



# Franciscan Sources: Writings and Early Biographies of Francis and Clare

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# Objectives and Goals

Participants will:

1. Familiarize themselves with the writings of Francis and Clare
2. Differentiate between historical biographies and hagiography
3. Name key early biographies of Francis and their significance

# Opening Prayer

Open with a song (suggestions include a version of Prayer before the Crucifix, Gaze Upon the Lord by Briega O'Hare, or selection from CD by Cathy Tiesel Nelson or Rufino Zaragoza)

Take one of the suggested writings (Praises of God, Canticle of Creatures, 2 LtF 61-63, 2 LAg 11b-14, LtOrd 26-29, 50-52, 2 LAg 20)

Prayer together aloud, then reflect silently

Share your thoughts with group

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving

Conclude with praying it aloud once again

# Process

- It is expected that participants are familiar with the lives of Francis and Clare
- Participants can move through powerpoint slowly, savoring the richness of each writing
- Select a writing or source on Francis or Clare
- Read it through and prayerfully reflect on its meaning
- Use discussion questions

# Discussion Questions

- What line or word or phrase caught your attention? Why?
- What do you think Francis or Clare meant to say for their hearers? What does this say to you today?
- What was a key point or theme in this writing or story? Why was that important to Francis or Clare?
- What questions would you have for Francis or Clare?
- What scripture passage is reflected in this writing?
- After studying the writings, discuss the theology of God, the world, being human through a Franciscan lens?
- Discuss the major themes in the writings as being simple and subject, fraternity, following in the footprints of Jesus, being creature, penance, etc.

# Sources

Writings and biographies of Francis and Clare can be found in the following sources:

Armstrong, R. and Brady, I. Francis and Clare: The Complete Works. New York: Paulist Press, 1982. (Available through Western Classics of Spirituality)

Habig, M. Omnibus of Sources. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973. (First English translation of sources)

Armstrong, R. Hellmann, W. and Short, W. Francis of Assisi: Early Documents vol I, II, III. New York: New City Press, 1999. (Most current accurate translation of sources)

Armstrong, R. Clare of Assisi: Early Documents. New York, Franciscan Institute Press, 1993; revised 2006.

# Abbreviations

Writing	Abbreviation
Prayer Before the Crucifix	PrCr
Earlier Exhortation (Letter to Faithful)	1 LtF
Later Exhortation (Second Letter to Faithful)	2 LtF
Letter to Clergy	LtCl
Letter to Custodians	LtCus
Letter to Rulers of the Peoples	LtR
Rule for Hermitages	RH
Early Rule (1221)	ER
Letter to a Minister	LtMin
Later Rule (1223)	LR
Letter to Anthony of Padua	LtAnt
Praises of God	PrsG


<b>Canticle of Creatures</b>	<b>CtC</b>
Canticle of Exhortation	CtExh
Letter to Entire Order	LtOrd
Letter to Leo	LtL
Testament	Test
Admonitions	Adm
Exhortation to Praise of God	ExhP
Office of Passion	OfP
Prayer Inspired by Our Father	PrOF
Praises to be said at all hours	PrsH
Salutation of Blessed Virgin Mary	SalBVM
Salutation of Virtues	SalV
True and Perfect Joy	TPJ




<b>The Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano</b>	<b>IC</b>
Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul	2C
Treatise on Miracles	3C
Life of St. Francis by Julian of Speyer	LJS
Versified Life of Francis by Henri d'Avranches	VL
Mirror of Perfection	I MP, 2MP
Sacred Exchange between Francis and Lady Poverty	ScEx
Anonymous of Perugia	AP
Legend of the Three Companions	L3C
Assisi Compilation (Legend of Perugia)	AC
Major (Minor) Life by Bonaventure	LMj, LMn
Little Flowers of Francis	LFI

# Background for approaching the writings:

- I. All texts are an approximation; two copies were originally made—one for the Order and one for the papal see. There are errors seen in copying texts and even some theological updating reflecting an interpretation of what is historically happening in Order at a given time. For example: in the ER, “suitable” tools is changed to “necessary” tools for working (showing an interpretation of Observant reforms)

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2. Language and translation: all the texts with exception of the Canticle were written in Latin. Francis' Latin was rudimentary, leaving him to resort to secretaries. Francis is thinking in vernacular and things may be lost in translation.

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3. Distinction between authentic versus original: original works were created by Francis alone; authentic works come from Francis' thoughts but may have ideas in previous prayers or popular practices of his day.
  4. Works of the movement versus work of Francis alone: some works such as the rules evolved through the experience of the brotherhood.


# Writings of Francis


## Prayer Before the Crucifix

- Narrative tradition would place this during Francis' conversion while at prayer before cross in San Damiano (2 C 9-11) around 1205/06
- The only prayer spoken with "I" (later prayers always use a plural)
- Influenced by prayer from the breviary, but changes it to be as inclusive as possible
- Every time Francis goes off to pray, the prayer is to know and do the will of God

## Early and Later Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance (Letter to the Faithful)

- Summarized Francis' whole thought and credo
- Penance is what God does for us, God does the initiating and we respond
- It is a domestic spirituality, available in all circumstances of life, in our own homes; there is no division between the sacred and the secular
- Conditions for doing penance: loving God passionately, hating our vices and sins, receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord, and doing charitable deeds

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- In the Eucharist, Jesus is concretely present; we are taught the meaning of being lesser, by humbling himself in the Bread
  - The dignity of our humanness is seen in the Incarnation
  - The consequence is relational—spouses, mothers, brothers/sisters—form a dwelling place, carry God spiritually, give birth to God, make the Incarnation present again
  - We live with a different kind of wisdom, understanding our creatureliness

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- In the climax, we are subject and servant—renouncing all social status and power as a way of relating with others
  - The intimacy expressed between Jesus and the Father is ours to have

# Letter to Clergy

- Would seem to date around 1220, after Francis' return from the East
- Specifically centers on the Body and Blood of Jesus, keeping the altar, reverence for the name and Word of God, keeping the liturgy and liturgy of hours
- Francis emphasizes seeing—the Eucharist was a visual experience—the Word was visual, concrete, sensual; a sacrament of divine presence

# Letter to Custodians

- Seems to date to 1220 after Francis returned from Holy Land
- Written to Custodians of Order, a liaison between provincials and friars of a region
- Makes reference to letters to clergy and rulers of people and requests they be handed out

# Letter to Rulers of People


- Again written after 1220
- Written to mayors and governors as opposed to kings or the emperor, those who were ultimately responsible for the people
- Exhorts rulers to penance, respectfully insists on changes of behavior; concern is for conversion of everyone
- Gives advice to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord worthily and to give praise to God in everything

# Rule for Hermitages

- Written sometime between 1217 and 1221
- The hermitage is meant to be a temporary experience of going to be in solitude with God; when they take the place of mother and son they interchange the roles so both may experience what it means to serve and be in solitude
- It has a community dimension, always 3-4 persons, and silence is broken each evening to share with each other
- The liturgy of the hours orders the day; purpose for life in hermitages was to seek the kingdom of God

# Early Rule

- Represents experience of the brotherhood from 1209 to 1221; is a way of life expressing the way they lived
- Outline: I—identity in the gospel; II—conditions for accepting life; III—life of faith; IV-VI—obedience as source of unity; VII-IX—means of support; X-XI—fraternal life; XII-XIII—presence in society; XIV—biblical foundation; XV—concerning travel; XVI—special mission among non-believers; XVII—means to accomplish mission; XVIII—chapters; XIX—catholicity; XX—Eucharist and penance; XXI—exhortation to penance; XXII—testament; XXIII—canticle of penance; XXIV—call to fidelity in church

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- ER is filled with scripture
  - Themes abound as living simply and subject to all, referring all good to God, thankfulness, penance as relational
  - Emphasizes loving with all our desires, affections and emotions; desire nothing else than God; God is all GOOD, magnificent adjectives of God—incomprehensible, indescribable, unfathomable, gentle, loving, delightful, delectable, sweet
  - Describes the wideness of the church

# Letter to a Minister

- Written between 1221-1223, intended perhaps for Peter Catanii or Elias??
- Gives insight into role of minister and understanding of chapter
- Instructs minister “not to wish another to be a better Christian”, accepting others as they are
- Desire mercy
- Very concrete example of minority in not lording it over another

# Later Rule

- Approved 1223, original preserved at the Sacro Convento in Assisi
- At the heart is chapters 5-6 as a way of living as “homeless housemates”
- Redacts much of scripture and is more legislative
- Text is more inwardly reflective on the life of the fraternity

# Letter to Anthony of Padua


- 2 Celano 163 speaks of letter, likely written 1223
- Anthony was probably present at chapter of 1221 and may have heard Francis speak about preaching and praying brothers (AC 103), where Francis asserts it is not the preachers who convert the people, but the prayers; might this be why Anthony was hesitant to leave the hermitage and begin preaching?
- Emphasizes not losing zeal for prayer but putting study into practice

# Praises of God

- An autograph of Francis, written Sept 1224, text was kept in Leo's pocket and probably given to the abbess at San Damiano in 1257
- Text is referred to in 2 C 49, LMj XI: 9
- Speaks to God and not about God, to who God is, not what God does
- An imminent, personal expression, calling God by name: love, charity, sweetness, humility, patience, beauty, goodness
- Blessing of Leo written on opposite side

# Canticle of Creatures

- Praise of God written during personal suffering: vs 1-9 at San Damiano in winter 1224-25; vs 10-11 summer 1225 for bishop and mayor during dispute; vs 12-13 1226 near death
- Middle verses also autobiographical, enduring with patience the suffering one has; appears to unlock the experience of the stigmata
- Adjectives and images of God echoed in 2 LtF and PrsG
- Sense of wonder regarding everything as GOOD, expecting nothing, so receiving everything as gift

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- Shows reverence and awe for the world as cosmic fraternity
  - Creation is reconciled space
  - All creatures are brother and sister
  - Everything is in right relationship—all things have meaning in and of themselves, not in reference to human beings; all live in equality side by side with humans, no domination, simple and subject
  - Our identity as creature is where we have our greatest dignity

# Canticle of Exhortation

- Referred to in Assisi Compilation 85
- Written to Clare and the Poor Ladies in 1225-26
- Reiterates life at San Damiano, paying attention to work of Spirit

# Letter to Entire Order

- Written 1225-26 addressed universally to all brothers in fraternity
- Prompted by papal permission to celebrate Eucharist in own churches
- Centers on Body and Blood of Jesus and implications in lives of friars
- Verses 5-6 focus on Word, mission to witness to the Word and reminds of fraternity and minority in times of advancing clericalization
- Verses 26-29 prayer—within our poverty we can receive him who held nothing back from us; summary of religious experience of being lesser and comprehending the Incarnation
- Francis describes his spiritual journey in final prayer—to do what we know you want us to do, to always desire what pleases you, to be cleansed,, enlightened and inflamed by Holy Spirit

# Letter to Leo

- Autograph preserved in Spoleto Cathedral, Leo had it in his possession until his death in 1271 at which time it went to the Poor Clares in Assisi
- Probably written some time 1224-26
- Intimate expression between friends

# Testament

- Written at Portiuncula shortly before death in 1226
- Verses 1-4 conversion experience of doing penance, showing mercy, experiencing sweetness, leaving the world
- Penance is what God does for us, being led; God takes us out of ourselves and moves us toward the other, turns us around
- Fraternity is essential—it is among others that God is experienced, the gospel heard
- Stresses mutual exemplarity, the coming of the brothers was God's revelation
- Being simple and subject to all—foolish for the sake of the cross, choosing to be minors and bearers of peace



Augustine | (vertical)


sweetness is turning within, looking up for  
God

Francis -- (horizontal)

turning outward toward another is  
sweetness

# Admonitions

- Cannot be dated precisely, but likely toward end of life
- Armstrong calls them the Cantic of Minority; general themes include poverty, humility, obedience
- Key themes: Adm 1: “seeing” is mentioned 17 times—must see through the Spirit; attitudes of humility, obedience, bearing with suffering; Eucharist allows us to see God; God makes us available to continue the Incarnation
- Adm 2: the fundamental sin is appropriating to ourselves what is not ours; we correct sin by becoming simple and subject

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- Adm 5: everything in creation is actively praising God simply by being what they are; human condition is full of dignity, it is what Jesus embraced; praises poverty, humility and vulnerability
  - Adm 15: speaks of being true peacemakers, those who bring peace through reconciliation and patient suffering, through acceptance of weakness; prophetic witness is often in the unassuming, far from spectacular ways of daily acknowledging all that belongs to God

# Exhortation to the Praise of God

- Almost impossible to date, between 1213-1223
- The entire universe and all people are invited to praise
- Preference for the humble and simple things, as children and birds
- Direction of prayer moves from high to low, from fear to praise, from invitation to praise and to praise itself, then from praise to supplication

# Office of the Passion

- Undated, but seems around 1223
- Celebrates the entire mystery of salvation
- Psalms were composed freely by Francis, taking verses from the Roman psalter predominantly; personalizes the psalms, shows the dynamic of Christ speaking to the Father, never wavering in love
- Contains an antiphon to the Blessed Virgin Mary and prayers
- Rubrics not developed by Francis but came later

# Prayer Inspired by Our Father

- Undated, but should be considered a mature reflection of Francis
- Follows a tradition of commentary on the Our Father, going back to the Fathers of the Church
- A type of catechism of prayer, referred to as both an exposition and a paraphrase

# Praises to be said at all the Hours

- Originality difficult to judge because it is mainly biblical passages except for the final prayer
- Probably written late in his life
- Is an affirmation concerning the **GOODNESS** of God, an appeal to creation to praise and bless, focuses on holiness of God

# Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

- Referred to in 2 C 198
- Probably written after 1220, but date uncertain
- Mary, Mother of God, becomes church; we are church, we are to be as Mary
- Titles associated with Mary—palace, temple, house, vestment, handmaid, mother
- Written as a sermon-song for the brothers to use as they went about preaching

# Salutation of Virtues

- Undated
- Written as sermon-song; referred to in 2 C 189
- Virtues represent an indwelling of the Spirit, an opportunity to respond to power of God
- Pairs wisdom/simplicity; poverty/humility; charity/obedience
- Are feminized—same meaning as asking brothers to be mothers; looks at power in different way

# True and Perfect Joy

- Probably written after 1220
- Scholars suggest this was a way Francis taught the brothers
- Refers to patient suffering and sincere joy in the acceptance of physical suffering or mortification and rejection and insults, especially that which results from sin

# Writings of Clare

- Because of different styles, seems likely two secretaries were involved, some suggest Leo was her scribe
- Clare was an educated woman; she was likely taught to read and comment on scripture
- She cites mostly Song of Songs, synoptic gospels, psalms and Paul's letters
- “sister” used 96 times throughout writings—fraternal life was key

# First Letter to Agnes

- Written 1234
- Focuses on exchange, espousal with Jesus, acceptance of poverty
- Poverty allows close relationship—makes you spouse, mother, sister
- Connects poverty to Passion and Death of Christ, cross is significant
- Role of desire

# Second Letter to Agnes

- Written 1235
- Essence of obedience within context of relationship
- Gazing, considering, contemplating; but can't stop there—must imitate; is a way of life not just a formula of prayer
- One thing necessary is poverty

# Third Letter to Agnes

- Written 1238
- Mission is to be a co-worker with God
- Enclosure is space where Christ is given birth
- Remain faithful in contemplation—placed in the context of conversion
- Mirror imagery
- Love totally the one who gave his life for you, images of womb and mansion, Mary as an example, carry Christ spiritually (parallels to LtOrd, 2 LtF, Adm 1, ER 22)
- Exhortations on fasting reflect style of personal responsibility and discernment

# Fourth Letter to Agnes


- Written 1253
- Christ as a mirror—is whole way of life—  
sisters are to become mutual mirrors  
reflecting Christ in each other
- Banquet of espousal, eternity already  
begun here

# Letter to Ermentrude

- The text as preserved is not authentic; appears to be a summary of letters written to Ermentrude of Bruges, who lived as a hermit, but upon hearing of Clare, made a pilgrimage to Assisi, and later transformed her hermitage into a monastery of Poor Clares
- Contents are close to letters of Agnes but central themes of poverty are lacking

# Rule of Clare

- Written and approved just before her death in 1252-3
- Essential for Clare was a lack of possessions, even common ownership, and a close relationship with the friars
- Inserts the original form of life and last will written by Francis for her
- Uses the title “Poor Sisters” echoing “Lesser Brothers”; intentionally does not use nun, determined to inculcate values of minority and fraternity

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- Vision of community was a unity of mind and heart; mutual relationships and poverty were related in non-hierarchical manner
  - Displayed high levels of cooperation and sharing; recognition of personal responsibility; consultation with sisters on all matters
  - Uses much of Francis' rule and writings showing a mutual charism of gospel life

# Testament of Clare

- Lots of questions surround authenticity of document
- One theory supports Leo wrote document after Clare's death to strengthen argument for poverty; Leo considered a close friend of Clare and an authentic interpreter of her thoughts
- Reflects an understanding of mission as mutual mirroring; life held together by mutual exemplarity, not juridical norms

# Blessing of Clare

- Mentioned in Legend of Clare 45—describes how Clare blessed all on her deathbed
- Leo was present
- Author of Blessing is same as author of Testament, given language, style, usage, etc (might both have been Leo?)
- Mentions mysticism of servanthood and sisterhood
- Uses OT blessing same as Francis used for Leo, both imitates Francis and makes explicit connection of Poor Ladies with friars

# Franciscan Sources

Hagiography: a particular genre of literature that operates out of its own perspective and rules

- It is not a biography as in dealing with facts
- The author is more interested in communicating the meaning and intention of a saint's life
- It is a sacred biography, a narrative about the life of the saint; the text is about showing how a person became holy
- It is more interested in the meaning of the saint's life than in the facts of history

# Sacred Biography

- “Sacred biography refers to a narrative text of the vita of the saint written by a member of a community of belief. The text provides a documentary witness to the process of sanctification for the community and in doing so becomes itself a part of the sacred tradition it serves to document.” (T. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 16)
- The author is trying to achieve a balance in the saint’s life between imitability and admirability

# The Life of Francis (First Celano)

- Was written in 1228/1229 by Thomas of Celano
- It was the first biography on Francis. Pope Gregory IX directed Thomas to write a life of Francis to inform people of the life of Francis for the purpose of renewal of the Church, to show Francis as a saint committed to the Church and to fight heresies.
- Francis was portrayed as a saint, a model exemplar to be imitated.
- It used Francis' writings with the purpose of identifying the spiritual role of the Order in the Church which was to preach penance and conversion.
- He highlights the stigmata in *1C91 ff*

## The Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul (Second Celano)

- Was written in 1245-1247 by Thomas of Celano
- In the Chapter of 1245, the General Minister Crescentius of Jesi ordered Thomas to write it. He requested all friars to record and transmit the remembrances of Francis to Thomas. It is very different than *1C*. It tells the stories of Francis especially of his companions.
- It focuses on “baptismal grace”, the issue of poverty, the interpretation of the Rule, the distinction of ownership versus use

## Treatise on the Miracles of St. Francis (Third Celano)

- Was written in 1250-1252 by Thomas of Celano
- It is based on the *Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul*. Thomas was asked by John of Parma to complete the trilogy, so the miracles are signs through which God had authenticated the holiness of Francis and his extraordinary deeds attesting to God's power working through him.

## Life of St. Francis by Julian of Speyer

- Was written in 1232/1235 and attributed to Julian of Speyer
- It was written for table reading for the friars in Paris and for formation of clerical ministry. It focuses on preaching which leads to conversion and confession
- Francis is the model of virtue and the “universal friar”
- Julian talks about the rebuilding of the three churches which is the foreshadowing of the three orders.
- He focuses on institutional renewal and develops Francis’ theme of Eucharist as a sign of martyrdom
- Distances Francis from concrete context of Umbria— becomes a saint for all places
- Moves Francis in the direction of closer conformity to Christ; tends to accentuate the miraculous in Francis’ life

## Versified Life of Francis by Henri d'Avranches

- Was written in 1230-1235 by Henri d'Avranches
- Was written for nobility, for entertainment for Pope Gregory IX's Courts
- Written about morality and uses Celano's writings in poetic texts
- No new content from Celano but inflates data

# Mirror of Perfection

- Compiler rearranges texts from Assisi Compilation into a new order; includes Admonitions as final chapter
- Written sometime after 1318
- Emphasis on perfection and virtue; significant shift in vocabulary from following to imitating
- Points to Francis as the supreme authority at a time in the Order when controversy existed over interpretation of the Rule

## Sacred Exchange between Francis and Lady Poverty

- Controversy exists as to dating (anywhere from 1235 to 1270s) and to authorship
- Concept of poverty portrayed: poverty for Francis was not poverty for itself, but for the sake of being a minor
- Level of poverty this text demands is strong
- Written as a medieval mystery play
- Geography important; poverty is not in the city “the world is our cloister”

# Anonymous of Perugia

- Written by John of Perugia (a disciple of Giles) in 1240-41
- 60% is new information, remainder is borrowed from Celano
- Stresses the origins of the early fraternity into an order
- Less explicit connection to Assisi—emphasis placed primarily on mission and ministry
- Text shows the transition from lay brothers to clericalism as pre-ordained (Francis even predicts it)—text justifies a current reality

# Legend of the Three Companions

- It was written circa 1247 and attributed to Brothers Leo, Rufino and Angelo
- General Minister Crescentius requested stories on Francis
- It retells the story of the early fraternity, focuses on Francis as the founder of the fraternity.
- It “unofficially” offers the truth of Francis - they emphasize that Francis was a saint in the ordinary way that he lived life as a human being.
- The incident of the leper and the crucifixion that speaks to Francis completes his conversion . The mission is connected to the Christ crucified. Christ crucified is the key event.
- What happened at San Damiano clarified the mission – to speak of peace, you must have it in your heart. The mission to justice and people is for all people and to bring about the Gospel message
- New information presents image of Francis as prophet—everything that happened is foretold

## Assisi Compilation (Legend of Perugia)

- Assembled in 1311 from a compilation of stories believed to have originated from the early companions “we who were with him”
- Very human portrait of Francis—intimate relationship of the early fraternity
- Shows the brotherhood held together by mutual exemplarity not juridical structures
- Francis viewed as model and example

# Major (Minor) Life of Francis by Bonaventure

- Was written in 1260-1263 by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio
  - He, as General Minister, decided to write a life of St. Francis at the Chapter of Narbonne of 1260. The order was expanding to 30,000
  - It emphasizes the Rule and points to the stigmata of Francis, the cross, Christ crucified
  - The stigmata for Bonaventure is Christ crucified, a life that is to be attained by every Christian. The Prologue is apocalyptic and reflects a hierarchical ascent to God
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- *The Minor Legend Life (LMn)*
  - Was written in 1260-1263 by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio or an assistant
  - Its purpose was for liturgical use – the Divine Office. It is a shorter version of LMj and gives a summary of the life of Francis

# Little Flowers of Francis

- Dates from 1390-1396
- Is written not for the friars but for the general faithful
- Author is not interested in “what happened” but rather “what was meant”
- Image of Francis as the *alter Christus*
- Francis and his companions are models of evangelical perfection

## Process of Canonization of Clare

- Clare died August 11, 1253; at her funeral the next day, Pope Innocent IV declared that the Office of Virgins should be celebrated, effectively proclaiming her sanctity
- Within two months, Innocent establishes the commission to investigate her holiness
- Process took place between November 24-29, 1253 at the monastery of San Damiano, interviewing 16 sisters and 5 citizens of Assisi
- The Early Documents contains the testimonies given and the Bull of Canonization

# Legends of Clare

- Prose Legend written 1255-56
- Commissioned by Pope Alexander IV
- Used predominantly for liturgy
- Versified Legend written 1254-55 and is addressed to Alexander
- Shows development of life, conversion, manner of life and miracles to promote an official picture of the saint