



**St. Agnes of Assisi (Poor Lady)**  
**[1197/1198 – November 16, 1253]**  
**(Feast Day: November 19)**

(1197 – 1253), Catherine (Caterina) was born in Assisi. She was the younger sister of St. Clare. In 1212, at the age of fifteen and sixteen days after Clare left her home, Catherine left home.

Clare had originally joined the convent of the Benedictine nuns of San Paulo, near Bastia, under Francis' orders. When her relatives found her and attempted to force her back into their home, she refused and professed that she would have no other husband than Jesus Christ. In order to give her the greater solitude she desired, Francis sent Clare to Sant' Angelo in Panzo, a convent of beguine\*-like sisters. Clare's sister joined her at this monastery.

The family tried to bring Catherine back by force. Monaldo, who was Catherine's uncle, drew his sword to strike his niece, but his arm allegedly dropped to his side, withered and was useless. The others dragged her out of the monastery by her hair, striking her and kicking her repeatedly. Catherine's body reportedly became so heavy, perhaps due to the help of her sister's prayers, that her assailants dropped her in a field nearby. Catherine's relatives, purportedly realizing that something divine protected her, allowed the sisters to remain together.

The two remained at Sant' Angelo until a separate dwelling was built for them next to the church of San Damiano. At San Damiano, **St. Francis gave Catherine the name of Agnes**: "You have suffered like the virgin martyr, Agnes of Rome. In her honor and in memory of your courage, you will be called Agnes." He cut her hair with his own hand and gave her the habit. [Note: Agnes of Assisi is **not** the person who is known as either *Agnes of Prague* or *Agnes of Bohemia*.]

Agnes matched her sister in devotion to prayer and in willingness to endure the strict penances which characterized their lives at San Damiano. In 1221, a group of Benedictine nuns in Monticelli (near Florence) asked to become Poor Clares. St. Clare sent Agnes to become abbess of that monastery. Agnes soon wrote a rather sad letter about how much she missed Clare and the other nuns at San Damiano.

After establishing other Poor Clare monasteries in northern Italy, Agnes was recalled to San Damiano in 1253 when Clare was dying. Clare died August 11, 1253. Three months later, on November 16, 1253, Agnes at the age of 56 died at the monastery of San Damiano of natural causes. Agnes was canonized in 1753.

\* The Beguines and the Beghards were Christian lay religious orders that were active in Northern Europe in the 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their members lived in semi-monastic communities but did not take formal religious vows. That is, although they promised not to marry "as long as they live as Beguines" to quote one of the early Rules, they were free to leave at any time. Beguines were part of a larger spiritual revival movement of the 13<sup>th</sup> century that stressed imitation of Christ's life through voluntary poverty, care of the poor and sick, and religious devotion.

*[Bold was added for emphasis and sometimes for clarification.]*