

**SFO GENERAL CHAPTER MESSAGE TO THE POOR CLARE
SISTERS ON THE OCCASION OF THE EIGHTH CENTENARY
OF THE BIRTH OF THE CHARISMA OF SAINT CLARE**



Brasile, 22-29 Ottobre 2011

Dear Poor Clares Sisters of the Fazenda Esperança (House of Hope),
May the Lord give you peace!

With fraternal affection I greet you on behalf of the Secular Franciscans from around the world, whose representatives began the celebration of the XIII General Chapter of the SFO yesterday in Sao Paulo, on the day of the liturgical memorial of Blessed John Paul II. With this greeting I would also like to extend my congratulations, and that of all the Capitulars, to all Poor Clares in the many monasteries scattered around the world to mark the eighth centenary of the beginning of the evangelical adventure of Saint Clare, which led to the founding of the Order of the Poor Clares. This evangelical charism is a gift from the *Father of Mercies* that was brought forth by the Holy Spirit from the testimony of the evangelical radical life of Saint Francis. This testimony awoke in *Clare di Favarone* a burning desire to follow Christ. As she would later tell her sisters in her Testament: "The Son of God has been made for us *the way*, which our blessed father Francis, his true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example." We also recall with admiration that the poverello (the poor one), while repairing the chapel of San Damiano, would invite the passersby to help in that task, prophesying that "ladies are yet to dwell here who will *give glory to our heavenly Father*, throughout his holy, universal church by their celebrated and holy manner of life."

In this year of your centenary, it gives us great joy to meditate with particular attention on the great gift of your vocation as a way of holiness and effective witness to the kingdom of God, especially through community life, prayer and contemplation, as well as poverty, simplicity,

work and humble service. It is worth remembering also that for Saint Clare, her vocation was brimming with hope for the future of God. We can discover all this in other phrases from the same Testament:

“Since the Lord has called us to such great things that those who are to be a mirror and example to others may be reflected in us, we are greatly bound to bless and praise God and be all the more strengthened to do good in the Lord. Therefore, if we live according to the form mentioned above, we shall *leave* others *a noble example* and gain, with very little effort, *the prize* of eternal happiness.”

Recalling today the admirable fidelity of Saint Clare to evangelical poverty, we rejoice and we are challenged to become better and better followers of Jesus according to the charism of St. Francis. Clare was a young woman who brought light to the world and the Church of her time with her deep and courageous love for the poor and humble Jesus.

On our part, we want to thank you because, by constantly renewing your response to God’s call, you give to the world and to us a living testimony of Christ's love. This testimony encourages us to seek God's countenance deep in our hearts, in the Word of life, in the sacraments lived with faith and in our engagement in building a history worthy of the sons and daughters of God. As Secular Franciscans, we are called to throw light upon temporal affairs and order them according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and with the spirit of Francis. Since contemporary society seems to have lost many authentic human and spiritual values, we face many challenges to our mission of evangelization. We ask you to accompany us always with intercessory prayer and fraternal affection so that we may be ever more faithful to our vocation. In several places, some of your sisters assist our local fraternities spiritually. We greatly appreciate your assistance.

For all of that, I wish to express to you that we, the members of the SFO and YouFra, have a deep sense of fraternal communion with you who are an integral and indispensable part of our Franciscan family, although, sometimes, we cannot be physically close. The various states of life within this family can be compared to a beautiful garden in which there is a diversity of plants and flowers, in which Saint Clare, San Francis’ little plant (seedling), and her spiritual heirs have a special place that beautifies and gives life and joy to the rest of the garden. All this reminds us of the richness of the spirituality of St. Francis who gave life to many forms of life because of the fruitfulness of the Spirit of the Lord.

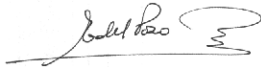
Today we want to share bread with you, dear sisters of the Monastery of the 'Fazenda Esperança.' It is a sign of the body of Christ united with our humanity. We know that Jesus himself chose this sign when he loved us to

the end. We make this concrete gesture as Capitulars, inviting all national fraternities of the SFO to appoint a delegation of brothers and sisters geographically close to the monasteries of the Poor Clares in their respective countries to visit and to express our vital reciprocal communion with all of them, also sharing some bread with them.

We appreciate this opportunity to meet, and invite you to pray for us intensely during these days in which we are gathered to analyze our life and to renew it in light of the Gospel in order to be bold and generous evangelizers of the men and women of our time, who live with joys and sorrows, with concerns, but also with hope in the God of life, of peace and goodness.

On behalf of the brothers and sisters of the SFO fraternity I say a fraternal goodbye,

São Paulo 23 ottobre 2011



Encarnación del Pozo

Ministro Generale OFS