

July 13

SAINT CLELIA BARBIERI

Foundress of the Minims of the Sorrowful Virgin

Clelia Barbieri was born on 13 February 1847, at Le Budrie in the Diocese of Bologna, Italy. Her early years were passed in great poverty. In 1868, together with three companions, she founded a community to care for abandoned girls and to provide for their education. She died at the age of twenty-three on 13 July 1870, at Le Budrie where her body is venerated. She was canonized by Pope John Paul II on April 9, 1989. From the small group at Le Budrie was born the religious family of the Minims of the Sorrowful Virgin.

From the common of saints and blessed of our Order, or from the common of virgins.

Office of Readings

SECOND READING

Choose one of the following readings.

Letter to Jesus by Blessed Clelia Barbieri

(Ex L. Gherardi, *Il sole sugli argini*, Bologna, 1970, pp. 161-163)

Jesus, my beloved Spouse

There are many oral traditions concerning Blessed Clelia, words attentively heard and preserved in pious memory by her first companions; but we have only one document written in her own hand - the letter, *Jesus, my beloved Spouse*.

This letter, which deserved to be called the testament of Mother Clelia, was written on 31 January 1869, a year before she died. During this time, as her body became weak, the love of Christ grew more and more powerful within her and her spirit more enlightened to investigate the riches of God's grace. This young girl, with little education or culture, learned the way to supernatural knowledge by her own prayer and contemplation, and above all, in the humble service of the community. She seemed to drink in the love of God from a full-flowing spring:

"Jesus, my beloved Spouse, I want to write this down to impress it forever on my mind. On January 31, 1869, God granted me an extraordinary grace. While I was in church during the celebration of Mass, my soul was seized by an impetus of divine fervour impelling me to sacrifice my will in everything, and make it my aim each day to please God alone.

"This is indeed my desire, but I lack the strength to accomplish it. O great God, you see my constant longing to love you and never displease you, yet through the frailty of my nature, I often offend you. Lord, open your heart that mine may be enkindled by flames from your heart of love, that I may be consumed with a like love.

"Do you not know, beloved daughter, how much I love and cherish you, how passionately I long to make you radiant with high sanctity? Be strong in confidence, be of good heart, and all things will work together for your good; but if anything seems to work against you, entrust it to my heart, and I, with my Father's help, will give you rest.'

"Then do not forget this poor sinner, your servant, Clelia Barbieri. At the end of her short life, Blessed Clelia attained that experience of God which is considered to be the highest stage of the mystical life. The autograph of this letter -this brief testimony to a great love- is reverently preserved in the first house of the congregation, as are other personal articles used by Blessed Clelia.

RESPONSORY See Matthew 11:25; 1 Corinthians 1:27

V. I give you thanks, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.

R. What you have hidden from the learned and clever you have revealed to the merest children,

alleluia.

V. God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. R. What you have hidden from the learned and clever you have revealed to the merest children, alleluia.

Alternative.

God has chosen the weak of the world

Clelia was born in the town of Le Budrie, in the Diocese of Bologna, on 13 February 1847, of very religious parents, Giuseppe Barbieri and Giacinta Nanetti. Her fellow villagers and neighbours eked out a meager living by the work of their hands, but, because of the lack of resources, were often ill. When Clelia was eight her father died of cholera.

The young girl learned from her mother not only how to sew and weave wool, but, more importantly, how to love God and live a religious life. She often asked her mother: "Tell me about God," or "What can I do to become holy?" She regularly went to church, and spent time at prayer. She earnestly applied herself to the study of the catechism. By nature she was gentle and sweet, and remarkably innocent. When she wove hemp for marketing, she used to say to her mother who was urging her on to greater speed: "Mother, we're being paid for this work, so we have to do it as well as we can." She developed her soul and mind by spiritual readings, especially the work of Saint Alphonsus Liguori entitled *Pratica di amare Gesù Cristo*, and the *Filotea* of Giuseppe Riva. She availed herself of the competent spiritual guidance of Don Gaetano Guidi, pastor of the town of Le Budrie, and with his help made great strides forward in love of God and Christian perfection. Urged on by this man of God and her own natural inclinations, she wanted to dedicate herself entirely to the service and well-being of her fellow human beings. With this in mind she and other young people of the town began to work zealously at helping the poor and instructing the young in Christian doctrine. After Vespers on Sundays she and her three companions met regularly and they would speak together about God. Gradually they decided upon sharing a common life. "We're so poor," Clelia used to say, "that we won't be accepted into any institute. So we'll join together in a common life, dedicating ourselves entirely to God and neighbour."

As a result, on 1 May 1864, the four young girls, trusting in God alone, moved into a small house, locally known as "The Master's House." There they established a quiet place withdrawn from the world, called "The Retreat of Le Budrie," which is rightly considered the cradle of the Congregation of the Minims of the Sorrowful Virgin. At first the primary concern of the members was to care for girls deserted or neglected by their parents, and train them in good living and domestic work. A little later, during a retreat, Clelia wrote a rule of common life, which stressed prayer, sacrifice, work and love. The group of sisters chose as their patrons the Sorrowful Virgin Mary, whose devotion the Friar Servants of Mary had fostered in the Diocese of Bologna, and Saint Francis of Paola, the most humble of the servants of God whose help they sought in the necessities of life. Gaetano Guidi, the pastor, appointed Clelia superior of the group, for God had enriched her with heavenly gifts. This is shown by the only handwritten letter of hers which we have, a letter entitled "Jesus, my beloved Spouse. "

Meanwhile, while Clelia progressed rapidly through the stages of sanctity, the first stages of tuberculosis appeared in her fragile body. For seven months she was confined to bed. Finally, on 13 July 1870, after saying: "Be of good cheer! I'm going to Paradise, but I'll always be with you, and never desert you," she went to the Lord.

On the first anniversary of her death, as if in fulfilment of her promise, while her companions were gathered in prayer in what had been her bedroom, a voice-which all present thought to be that of Clelia -was heard responding to the prayers of the sisters.

From this modest beginning, the Congregation of the Minims of the Sorrowful Virgin grew. Clelia was beatified by Pope Paul VI on 27 October 1968. Her body is venerated in the chapel of the Congregation's motherhouse at Le Budrie.

RESPONSORY See 1 Peter 5:5; Matthew 11:29

V. In your relations with one another, clothe yourselves with humility.

R. God is stern with the arrogant but to the humble he shows kindness.

V. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

R. God is stern with the arrogant but to the humble he shows kindness.

PRAYER

Father, in Clelia Barbieri you gave the Christian community an example of Gospel life celebrated in the service of others. Grant that, like her, we may do the work of the Lord, as servants of his kingdom. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.