

MODERN SAINT

God's new star: cause for beatification begins for Sister Clare Crockett

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On Sunday 12 January, in the Cathedral of Alcalá de Henares (Spain), the Cause for the Beatification of **Sister Clare Crockett** (14 November 1982 - 16 April 2016) was solemnly opened. The young girl from Northern Ireland, a member of the Servants of the Mother

Focolare and a victim of the terrible earthquake that struck Ecuador on 16 April nine years ago, is now recognised with the title of Servant of God.

The ceremony was presided over by Monsignor Antonio Prieto Lucena, whose diocese was given jurisdiction over the case after the approval of the Ecuadorian Archdiocese of Portoviejo (where the nun died) and the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. As the Bishop of Alcala explained, the tribunal chosen to examine the cause at the diocesan level will now have the task of "thoroughly investigating the life, virtues, reputation for holiness and the graces and favours received through the intercession of Sister Clare, in order to prove the heroic nature of her virtues".

If the heroic virtues are proven, Sister Clare can be declared Venerable, a step that precedes her eventual beatification (for which a miracle through her intercession must be recognised) and canonisation (for which a second miracle is usually required). In short, these are the fundamental stages before Sister Clare Maria of the Trinity and the Heart of Mary can be declared a saint.

While we wait for the Catholic Church to examine the cause with due prudence, Sister Clare's reputation for sanctity has already spread halfway around the world. And the testimonies show how Jesus continues to use this Bride as a favoured instrument for His plan of salvation. "Her overflowing joy has led many souls, especially young people, to discover that true happiness is found in God alone. The coherence of her life and her total dedication in the various apostolates she carried out in Spain, the United States and Ecuador, succeeded in conveying the message that only God can satisfy the heart of mankind when it is given completely to Him, without denying Him anything," **said Sister Kristen Gardner, Sister Clare's postulator**, in the Cathedral on Sunday, formally requesting the opening of the cause.

Sister Kristen recalled that Sister Clare's family had requested that their daughter to be buried in her home town of Derry, Northern Ireland. At first, the Focolare servants believed that their sister had a special mission from heaven to evangelise her homeland. But they soon discovered that Sister Clare's mission was much broader, as testified by the messages and e-mails received by her religious family "from more than 50 countries". The testimonies are very varied. Desperate souls on the verge of suicide have regained hope; university students lost in vice have received the strength to return to the Lord; lukewarm Catholics have regained the desire to be saints," the Postulator summarised. Boys and girls have been inspired to choose the consecrated life. Countless seminarians and religious have said that Sister Clare saved their vocation when they thought they had no choice but to turn their backs on God. Sister Kristen

explained that a common thread in these testimonies is the fact that "many describe Sister Clare as their friend, even without having met her. There are also testimonies of graces on the physical level; people who "speak of miracles" and who "turn to Sister Clare in their needs and feel heard. They ask for relics and for her to be declared a Saint".

A request - reiterated in the solemn ceremony on Sunday 12 January - that would have been humanly unthinkable 25 years ago, when Clare Crockett was a teenager dreaming of becoming a Hollywood actress. She had all the makings of a star: talent, charm, an established career in television and theatre, a manager. A brilliant child of our times, one might say, who had abandoned religious practice after her first sacraments.

Then came the 21st of April 2000, Good Friday, when the then 17-year-old was in Spain for a few days to take part in a pilgrimage - "arranged" by a friend - much against her will. On Good Friday, our Clare, who was used to staying outside and smoking, entered the chapel only when she was urged to do so. At the moment of the Adoration of the Cross, she too stood up, went to the altar and kissed the nail that pierced Jesus' feet. At the end of the liturgy, a nun found her crying: "He died for me. He loves me! Why has no one told me this before?", she said.

On her return to Northern Ireland, Clare relapsed into her former lifestyle of sexual promiscuity and alcohol, to which she added drug smoking. One night, in the toilet of a nightclub, on the verge of vomiting from too much alcohol, she heard the Lord saying to her within: "Why do you keep hurting me?" It was the final turning point that made her realise the evil she was doing and how she was wasting her life. The call of Jesus to consecrate herself to Him was so strong that the temptations, the promises of her manager and the pleas of her family had no effect. On 11 August 2001, the feast of the saint whose name she bears, Clare entered the Focolare Sisters as a postulant.

From then on, her life was a crescendo of self-giving to God and to others in the various places to which she was called. As a true spouse of the Crucified One, a year before her death, she wrote in an email to Father Rafael Alonso, founder of the Servants of the Focolare: "Although Good Friday is a sad day, I cannot explain the joy and enthusiastic desire I have to suffer for the Lord. Everything seemed small to me: the lack of rest, the fasting, the heat, having to listen to people... Everything that can cost me fills me with joy, because it keeps me close to the Lord. (...) I remained before the cross for a long time, asking for the grace never to forget all that the Lord and Our Lady suffered for me" (8 April 2015). Death came to her, as it did to her heavenly Spouse, at the age of 33. It was 16 April 2016, and on that day, during her last meal, according to the

testimony of those who were with her, she had said: "I am not afraid of death. Why should I be afraid of death when I go to Him with whom I have longed to be all my life?".