

Clare's nuns soon spread to other parts of Europe, especially Spain, Bohemia, France and England, where four convents were founded in the late 13th and 14th centuries.

Clare never left her convent at Assisi – she became distinguished as one of the great medieval contemplatives, devoted to serving her community in great joy, and practising Franciscan ideals, including the love of nature.



Clare was considered a powerful woman: when Assisi was in danger of being sacked by the armies of the Emperor Frederick II, Claire, although ill, was carried to the wall with a pyx containing the Blessed Sacrament. At sight of her and the pyx, her biographers say, the armies fled. This is why in art Clare is often depicted with a pyx or monstrance. Clare was canonised only two years after her death in 1253. The Poor Clare continue today in many countries as a contemplative order.

All in all, Clare's life was one of extreme self-denial and constant contemplative prayer. It is hard to explain why Clare, who died over 700 years before the invention of the electric light, has been named patron saint of television.

## August 31 - Aidan

### The man who brought Christianity to England

St Aidan is a strong contender for the title of the first English bishop. Not that honours meant a great deal to this austere but captivating character. In 635 he came to Northumbria at the invitation of the local ruler, Oswald. Oswald had spent several years of his childhood on Iona, and when he succeeded to the throne of his northern kingdom he was shrewd enough to realise that the Christian faith would be an ideal unifying force to pacify rival tribes of warlords.

Oswald's invitation was not immediately successful. The first missionary from Iona returned in despair, claiming that the barbarity of the Northumbrians made them unconvertible. But as Aidan listened, he felt the unmistakable call of God to try again. "Perhaps you were too harsh on them," he found himself suggesting to the travel-stained missionary. Shortly afterwards, Aidan found himself at the head of a party of brothers heading for Northumbria. He was never to see his beloved Iona again. The monks made the long journey to Northumbria on foot, singing psalms as they went. Their need to ward off the powers of evil with prayer was genuine, for these were dangerous times to travel through remote country unarmed.

The brothers realised that to live under the king's protection would make it difficult to avoid the world's temptations and establish a rapport with the local people. They saw the tidal island of Lindisfarne on the horizon and chose it as their base. The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Aidan was much loved as a teacher and evangelist; though stern in his own self-discipline, he was prepared to travel to the most inaccessible villages, where he cared for the local people with compassion and gentleness. In time his influence grew and noble people joined the stream of visitors to Lindisfarne.