

In the immensity of existence, Mother Clara found a fertile soil through pain. It was May 31, 1856, at the age of 13, when Libania experienced the goodbye of nostalgia and the infinite love of her mother. After the death of his spouse, Libania's Father, armed with courage, prepared his children for what life would demand from them. He did it with words of immense tenderness, but also with christian firmness, motivating them to face with heads held up high, the hardships of life without ever turning back to their duty. He helped them to overcome emotion, to wipe away the tears and to smile with their lips still trembling. With the same courage he saw the five children leave home and go to the shelter Homes, as he was unable to work and bring up the five children alone. One month after entering the Asilo of Ajuda, the Father of Libania also contracted the yellow fever, leading to his death at the age of 45. At that time of cholera everything was done to avoid contagion. Therefore, Libania was not able to neither see her Father nor say goodbye to him. These were profound developments in such a young personality, but even more profound was the faith received from her ancestors, to the point of forging a character that was both firm and persistent, kind and sensitive, always enlightened by hope and optimism. Divine grace oriented her, between sacrifices and acceptance of what she considered the will of God and followed the path, deciding in favour of poverty, silence and total consecration to the Lord (Cf. MENDES DE MOURA, Rosa Helena. *Maria Clara do Menino Jesus sua gente e sua obra*, Coimbra, 2013, pgs. 37-40).

It is in moments of challenges and adversities that the roots of resilience deepen until growth is achieved that transcends the restrictions of life. On May 3, 1871, Father Beirao ventured into the mission of starting a new Institute in Portugal, capable of responding to the needs of his time, but he was not alone. He counted with Sister Maria Clara do Menino



MOTHER CLARA

**A GRAIN THAT SPROUTED ON
THE CROSS**



During the repulsive persecutions borne during the trial of Sister Coleta, she continued to hope serenely in the Lord, aware that the works of God must be tried by contradiction. The statements she made in the interview with *La Unión Católica* reveal that she did not let herself be shaken, nor did she lose faith and trust in the Provident and Good God (Cf. *Ibidem*, pg. 58-59).



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She never used words or attitudes that would create conflicts between people, or set the authorities against one another. Even though reason was on her side, she never prevailed on this. On the contrary, she acted as if nothing had happened (Cf. MENDES DE MOURA, Rosa Helena. *POSITIO Super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis Mariae Clarae a Iesu Infante*, Vol. I Informatio, Romae, 2002, pág. 89).

With the ecclesiastical authorities she was respectful, delicate and upright, reverently complying with their determinations, even to her disfavor, without ever betraying her conscience. Despite misunderstandings and injustices on the part of ecclesiastical authorities, she always expressed deep gratitude to them. Not only did she not show resentment towards offenses, but remained open and available (Cf. MENDES DE MOURA, Rosa Helena. *POSITIO Super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis Mariae Clarae a Iesu Infante*, Vol. I Informatio, Romae, 2002, pág. 94).



Jesus. After completing her formation for the Consecrated religious life, with the Hospitaller Sisters and Teachers of Calais, she became the Foundress of Confhic in love and grew up in the shadow of the cross. Together with the joy of making her consecration to God, she did not fail to experience a certain amount of fear, thinking of the arduous mission that awaited her. She sensed that this step was the beginning of a long and painful “Way of the Cross”, on the path of her configuration with Christ (Cf. *Ibidem*, pg. 61).

In an admirable manifestation of inner strength, Sister Maria Clara continued her path between joys and hardships, with courage and determination. This time she experienced a new type of orphanhood, spiritual one. With just seven years of foundation, she faces the sudden death of Father Founder, her zealous advisor and most faithful support in difficulties and tribulations. In view of this situation, she found herself humanly alone at the head of a Congregation that was rapidly expanding, with countless problems and challenges, counting only on divine assistance and her firm faith in Divine Providence (Cf. *Ibidem*, pgs. 95-96).

It was urgent to organize the internal life of the Congregation in accordance with the Constitutions. As a servant, obedient to God, the Church and the mission entrusted to her, she sought the necessary means to keep the Hospitaller Charism alive and fruitful, facing internal and external conflicts and obstacles, as well as from Church authorities. But, it was necessary for the work to take deep roots with adequate spiritual guidance. Besides being a Congregation of pontifical right, it depended on the ordinaries of the Dioceses where the Sisters worked (Cf. *Ibidem*, pg. 141).

As Sister Saudade says, “at that time, the weeds and the darnel that the devil had sown in the Congregation had already produced their poisonous fruits”. After Sister Coleta’s trial, some Sisters did not look at favourably and became her “declared adversaries, who did not forgive her the slightest fault or imperfection, taking advantage of every means to humiliate her and make her suffer, even though baseless”. The Nuncio said that he had received complaints from the Sisters. It was a list of complaints: they were forced to confess to a priest whom they did not like, there had never been no other General, who made distinction of persons, easily dispensed herself from the acts of the community, appointed newly-professed Sisters as superiors, she was by nature stubborn and despotic, and very little educated, she had a “violent temper” and among others, she treated the Sisters badly (Cf. *Ibidem*, Vol. II,pg.109).
pág.109).

The Patriarch of Lisbon accused the General of supporting the Superiors and interfering in their transfers. He convoked and prepared an anticipated Chapter and reminded the General of her willingness to resign and not to count with a re-election, as it would not be accepted by the Holy See. He advised her to, if re-elected, decline the honour in order to leave her position with dignity. As a justification for this way of acting, the Patriarch alleged disorderly attachment and pride in her office, sickness, lack of zeal, of prudence and docility to the orders of her Superiors: “she always does what she wishes, even though she promises to obey”. With everything that fell upon her, Mother Clara followed her path of doing good wherever there was good to be done, striving to take the Congregation forward and silently bearing the pain and humiliations for its sake (Cf. *Ibidem*, vol. II, pgs. 112-115).



“She walked towards Calvary, always determined and cheerful, no matter how great the difficulties and trials that she had to undergo. It could be said that the more difficult the path, the greater the fortitude with which she was invested”

(MENDES DE MOURA, Rosa Helena. *POSITIO Super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis Mariae Clarae a Iesu Infante*, Vol. I *Informatio*, Romae, 2002, pg. 111).

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"How will he recognize you to be his daughters, if he finds nothing in you that resembles him?"

(Mother Clara)