesus Christ. **Neither her family’s pleas, nor her manager’s promises could stop her. On August 11, 2001, she gave her life to God as a candidate in the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother.**

Clare had to change many things in her life. With the bloody struggles for Northern Ireland’s independence from the United Kingdom, the difficult atmosphere in Derry, her hometown, had wounded her heart deeply. This was the first wound in need of healing. Yet Clare had surrendered to Jesus Christ’s immense love for her, and there was nothing that would stop her. She herself explained, *“At first, I was tempted to look back and say, ‘I want it back.’ But I understood that I had found an even greater love.”*

Following her years as a candidate and novice, she took her first vows on February 11, 2006. During the month-long spiritual exercises that she made during her novitiate, she received a grace to comprehend what the Lord had said one day to Saint Catherine of Siena: *“You are the one who is not, and I am He who is.”* **It was something that transformed her interiorly** and helped her, as she matured humanly and spiritually, to put the many gifts with which she was endowed at the Lord’s service for evangelization.

When she was still very young and with many things to learn, she arrived at **her first assignment in the community at Belmonte, in Cuenca, Spain.** There, the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother direct a residence for girls that come from families in difficulty. It is hard work, because the girls arrive from difficult family situations that mark them painfully. Sr. Clare **began to show her special gift to reach the souls of children and young people**, teaching them the truth and the love of the Lord, guiding them in the personal process to heal their interior wounds. **Her zeal for souls, especially those of the youth, was immense.**

Sr. Clare spent only a few months in that house, because she was sent to the new community that was about to be opened in the United States, **in Jacksonville, Florida, in October 2006.** The sisters began pastoral work at Assumption Parish and School. **The parish priest, Fr. Fred Parke, explains,** *“The children picked up on the enthusiasm that she had for the Eucharist. She overflowed with enthusiasm for the Lord. Once you had been with her, you knew you had to pick up that same enthusiasm. It was so catchy.”*

On September 8, 2010, Sr. Clare came back to Spain from the United States to take her perpetual vows.

Afterwards, she was sent to the community that the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother were opening in Valencia, Spain. Her superior, Sr. Isabel Cuesta, remembers: *“Sr. Clare had just taken her perpetual vows. She had given herself completely to Lord*

*and she did so with all her strength. (...) There was an example that Sr. Clare used a lot, which helped her to place her life in God's hands. **It was the example of a 'blank check.'** Each day she would give a blank check to the Lord, so that He could ask of her whatever he wanted."*

In Valencia, Sr. Clare's main apostolate was attending the spiritual needs of terminally ill patients in the Hospital in Mislata. It was a difficult apostolate, and it required a constant self-forgetfulness to try and understand the heart of each patient to guide them in the last moments of their lives.

In 2011 Sr. Clare returned to Belmonte. This time her superior was Sr. Ana Maria Lapeña, who very accurately sums up **Sr. Clare's spirituality in these words, "She gave everything with a great sense of humor."** Sr. Ana Maria admires to this day Sr. Clare's obedience and affirms, *"I still do not know what things she liked to do and what things were hard for her. I could never tell. And when I would ask her to do something, her answer was always, 'Of course!' And on top of that, she was always observing to see what was needed and so offer to help. At the end of that year I thought to myself, 'I want to learn how to obey like her.'"*

In October of 2012, Sr. Clare received a new destination where she would be able to put into practice her potential for evangelization: Ecuador. She was sent to the recently founded community in Guayaquil. The Servant Sisters had only been in Guayaquil for one year. The Sisters there give classes in a few different schools in very poor areas, and they work in a parish, evangelizing the youth and children. They put on retreats, summer camps, weekly formation meetings, etc. There was a lot of work to be done, and the excruciating Ecuadorian heat, in addition to the various tropical diseases she suffered, was exhausting. **Sr. Clare herself talked about the disposition she had when she reached Ecuador.** *"When I arrived in Ecuador, we were listening to the life of John Paul II, and in one of his apostolic visits they asked him, 'Holy Father, are you tired?' and he answered, 'The truth is...I don't know.' It was my first week here in Ecuador and I wanted to use that quote from John Paul II not as my motto, but as my way of life here. Sometimes you get tired, of course! Work tires you out, but even though I am tired, I hope to not feel sorry for myself and to keep giving."*

Two years later, Sr. Clare was sent on a mission to another community in Ecuador: Playa Prieta. There the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother run a school, the Holy Family Educational Center, where poor children can receive a high quality, Catholic education, thanks to the sponsorship of many benefactors. After the intense school day is over and the extracurricular activities have finished, the Sisters find time to work in the parish and to attend to many poor families. Under the scorching sun or in the torrential rains, the Sisters visit the impoverished houses in the rural area to evaluate the basic needs of each family and thus be able to give them Jesus Christ and the hope of Eternal Life, together with food baskets, medicine, and many other solutions to their material problems.

Several times throughout the year, the Communities of Servant Sisters and Brothers of the Home of the Mother, along with a group of young people, would visit **Puyo, located in the Ecuadorian Amazon, to evangelize.** Sr. Clare also took part, trekking

for hours through the treacherous paths with mud up to her knees and crossing the tributaries of the Amazon with water up to her chest, until she reached the humble villages of the *Shuar*, the greatly feared “Jivaroans” of long ago. The *Shuars* live in small communities of no more than thirty people. They cultivate the land with ancestral methods and live in great poverty. Sometimes the Sisters reached villages where the indigenous had never heard the Gospel and still practiced polygamy. There was practically no knowledge of the faith even in the villages which had occasionally received a visit from a priest and whose inhabitants were baptized.

Everyone always remembers Sr. Clare with her guitar in hand, her great companion in evangelization. They remember her singing and singing, even to the point of losing her voice, and, even then, she continued to sing, in spite of the heat, fatigue, and migraines. **Her way of singing reflected the way she lived.** Sr. Kelly Maria Pezo recalls, *“When she sang, she kept nothing back. And when she lived, she kept nothing back.”* **Despite the hustle and bustle and joy that always surrounded her, as the years passed by, Sr. Clare’s need for silence and moments to be alone with the Lord increased.**

It was evident to the Sisters to what extent Sr. Clare was giving of herself. To her, nothing seemed enough for Christ. This is shown in an e-mail she wrote to the founder of the Servant Sisters, Fr. Rafael, on April 8, 2015: *“Even though Good Friday is a sad day, I don’t know how to explain the joy and enthusiastic desire I have to suffer for the Lord. Everything seems little to me: the lack of sleep, fasting, the heat, having to attend to the people... Everything that could be difficult fills me with joy, because it brings me closer to the Lord... I spent a good amount of time in front of the cross asking for the grace to never, never forget everything that the Lord and Our Lady have suffered for me.”*

The earthquake that put an end to the lives of Sr. Clare and other five young aspirants, began at 6:58 P.M. on Saturday, April 16, 2016. Due to the strong floods that in the previous days had devastated Playa Prieta, the Sisters had lived a very difficult week. Just two weeks before the start of a new school year, they found themselves with a school that was in a state of total disaster: all of the classrooms were flooded; the recently painted walls, chairs, tables, doors, and a large quantity of teaching materials were destroyed by the water, because the Sisters had not had time to rescue them. For that reason, as soon as the water level began to recede, the Sisters got busy cleaning and trying to fix the disaster. They worked with joy and generosity. The work was hard, because, as the water subsided, it left several layers of mud. They were also worried about the many poor families in the area that had lost everything, or almost everything, as a result of the floods. **In the face of an extreme situation, they reacted with total donation. Contemplating the events posteriori, it seemed as though the Lord was preparing them.**

The earthquake began shortly after they had come back from Mass at the village’s parish. It was already dark. Sr. Clare and the group of young women who passed away were on the first floor. They had had guitar class and were about to pray the Rosary with the rest of the sisters and girls. The heavy quake caused the building to collapse,

with four Sisters and seven girls inside. Only five were rescued alive. Curiously enough, they had been talking about death during lunch that very day. Very convinced, Sr. Clare had said, *“Why should I be afraid of death, if I’m going to go with the One I have longed to be with my whole life?”*

To our surprise, the news of Sr. Clare’s death began to circulate on the mass media worldwide. We began to receive messages of prayer and support, but above all, testimonies of people who had been touched by Sr. Clare’s story and had decided to return to the Sacraments and to live their faith with greater intensity.