

*E*choes *of the Company*



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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Year of Consecrated Life

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Letter of November 27, 2014

My dear Sisters,

The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always!

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Spiritual
Life

With all my heart I wish you joy for the Family Feasts of November 27th, 28th and 29th. We will be united at the time of this triduum when we celebrate Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Catherine and the anniversary of the Foundation of the Company.

The feast of November 27th gives us the occasion to give thanks for the gift of the Medal, “*a sign which reveals the Immaculate Conception of Mary, her powerful intercession, her love for all people and the world.*”¹ Mary, united to Christ, watches over her children who walk with and turn to her with confidence. She invites them to *come to the foot of the altar*; she constantly reminds us of our responsibility to present to her all those who are suffering, who are far from God or who live without hope. Vatican Council II solemnly reaffirmed her and the Church invokes Mary *under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.*²

Together let us ask Saint Catherine’s intercession for vocations, for all the young people the Lord calls and who have difficulty in making a commitment. Let us also confide to her all the Seminary Sisters in the Company.

1. Father Jamet, *Vincentian Meditations*, p.115

2. *Lumen Gentium*, 62

On November 29th there will be in Rome and in many dioceses, a vigil of prayer to prepare for the Year of Consecrated Life which begins the following day, the First Sunday of Advent. I see this as an invitation to thank God for the Company, the Charism given to Saint Vincent and Saint Louise and the boldness of our first Sisters who came together on November 29, 1633.

United to the Church, let us prepare to celebrate this year that Pope Francis wished to dedicate to Consecrated Life to: *“Thank God for the gift of Consecrated Life, particularly for the 50 years of its renewal according to the teachings of the Council...*

Embrace the future with hope, confident in the Lord to whom consecrated persons offer their life...Live the present with passion, by evangelizing her own vocation and by bearing witness in the world to the beauty of following Christ (Sequela Christi), in the many ways in which consecrated life is expressed.”³

Let our Family Feasts and the year of Consecrated Life gather us in the joy of belonging to the Company, with the Virgin Mary as our Only Mother!

O Immaculate Virgin, the Holy Spirit filled you with grace, and inspired your canticle to the Savior of the Poor. May the same Spirit fill the Company with apostolic courage, with humility, simplicity and charity, and the gift to live, in a radical way, the evangelical counsels. In this way, today and in the years to come, the Little Company will be in the Church, the servant of those who Poor:⁴ Amen.

With the assurance of my prayer and my devoted affection for each one of you,

Sister Evelyne FRANC
Daughter of Charity

3. Cf. Press conference January 31, 2014 – Cardinal Braz de Aviz

4. Act of Consecration for December 8

**Advent 2014:
Prayer,
Peace,
and a Place for the Poor**

My brothers and sisters in Jesus and St. Vincent,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be forever in our hearts!

The season of Advent is upon us, a time ripe for reflection on the mysteries of our faith. The Scriptures, stories, and hymns of Advent call us to embrace prayer, to seek the peace of Christ, and to open our hearts and hands to serve God's chosen and our "lords and masters", the poor.

In this Advent letter, I will share with you three simple, but profound experiences I had in one day. They touched my heart and led me to reflect on a need for prayer, a search for peace, and a deeper commitment to serve the poor. This occurred while visiting a Marian shrine, meeting with contemplative Sisters, and sharing Mass and a meal with a group of recovering addicts.

On September 27, the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul, I arrived in Kazakhstan at the national shrine of Our Lady Queen of Peace, located in a small village. After traveling all night with a Polish confrere serving in the mission in Kazakhstan and Fr. Stan Zontak, we were warmly welcomed by the Archbishop, whose diocese is twice the size of Italy! This shrine is home to the "Star of Kazakhstan," an altar dedicated to peace, one of twelve worldwide. Why an altar for peace in this faraway place? Behind the shrine is a mountain with a cross marking the center of Eurasia. The "Star of Kazakhstan" contains precious regional stones and metals. It centers on Mary, in whose heart is the Eucharist to show that Jesus was born from her heart of love.

Following this moving experience, the Archbishop led us to a monastery in the village, where I met four contemplative Carmelite Sisters. We had a wonderful conversation! They spoke of their life with simplicity, grateful for the support of the Archbishop and the people in the village. They were joyous women and told how prayer is the heart of their life. It moved me deeply.

The last part of the day's journey was a visit to a shelter for people recovering from addiction to drugs and alcohol. Managed by a woman deeply committed to our Vincentian charism, she said it is her Christian duty to provide an outreach to the poor, especially addicts. The program is a basic one in a clean, warm environment, much needed in Kazakhstan. When the Archbishop arrived, he celebrated the Eucharist, after which we shared a meal and talked - all twelve of us!

After the meal, the Archbishop asked me to say a few words to the group. My remarks formed the basis of my message for this Advent letter. Later, I reflected on what a wonderful experience it was for the feast of St. Vincent. With the significance of the day and people I met, I believe the Lord was pointing me to reflect on three key goals in my life and for the Vincentian Family. Advent 2014 is a call to engage in prayer, to seek peace, and to joyfully serve God's poor.

A Time for PRAYER

After visiting in the monastery with the Carmelites, I reflected on the need for prayer in my own life. Our charism invites us to pray as contemplatives in action, to step out of the busy world of work and other distractions, and focus on the presence of Jesus in Word and Eucharist. In my dialogue with these Sisters, I was so impressed with their simple, joyful witness in sharing their faith. As active contemplatives, we must also come aside to rest and reflect with the Lord.

As St. Vincent told his first companions: "The apostolic life does not exclude contemplation, but encompasses it and profits by it to know better the eternal truths it must proclaim" (*CCD, Vol. 3, Letter 1054*). This Advent let us find some time in our busy lives to pray before the Lord. Whether priests, brother, sisters, or laity, all Vincentian Family members know the need for prayer, as it is the motivating force for what we do.

Advent 2014

It is a distinct mark of our service, grounding us in the love of God. It helps us see the Divine presence in God's poor.

A Time of PEACE

At the altar of the Star of Kazakhstan, I reflected on the current state of the world, with its lack of peace on earth. Whether it is Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, or many other places, we see constant acts of violence, terrorism, border and tribal disputes, threatening the peace we seek. Today, there is an urgent need for people to learn how live in peace. After visiting this shrine, I realized the quest for peace begins with me.

I thought of St. Vincent as an example of one who sought peace and shared it with others. He told St. Louise, "The kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit. He will reign in you if your heart is at peace. So, be at peace, Mademoiselle, and you will honor in a sovereign way the God of peace and love" (*CCD Vol. 1 Letter 71*). Vincent lived in an era where violence, wars, and skirmishes plagued France. As it happens, the poor often suffered the most from these conflicts.

Yet, St. Vincent was a peacemaker who did so by defending the poor. He made Church and Crown aware of what these conflicts did to "our lords and masters, the poor." We, as the Vincentian Family must be champions and instruments of God's peace.

This Advent, let us seek peace within to be one with the Prince of Peace of whom the prophet Micah said, "He shall take his place as shepherd by the strength of the LORD... he shall be peace" (*Mi. 5:4-5*).

Joyful Service to the POOR

After an intense experience of prayer in the shrine and profound peace with the Sisters in the monastery, I had the good fortune to share in Mass and a meal at the shelter. I felt Our Lord present in two significant ways: at the altar and at the dinner table. As I moved from being with the Eucharistic body of Christ in the shelter chapel to the small dining room, I saw the embattled, but unbroken Body of Christ in these recovering addicts. In praying with them and sharing a meal, I was given the grace to see that we are all part of the mystical Body of Christ.

Jesus was born into poverty and lived in humble surroundings. This reality – the poverty of Our Lord in his earthly life – is not a sentimental Christmas story, but salvation history. God is revealed in the *anawim*, a Hebrew word that literally means “*the poor who depend on the Lord for deliverance.*” In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ first major teaching is the Beatitudes to remind us that both Jesus and the Father identify with the least among us. At the end of each liturgical year, we hear Matthew’s Parable of the Last Judgment as our challenge: “I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me” (*Mt. 25:40*).

St. Vincent reminded us of the intrinsic link between our salvation and caring for the poor: “We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor, in the arms of Providence, and with genuine renouncement of ourselves in order to follow Jesus Christ” (*CCD Vol. 3 Letter 1078*). Let this Advent be one in which, having prayed and sought the Lord’s peace, we go forth in renewed service to God’s poor.

Advent as a time for CONVERSION OF HEART

Since my return from Kazakhstan, I have been fortunate to visit provinces, missions, and branches of the Vincentian Family in Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa. But that celebration of St. Vincent’s feast day has remained with me. I felt the Lord calling me as Superior General to reflect on how to better integrate prayer, peace, and service to the poor in my own life. I gained insight into times when I had failed to be a man of peace, prayerfulness, or service to the poor. I asked the Lord for the grace of forgiveness. I gave voice to this at the shelter, and I willingly share it with you as we embark on this Advent together.

On the first Sunday of Advent, the prophet Isaiah tells the truth of our human condition: “O Lord, we are the clay and you are the potter: we are all the work of your hands” (*Isa. 64:7*). Advent is the time to again entrust ourselves to the merciful love of God by entering into the scriptural stories of our salvation. Through the lives of people such as Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, Zechariah, and Elizabeth, we experience the saving power of God, the shepherd of our souls. Their stories of salvation are bound up with our life stories.

Advent 2014

A good Advent will help us see that God wants to open our minds and hearts to “prepare the way of the Lord” (*Mk. 1:3*). The Second Advent preface before the Eucharistic prayer beautifully expresses the true meaning of this holy season: “It is by his gift that already we rejoice at the mystery of his Nativity, so that he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise.”

A month after the trip to Kazakhstan, I read the address of Pope Francis at the conclusion of the October Synod of Bishops. I share with you what I consider a truly ‘Vincentian excerpt’ that will guide us in Advent to become more prayerful, peaceful, and joyful in the service of the poor.

“And this is the Church, the Lord’s vineyard... not afraid to roll up her sleeves to pour oil on people’s wounds; who doesn’t see humanity as a glass house to judge or categorize people. This is the Church...composed of sinners, needful of God’s mercy. This is the Church, true bride of Christ... not afraid to eat and drink with prostitutes and publicans. The Church with the doors wide open to receive the needy, the penitent, not only the just or those who believe they are perfect! This is the Church... not ashamed of the fallen but on the contrary feels involved and obliged to lift him up and to encourage him to take up the journey and to accompany him...” Pope Francis, 18 October 2014 (*Excerpt from his Address, Conclusion of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*)

May Jesus, evangelizer of the poor, strengthen you, and may St. Vincent inspire and guide you in Advent and for the coming year.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Father G. Gregory GAY, C.M.
Superior General

Year of Consecrated Life

Friday, November 29, 2013, during a dialogue with 120 Superiors General of male institutes that lasted more than three hours, Pope Francis announced that 2015 would be dedicated to Consecrated Life. It will begin November 30 (the first Sunday of Advent) and end February 2, 2016 (Day of Consecrated Life).

Shortly after the conclusion of the Year of Faith and following the Year for Priests held from June 2009 to June 2010, the Jesuit pope has chosen to draw the attention of the Catholic Church to the vocation to religious life, which involves approximately 800,000 men and women throughout the world today.

This Year of Consecrated Life has been prepared in the context of the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and, more specifically, on the 50th anniversary of the publication of the conciliar decree on the renewal of consecrated life, *Perfectae caritatis*.

We believe that the Council has been a breath of the Spirit not only for the whole Church but, perhaps especially, for the consecrated life. We are also convinced that over these 50 years consecrated life has undertaken a fruitful journey of renewal — not free, certainly, of difficulties and hardships — in the commitment to follow what the Council asked of consecrated persons: fidelity to the Lord, to the Church, to their own charism and to the people of today (cf. PC 2).

THREE OBJECTIVES FOR LIVING OUT THIS YEAR¹:

1. “Look to the past with gratitude”

Consecrated life, as Pope Francis recalled during his meeting with Superiors General, “is complicated; it consists of grace and sin.” During this Year, we want to acknowledge and confess our weaknesses, but we also want to vigorously and joyfully “proclaim” to the world the holiness and vitality that are present in the life of consecrated persons. In monasteries, in convents, in the homes of consecrated persons, there is so much holiness, very often hidden, but no less fruitful, which leads these men and women to become “living icons” of the “thrice-holy” God (cf. *Verbi Sponsa* 8).

2. “Embrace the future with hope”

We are well aware this is a “difficult and trying” period, as John Paul II asserted in *Vita consecrata* (cf. VC 13), and the crisis that society and the Church itself are going through significantly affects consecrated life. However, we want to take on this crisis, not as a waiting room for death, but as a *kairos*, a favorable opportunity for significant growth and, as a result, for hope, motivated by the certainty that consecrated life could never disappear from the Church because it “was desired by Jesus himself as an irremovable part of his Church” (Benedict XVI, address to bishops of Brazil on their *ad limina* visit, November 5, 2010). Faced with many “prophets of doom”, we want to remain men and women of hope, a hope not founded on our “chariots” and “charioteers”, that is, our own strengths, our numbers, but on Him in whom we have placed our trust. No one will rob us of our hope in Him!

3. “Live the present with passion”

Whoever speaks of passion refers to being in love, true friendship, profound communion... All of this is involved when we speak about consecrated life, and this is the true beauty of the life of so many men and

1. João Braz Card. de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

women who profess the evangelical counsels and follow Christ ‘more closely’ in this state of life. The Year of Consecrated Life will be an important moment to “evangelize” one’s own vocation and bear witness to “the beauty of following Christ [*sequela Christi*]” in the various types of religious vocations.

Consecrated persons take up the witness that has been left them by their respective founders and foundresses. Urged forward by Pope Francis as well, they want to “wake up the world” during this Year by their prophetic witness, particularly by their presence at the existential margins of poverty and thought, as Pope Francis asked of the Superiors General.

Consecrated men and women are aware that, in addition to recounting the glorious history written in the past, they are called to write a history that will be no less great or glorious in the future (cf. VC 110). All of this will lead religious and consecrated persons to continue the renewal called for by the Council by strengthening their relationship with the Lord, fraternal life in community and mission, and by providing formation adapted to the challenges of our time in order to “courageously propose anew” the experience of their founders and foundresses in creative and “dynamic fidelity” (cf. VC 37).

**“LOOK TO THE PAST WITH GRATITUDE, EMBRACE THE FUTURE WITH HOPE, LIVE THE PRESENT WITH PASSION”:
three objectives and one logo!²**

The logo for the Year of Consecrated Life - designed by Carmela Boccasile - expresses through symbols the fundamental values of



consecrated life. In it we recognize the “unceasing work of the Holy Spirit, who in every age shows forth the richness of the practice of the evangelical counsels through a multiplicity of charisms. In this way too he makes ever present in the Church and in the world, in time and space, the mystery of Christ” (*Vita consecrata* 5).

2. L'Osservatore Romano, 7 October 2014

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In the lines that outline the form of the dove the word ‘*peace*’ in Arabic can be made out: this is a reminder that consecrated life is called to be the model for universal reconciliation in Christ.

The waters are made of mosaic fragments; they indicate the complexity and the harmony of the human and cosmic elements that are made to “groan” by the Spirit according to God’s mysterious plans (cf. Rom 8:26-27) so that they may converge into the hospitable and fruitful encounter that leads to a new creation. The dove flies among the waves of history, above the waters of the Great Flood (cf. Gen 8:8-14).

Marked by the Gospel, consecrated persons have always been pilgrims among the nations; they live their charismatic and diaconal diversity like “good administrators of the multiform grace of God” (1 Pt 4:10); they are marked by the Cross of Christ, even unto martyrdom; they journey through history equipped with the wisdom of the Gospel; indeed, a Church that embraces and heals in Christ all that is human.

Father Bernard SCHOEPFER, CM
Director General

LIVING OUT THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE WELL

Sisters, on the occasion of this Year of Consecrated Life, I invite you first of all to reread the first circular letter, “*Rejoice!*” I have selected passages to make it easier to read and interiorize. This is a rich document that deserves to be made your own in your everyday life as Daughters of Charity.

Since this document is addressed to all consecrated persons, I suggest that, as a second step, you choose some of these paragraphs to reread in conjunction with your Constitutions, your Inter-Assemblies Document and the Founders’ writings and, in that way, allow yourselves to be challenged in your personal and communal life. Indeed, this Year of Consecrated Life will truly be a success if each one of you tries to enter a little more deeply into the Constitutions in order to live more deeply from them.

Meditation for the Year of Consecrated Life

Source: First circular letter: "Rejoice!"

"I want to say one word to you and this word is joy. Wherever consecrated people are, there is always joy!" (Pope Francis)

"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her all you who mourn over her. For this is what the Lord says: 'I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem. When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass; the hand of the Lord will be made known to his servants.'" (Isaiah 66:10-14)

I. BE GLAD, REJOICE, RADIATE JOY

1. Listening

In sacred Scripture the term *joy* is used to express a multiplicity of collective and personal experiences connected in a particular way to religious ceremonies and feasts, and to recognize the sense of the presence of God in the history of Israel. There are indeed thirteen different verbs and nouns found in the Bible to describe the joy of God, of people and also of creation itself, in the dialogue of salvation.

In the Old Testament, these recurrences are most numerous in the Psalms and in the prophet Isaiah. With creative and original linguistic variations, there are many invitations to joy. The joy of the nearness of God is proclaimed, the delight in what God has created and made.

Meditation for the Year of Consecrated Life

In the New Testament, joy is the messianic gift par excellence, as Jesus himself promised: *...that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete* (Jn 15:11; 16:24; 17:13). Starting with the events that precede the birth of the Savior, it is Luke who signals the exultant diffusion of joy (cf. Lk 1:14,44,47; 2:10; cf. Mt 2:10) and then accompanies the spread of the Good News with this effect that expands (cf. Lk 10:17; 24:41.52) and is a typical sign of the presence and the spread of the Kingdom (cf. Lk 15:7,10,32; Acts 8:39; 11:23; 15:3; 16:34; cf. Rom 15:10-13; etc.).

According to Paul, joy is a fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22) and a typical, constant feature of the Kingdom (cf. Rm 14:17) that is strengthened by trials and tribulations (cf. 1Thes 1:6). The source of joy must be found in prayer, charity and unceasing thanksgiving (cf. 1Thes 5:16; Phil 3:1; Col 1:11 f.). In his difficulties the apostle to the gentiles felt full of joy and a sharer of the glory that we all await (cf. 2 Cor 6:10; 7:4; Col 1:24). The final triumph of God and the *marriage of the Lamb* will complete every joy and exultation (cf. Rev 19:7), setting off an explosion of a cosmic *Alleluia* (Rev 19:6).

“Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her” (Is 66:10).

Throughout the history of Israel, the relationship of fidelity and love had failed, and they had ended in sadness and sterility. Now the power and holiness of God restores meaning and fullness of life and happiness, expressed in terms that belong to the affective roots of every human being, arousing unique feelings of tenderness and security.

It is a gentle but true profile of a God who radiates maternal vibrations and deep, contagious emotions. A heartfelt joy (cf. Is 66:14) that comes from God – with maternal face and supportive arm – and radiates through a people who have been crippled, whose bones have become brittle through a thousand humiliations. It is a freely-given transformation that spreads out joyfully to the new heavens and the new earth (cf. Is 66:22), so that all the people might come to know the glory of the Lord, the faithful redeemer.

2. Joy, the beauty of consecration

“This is the beauty of consecration: it is joy, joy.”

The joy of bringing God’s consolation to all. Joy is not a useless ornament. It is a necessity, the foundation of human life. In their daily struggles, every man and woman tries to attain joy and abide in it with the totality of their being.

In the world there is often a lack of joy. We are not called to accomplish epic feats or to proclaim high-sounding words, but to give witness to the joy that arises from the certainty of knowing we are loved, from the confidence that we are saved.

Our short memories and flimsy experiences often prevent us from searching for the ‘lands of joy’ where we can relish God’s reflection. We have a thousand reasons for remaining in joy. Its roots are nourished by listening with faith and perseverance to the Word of God. In the school of the Master we hear: *may my joy be in you and may your joy be complete* (Jn 15:11) and we are taught how to practice perfect joy.

3. Your calling

In calling you God says to you: ‘You are important to me, I love you, I am counting on you’. Jesus says this to each one of us! Joy is born from that! The joy of the moment in which Jesus looked at me. Understanding and hearing this is the secret of our joy. Feeling loved by God, feeling that for him we are not numbers but people; and we know that it is he who is calling us.

The Pope invites us to remain for a long time, on an interior pilgrimage, before the dawn, when, in a warm environment of friendly relationships, the intellect is led to open itself to mystery, the decision is made that it is good to set out to follow this Master who alone has *the words of eternal life* (cf. Jn 6:68). He invites us to make our whole “life a pilgrimage of loving transformation.”

Pope Francis calls us to pause at that opening scene: “The joy of the moment when Jesus looked at me” and to recall the important and demanding, underlying meaning of our vocation: “It is a response to a call, a call of love”. To stay with Christ requires us to share our lives, our

Meditation for the Year of Consecrated Life

choices, the obedience of faith, the happiness of poverty, the radicality of love. In the experience of vocation, God is indeed the mysterious subject of an act of calling. We hear a voice that calls us to life and discipleship for the Kingdom.

4. Found, touched, transformed

Consecrated life is a call to incarnate the Good News, to follow Christ, the crucified and risen one, to take on Jesus's way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brothers and sisters.

In practical terms, it is a call to take up his way of life, to adopt his interior attitude, to allow oneself to be invaded by his Spirit, to absorb his surprising logic and his scale of values, to share in his risks and his hopes. Be guided by the humble yet joyful certainty of those who have been found, touched and transformed by the Truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed.

Remaining in Christ allows us to grasp the presence of the Mystery which lives in us and expands our hearts to the measure of his Son's heart. Those who remain in his love, like the branch attached to the vine (cf. Jn 15:1-8), enter into intimacy with Christ and bear fruit. "Remain in Jesus! This means remaining attached to him, in him, with him, talking to him."

Consecrated life is in fact a continuous call to follow Christ, and to be made like him. Jesus's whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, all this is precious and relates to our personal lives.

Meeting the Lord gets us moving, urges us to leave aside self-absorption. A relationship with the Lord is not static, nor is it focused on self. "Because when we put Christ at the center of our life, we ourselves don't become the center! The more that you unite yourself to Christ and he becomes the center of your life, the more he leads you out of yourself, leads you from making yourself the center and opens you to others." We are not at the center; we are, so to speak, 'relocated'. We are at the service of Christ and of the Church.

5. Joy, a faithful 'yes'

Anyone who has met the Lord and follows him faithfully is a messenger of the joy of the Spirit. Faithfulness is the awareness of a love that points us towards the "Thou" of God and towards every other person, in a constant and dynamic way when we experience within ourselves the life of the Risen One. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.

Faithful discipleship is grace and love in action; it is the practice of sacrificial charity. When we journey without the Cross, when we build without the Cross, when we profess Christ without the Cross, we are not disciples of the Lord, we are worldly. We may be bishops, priests, cardinals, popes, but not disciples of the Lord. To persevere all the way to Golgotha, to experience the lacerations of doubts and denial, to rejoice in the marvel and wonder of the Paschal event, up to the manifestation of Pentecost and the evangelization of the peoples, these are milestones of joyful fidelity because they are about self-emptying, experienced throughout life, even in the sign of martyrdom, and also sharing in the life of the risen Christ. And it is from the Cross, the supreme act of mercy and love, that we are reborn as a *new creation* (Gal 6:15).

Being with Jesus shapes a contemplative approach to history which knows how to see and hear the presence of the Spirit everywhere and, in a special way, how to discern the Spirit's presence in order to live in time as God's time. When the insight of faith is lacking, life itself loses meaning, the faces of brothers and sisters are obscured and it becomes impossible to recognize the face of God in them, historical events remain ambiguous and deprived of hope.

Contemplation expands into prophetic aptitude. The prophet is one whose eye is opened, and who hears and speaks the words of God; a person of three times: the promise of the past, the contemplation of the present, the courage to point out the path toward the future.

Fidelity in discipleship occurs through and is demonstrated by the experience of community, a theological reality in which we are called to support each other in our joyful 'yes' to the Gospel.

II. COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem” (Isaiah 40:1-2).

1. Listening

The words that Isaiah uses: Comfort... speak tenderly, are found regularly in the Old Testament. These recurrences are of particular value in dialogues of tenderness and affection. Thus Ruth recognizes that Boaz has *“comforted me and spoken kindly”* (cf. Ruth 2:13), or in the famous page of Hosea who announces to the woman, Gomer, that he will *“allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her”* (cf. Hos 2:16) for a new period of fidelity.

This is a language to be interpreted in the context of love. Thus action and speech together, delicate and encouraging, remind us of the intense emotional bonds of God, the ‘spouse’ of Israel. This *comfort* must be an epiphany of reciprocal belonging, an interplay of intense empathy, ferment and vital connection. These are not superficial, cloying words, therefore, but mercy and deep-seated concern, an embrace giving strength and patient accompaniment in the rediscovery of faithful pathways.

2. Bringing God’s embrace

In Jesus’s view, consolation is a gift of the Spirit, the *Paraclete*, the Consoler who comforts us in our trials and awakes a hope that does not disappoint. Thus Christian consolation becomes comfort, encouragement, hope. It is the active presence of the Spirit (cf. Jn 14:16-17), the fruit of the Spirit. And *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Gal 5:22).

In a world of distrust, discouragement and depression, in a culture in which men and women are enveloped by fragility and weakness, individualism and self-interest, we are asked to introduce belief in the possibility of true happiness, in the feasibility of hope that does not depend solely on talent, superiority or knowledge, but on God. All are given the possibility of encountering him, if they only seek him with a sincere heart.

The men and women of our time are waiting for words of consolation, the availability of forgiveness and true joy. We are called to bring to everyone the embrace of God, who bends with a mother's tenderness over us – consecrated women and men, signs of the fullness of humanity, facilitators and not controllers of grace, stooped down in a gesture of consolation.

3. Tenderness is good for us

Joy is confirmed in the experience of community, that theological space where each one is responsible for their fidelity to the Gospel and for the growth of all. When a community is fed by the same Body and Blood of Jesus, it gathers around the Son of God, to share the journey of faith, guided by the Word. It becomes one with him, together in communion, experiencing the gift of love and festive celebration in freedom and joy, full of courage.

In these days when fragmentation justifies widespread sterile individualism and when the weakness of relationships breaks up and ruins the care of the human person, we are invited to humanize community relationships, to encourage communion of heart and spirit in the Gospel sense, because there is a communion of life among all those who belong to Christ. It is a communion that is born of faith that makes the Church, in her most profound truth, communion with God, intimacy with God, a communion of love with Christ and with the Father in the Holy Spirit, which extends to brotherly communion.

For Pope Francis, the sign of fraternity is tenderness, a “Eucharistic tenderness” because tenderness is good for us. Fraternity has an enormous power to call people together. Fraternity, with all its possible diversity, is an experience of love which goes beyond conflicts.

4. Closeness as companionship

Joy is born from the gratuitousness of an encounter! And the joy of the encounter with him and with his call does not lead to shutting oneself in but to opening oneself; it leads to service in the Church. St Thomas said: *bonum est diffusivum sui*. Good spreads. And joy also spreads.

Meditation for the Year of Consecrated Life

Do not be afraid to show the joy of having answered the Lord's call, of having responded to his choice of love and of bearing witness to his Gospel in service to the Church. And joy, true joy, is contagious; it is infectious; it impels one forward. Faced with this contagious witness of joy, serenity, fruitfulness, the testimony of tenderness and love, humble charity, without arrogance, many people feel the need to "come and see".

Entrusting to us the task of *waking up the world*, the Pope urges us to approach the stories of the men and women of today in the light of two pastoral categories that have their roots in the newness of the Gospel: *closeness* and *encounter*, two ways through which God himself is revealed in history culminating in the Incarnation.

On the road to Emmaus, like Jesus with his disciples, we welcome in daily companionship the joys and sorrows of the people, giving them 'heart warmth', while we tenderly care for the tired and the weak, so that our journey together has light and meaning in Christ.

Our journey together matures towards pastoral fatherhood, towards pastoral motherhood, and when a priest is not a father to his community, when a sister is not a mother to all those with whom she works, he or she becomes sad. This is the problem. For this reason I say to you: "the root of sadness in pastoral life is precisely in the absence of fatherhood or motherhood that comes from living this consecration unsatisfactorily, which on the contrary should lead us to fertility."

5. The restlessness of love

The Pope invites us not to privatize love, but with the restlessness of the seeker, tirelessly seek the good of the other, of the beloved.

We live in a culture of conflict, a culture of fragmentation, a culture of waste. The discovery of a tramp who has died of cold is not news. Yet poverty for us is a theological category, because our God, the Son of God, abased himself, he made himself poor to walk along the road with us. A poor Church for the poor begins by reaching out to the flesh of Christ. If we reach out to the flesh of Christ, we begin to understand something, to understand what this poverty, the Lord's poverty, actually is.

We are invited to be audacious, frontier men and women: “Ours is not a ‘lab faith,’ but a ‘journey faith,’ a historical faith. God has revealed himself as history, not as a compendium of abstract truths. You cannot bring home the frontier, but you have to live on the border and be audacious.”

Authentic culture, constantly called to serve humanity in all its conditions, opens unexplored paths, opens doors to allow hope to breathe, strengthens the meaning of life and watches over the common good. An authentic cultural process promotes an integral humanism and the culture of encounter and relationship: this is the Christian way of promoting the common good, the joy of living. Here, faith and reason unite, the religious dimension and the various aspects of human culture – art, science, labor, literature... Authentic cultural research encounters history and opens up ways of seeking the face of God.

The places where knowledge is developed and communicated are also the places where a culture of closeness, of encounter and dialogue can be created that lowers defenses, opens doors and builds bridges.

III. A CALL TO LIVE JOY

1. A missionary heart

“I want to say one word to you and this word is ‘joy’.” The joy of following Jesus; the joy that the Holy Spirit gives us, not the joy of the world.

As a global network in which we are all connected, where no local tradition can aspire to a monopoly of the truth, where technologies affect everyone, the world throws down a continuous challenge to the Gospel and to those who shape their lives in accordance with the Gospel.

In this historical process, through choices and ways of living, Pope Francis is building up a living hermeneutic of the dialogue between God and the world. We are introduced to a style of wisdom rooted in the Gospel and in human eschatology, which interprets pluralism, searches for equilibrium, invites us to facilitate the capacity of being responsible for change so that the truth of the Gospel might be better communicated, while we move “within the limits of language and of circumstances”.

Meditation for the Year of Consecrated Life

Aware of these limits each one of us becomes *weak with the weak... all things to all people* (1 Cor 9:22).

We are invited to promote a generative, not simply administrative, dynamic to embrace the spiritual events present in our communities and in the world, movements and grace that the Spirit works in each individual person, viewed as a person. We are invited to commit ourselves to dismantling lifeless models, to describing the human person as marked by Christ, who is never revealed absolutely in speech or actions.

Pope Francis invites us to a wisdom that should be demonstrated by flexible consistency, the ability of consecrated people to respond in accord with the Gospel, to act and to choose in accord with the Gospel, without losing ourselves among the different spheres of life, language or relationships, maintaining an awareness of responsibility, of the networks that bind us together, of the finitude of our limits, of the infinite number of ways in which life is expressed. A missionary heart is a heart that has known the joy of Christ's salvation and shares it as consolation: This heart realizes that it has to grow in its own understanding of the Gospel and in discerning the paths of the Spirit, and so it always does what good it can, even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.

2. Hail, Mother of Joy

Rejoice, full of grace (Lk 1:28). The greeting of the angel to Mary is an invitation to joy, to a deep joy, announcing the end of sadness. It is a greeting that marks the beginning of the Gospel, the Good News.

Alongside Mary joy expands. The Son she carries in her womb is the God of joy, of contagious, engaging delight. Mary throws open the doors of her heart and runs to Elizabeth.

Joyful in achieving her desires, sensitive in her duty, thoughtful in her joy, she hurries towards the mountain. Where, if not towards the summit, should she set out so kindly, she who was already full of God? She went *in great haste* (Lk 1:39) to bring the happy news to the world, to bring all the uncontainable joy she held in her womb: Jesus, the Lord. *In great haste*: it is not only the speed with which Mary went. We are told of her

diligence, the careful attention with which she undertakes the journey, her enthusiasm.

Behold the servant of the Lord (Lk 1:38). The Lord's servant ran *in great haste*, to become the servant of all people. In Mary the Church is all who journey together: in the love of those who go out to the most fragile; in the hope of those who know that they will be accompanied in their going out and in the faith of those who have a special gift to share. In Mary each one of us, driven by the wind of the Spirit, fulfils our own vocation to move out!

Star of the new evangelization, help us to bear radiant
witness to communion,
service, ardent and generous faith,
justice and love of the poor,
that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth,
illuminating even the fringes of the world.
Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness
for God's little ones,
Pray for us. Amen. Alleluia!

Source:
First circular letter: "*Rejoice!*"

Appointments of Provincial Directors

N

PROVINCE OF COLOGNE-NETHERLANDS: Father Georg WITZEL was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a three-year term, May 30, 2014, as well as Father Jan Van BROEKHOVEN as Sub-Director.

*News
from the
Provinces*

PROVINCE OF CALI: Father Diego Luis VASQUEZ MARIN was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, May 30, 2014.

PROVINCE OF NAPLES: Father Roberto D'AMICO was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a three-year term, June 10, 2014.

PROVINCE OF RIO DE JANEIRO: Father Alexandre NAHASS FRANCO was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, July 25, 2014.

PROVINCE DEL CARIBE: Father Faustino BURGOS BRISMAN was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a three-year term, October 1, 2014.

PROVINCE OF CHELMNO: Father Jacek WACHOWIAK was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, December 11, 2014.

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General and Sister Neghesti Michael, General Councillor Visit of the Province of Congo

May 11-20, 2014

At 9:30 p.m. on May 11, 2014, Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, and Sister Neghesti Michael, General Councillor for Africa, arrived in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. They were warmly welcomed by the Sisters of two local communities and of the Seminary. Everyone gathered in the chapel of Our Lady of Wisdom local community in Lemba (Kinshasa) to give thanks to God for this visit. The Province of Congo is made up of three countries: Tanzania, the Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It has 93 Sisters, 14 local communities and 2 annexes.

The following day, Sister Evelyne and Sister Neghesti met with the Seminary Sisters. After visiting the premises, Sister Evelyne spoke with the young Sisters. She encouraged them to live out availability, a visible witness and a balanced life and to guard against being crushed by the suffering of persons who are poor and to offer it to God in their daily prayer. She also invited them to develop their sense of belonging to the Company and to get to know the lives of Vincentian saints and blessed and of the first Sisters, who are sources of inspiration. Finally, she stressed the importance of being keenly aware that progress in one's vocation is the work of a lifetime.

The discussion strengthened the Seminary Sisters' sense of belonging and their responsibility to make the charism their own and to live it out.

On May 13, Sister Evelyne visited the Sisters of Blessed Lindalva local community, who minister to children living in the streets. The Sisters

Visit from Superiors

shared their joys, concerns and the many challenges that they must address. In the afternoon, all the Sisters living in Kinshasa gathered with Sister Evelyne to reflect on the Company of today and of the future. Sister Evelyne and Sister Neghesti emphasized the need for each Sister to feel responsible for faithfully maintaining the charism in order to pass it on to future generations and for living by faith in a deep way in order to “live together in great union and cordiality” and serve “coming and going”. She also asked them to be attentive to vocation ministry, especially through the witness of fraternal life in our local communities, to revitalize the missionary vocation, and to promote networking. All of this can expand our vision to new perspectives.

Accompanied by the Visitatrix and five other Sisters, our visitors set off the next day for Mbandaka, the heart of the Province. Approximately thirty Sisters from several local communities, the Vincentian Priests and five students from the Elikya school campus enthusiastically welcomed them. The song “*Ningana nse mobimba...*” (“*All you lands, exult with gladness...*”) provided the beat for the dance. At the Provincial House, many people were present to welcome them and demonstrate their joy and friendship: neighbors, students, teachers, collaborators, etc.

In the afternoon, the Visitatrix, Sister Angèle Mbula, flanked by about fifty Sisters, thanked our visitors for their presence and told them what a joy it is for her and the Sisters to belong to the Company.

Then, using a Power Point, each Sister Servant presented her local community, its mission, its joys, its difficulties and the challenges it must meet. In that way, Sister Evelyne was able to travel throughout the entire Province in two hours: from Tanzania to Congo-Brazzaville, to Kinshasa, and then up the river to arrive in Mbandaka. This made her aware of the Sisters’ work, which is both wonderful and difficult, and showed that the charism is very much alive! The day concluded with a festive Eucharist celebrated by the Vincentian Priests of the neighboring local community.

Sister Evelyne met with the young Sisters in the evening. She encouraged them to live their vocation authentically: it is essential to withdraw often into the “sanctuary” of our hearts to listen to the Word of God, to review our lives in its Light and to grow in a relationship of confidence and self-surrender, not fearing difficulties because God is always with us.

Authenticity, clarity, consistency and truth are the Gospel flavor. They are the exact opposite of individualism, seeking comforts, acting based on “what will people say” and activism. In order to overcome these temptations, each day we must cultivate our interior life, grow deeper in the spirit of our vocation, live community relationships joyfully with the “art” of living together, perform every ministry generously and in a spirit of detachment, and live out material poverty and poverty of heart. The Virgin Mary is there, right beside us, to help us on our vocation journey; she is our Mother, our teacher for the spiritual life and the best example of authenticity. Sister Evelyne also emphasized the importance of communication, vocation ministry, life witness, formation of the heart and a good preparation for a life-long commitment through vows.

The following day, the Superioress General met with the Visitatrix and her Council and then received the Sister Servants individually. Next, after a convivial meal at the Sacred Heart local community in Mbandaka, Sister Evelyne visited the house and its different services.

In the evening, the Sister Servants gathered at the Provincial House to listen to Sister Evelyne remind them about their role and its importance for the future of the Province and the Company, especially regarding their accompaniment of young Sisters. Based on a letter from Saint Louise to Sister Cécile, she stressed the fact that Sister Servants “*are accountable to all of them [our Sisters] and are obliged to serve them in order to assist them spiritually and materially.*”¹ As a spiritual animator, the Sister Servant assembles the local community and gathers it around Christ. She watches over the Sisters, loves them, and accompanies them along the path of their vocation. She helps them to develop their faith life by becoming familiar with the Word of God in imitation of the Virgin Mary. She encourages them to take on the charism of the Founders more deeply and to reflect on their lifestyle and the mission that is part of our identity in order to serve those who are poor with renewed fervor. Finally, she helps them to use communications well and take the risk of questioning themselves. Communications must not be reduced to asking permissions; they are privileged times to speak and listen in an atmosphere of trust, sensitivity and discretion and thus require preparation.

1. Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings* L. 523, p. 549

Visit from Superiors

May 16, after personally meeting with the Provincial Director, the Councillors and Sisters, Sister Evelyne and Sister Neghesti went to Our Lady of Congo local community in Mbandaka, where they were warmly welcomed by the Sisters, the directors, teachers and students of the two Elikya primary schools. After the meal, the guests visited the house and the works, including the residence for the elderly.

During the afternoon, Sister Evelyne met with the Sisters of Mbandaka and spoke to them about community life and the witness it should give. To achieve this, we must live the Beatitudes, bear witness to our joy of believing, have a welcoming heart and open local communities, and live an authentic spirituality of communion that makes it possible to constantly reestablish the connections of fraternal communion and thus overcome the heaviness of everyday life. The new millennium presents us with a new challenge for fraternal life, and Pope Francis encourages us to wake up the world, to be witnesses of a different way of living.² The day concluded with a very entertaining time of recreation.

Our visitors had the opportunity on May 17 to first visit the Siloam Center for children and youth with disabilities, the Bompikiliki primary school and the Elikya school campus. Then they went to the Dream Center for AIDS patients and the Center for those with diabetes and epilepsy. Everyone at each of these stops offered a warm and varied reception: poems, skits, songs, dances, etc.

Sister Evelyne and Sister Neghesti then returned by plane to Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The following day, after Eucharist animated by the Seminary Sisters in the Lemba district, our guests, accompanied by the Visitatrix and two Sister Servants from Congo-Brazzaville, crossed the river in a speedboat to reach the Sisters of the three local communities in Brazzaville.

On May 19, Sister Evelyne had the pleasure of discovering the “Special School” established in 1975 by Sister Marguerite Tiberghien. The school consists of ten “houses” and various workshops: automobile upholstery,

2. Pope Francis to Superiors General of male institutes, November 2013

carpentry, welding, market gardening, sewing, hairdressing, and cooking. Students from several classes presented songs and poems, and teachers spoke to welcome Sister Evelyne, who in turn expressed her joy in seeing this school. She thanked all those who contribute to its smooth daily operations because it is a work that fits the Vincentian charism well.

In the afternoon, after a tour of the city of Brazzaville, Sister Evelyne and Sister Neghesti held a simple sharing with the Sisters about the Domestic Assemblies, vocation ministry, communication with the Sister Servant, communal discernment, the Vincentian mystique, personal responsibility in use of communication devices, the art and finer points of living in great union and cordiality, etc.

The following day, after Eucharist at Divine Mercy of Jesus Parish, Sister Evelyne and Sister Neghesti met the parish priests and then returned to Kinshasa in order to fly back to Paris.

We thank God for this long-awaited visit. This simple and sisterly time spent with Sister Evelyne and Sister Neghesti is a great encouragement and support for each one of us in our vocation. We ask the Lord for the grace to put into practice all the guidance our Superioress General gave us. “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!”

The Sisters of the Province

Visit of Sister Evelyne Franc to the Province of Switzerland - Turkey

June 23-26, 2014

On June 23, 2014, Sister Evelyne, Superioress General, accompanied by Sister Pia, Treasurer General, arrived at the Lausanne train station, where they were welcomed by the Visitatrix, Sister Madeleine, and the Provincial Secretary, Sister Sylviane. On their way to the Provincial House in Fribourg, they stopped at Saint Joseph House in Châtel-St-Denis, where the Daughters of Charity worked from 1865 to 2009. One Sister is still there, where she lives out the final stage of her life, sharing in the everyday experience of the elderly persons to whom she had generously dedicated herself as a nurse for so many years.

At the Provincial House, Sister Evelyne and Sister Pia were welcomed by the small local community for an initial gathering in a simple friendly environment.

The next day was the annual “Summer Day”, which, for the past several years, has brought together all the Sisters of the Province for meetings, discussions, announcements and celebration of the year’s jubilarians. The day began at the House of Providence with Eucharist presided by Father Bouchet, the Provincial Director. It was an opportunity to give thanks for the presence of our two visitors and the four Sister Jubilarians and to entrust the future of the Province to the Lord and to the Virgin Mary, who is so often invoked in this chapel. Sister Evelyne was delighted to meet all the elderly Sisters, either in the chapel or in their rooms, as well as the lay director of this House of Providence where the Daughters of Charity have been present since 1858.

Next, at the Provincial House, after a presentation of the Province of Switzerland-Turkey as a whole, each Sister Servant, including the Sister

Servant of the Hospital of Peace in Istanbul, a very different context than Switzerland, briefly described her local community and the Sisters' ministries.

The average age in the Province is high, but the Sisters are dynamic and involved on behalf of the poorest of the poor, not in institutions but through numerous services that make charity "affective and effective" wherever the Sisters are. They prioritize close relationships with poor persons of the parish or neighborhood or through charitable organizations.

Sister Evelyne first expressed her gratitude for our commitment to Turkey, an important presence because of the universal mission of the Company. Then, starting from articles 2 and 89 of Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, she invited us to live out "*the Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum*" as authentically as possible, emphasizing that this theme for the upcoming General Assembly clearly follows the thinking of Pope Francis.

She reminded us of the importance of avoiding complacency and of accepting living without what makes us feel secure. The spirit of the world enters so easily into our life that we must become aware of it, discern and "rediscover the value of what is essential for living." Using Pope Francis' words, she stressed the witness of joy in community life and pointed out stumbling blocks to avoid:

- * No to warring among ourselves
- * No to careerism
- * No to spiritual worldliness
- * Yes to the challenge of a missionary spirituality
- * No to a sterile pessimism: let us take the time to discern as a community... Let us be communities whose doors are open, communities that "go forth", as our Pope urges!

Citing Saint Louise, Sister Evelyne reminded us that this witness of joy is also communicated through acceptance of the Cross and pointed out the importance of "*cheerfully...allow[ing] yourself to be led along this way.*"

Visit from Superiors

The Sisters were challenged by Sister Evelyne's powerful words, her clear responses to the questions asked, and the information provided about Sisters whose situation is particularly difficult and whose lives are in danger. This Provincial gathering came to a close with vespers.

The most recently established local community, Granges-Paccot (founded in October 2012), invited Sister Evelyne and Sister Pia to come and conclude the day in their home.

On June 25, Sister Evelyne met with the Provincial Council for a discussion on current issues related, among other topics, to our coming together with the French-speaking Provinces of Europe.

At the end of the morning, Father Barbey at Anchorage Point was eager to meet our Superioress General personally to thank her for having sent two Sisters to work in this organization serving migrants, asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants. This welcoming space that also provides advice, requested by the Church as a response to situations experienced by migrants, is managed by religious men and women (all retired) from various Congregations as well as lay volunteers, with the exception of one paid employee.

This organization survives on the generosity of parishes and benefactors and receives donations of surplus food from businesses. Sister Evelyne, Sister Pia and Sister Madeleine had the pleasure of sharing a meal with guests from about twenty countries, mostly from Africa and the Near East.

In the afternoon, the Visitatrix brought our guests to Cornaux and the Chalet des Charmettes, a guest house available to Sisters of the Province, priests and individuals for a respite period after difficult times.

In the evening, Sister Evelyne met with the local community on rue de la Neuveville in Fribourg, which, day in and day out, lives a service of proximity with the elderly Sisters and lay persons at the House of Providence.

Because of time constraints, Sister Evelyne was not able to visit the local community in Landeron nor the two houses in Geneva, but the Sisters were able to speak about their services during the gathering at the Provincial House.

We are very grateful to Sister Evelyne for this time that allowed us to experience fraternal moments with her in a spirit of joy, sharing and thanksgiving. Her words of hope and confidence strengthened our sense of belonging to the Company.

Sister Louise PITTET and Sister Madeleine SAILLARD
Daughters of Charity

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“Open to the Transforming Spirit”

*International
Session*

International Session

**held at the Mother House
from May 5 - 19, 2014**

**for Spiritual and Vincentian
Revitalization**

**of Daughters of Charity
over 40 years vocation**

Saint Louise:
“I continue to ask God for his blessings for you.”

Introduction

Having considered some key events in Saint Louise de Marillac’s life, today I am inviting you to welcome, from her own lips, her blessing of the Company and her last wish entrusted to the Sisters.

In the early morning of March 15, 1660, Louise asked all those who were waiting to see how her illness evolved to withdraw and that the curtains be closed. She would tell them when the time had come because she wanted to prepare for the great encounter. At eleven o’clock, she called everyone back and, at the urging of the priest of the Mission accompanying her, blessed them again; they prayed together. *“She rested in the Lord, and gave up her soul to him.”*¹

The account by Father Nicolas Gobillon, her first biographer, does not describe the death of Louise de Marillac: in reality, that March 15, 1660, the fullness of life dawned for her, her *“ultimate state”*, *“her most unique and distinguished potential”*², the ultimate affirmation of what she had lived.³ When her ardent eyes closed to the light of this world, when her loving heart stopped beating, when her lips stopped whispering prayers of surrender to and trust in God, the truth of her existence took flesh, her impressive accomplishments became a witness to a full life and her love was established on Love.

1. Cf. Gobillon, *Life of Mademoiselle Le Gras, Founder and first Superioress of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor*, p. 63.

2. Cf. Karl Rahner, *Mysterium Salutis*, V, p. 544.

3. Cf. Juan L. Ruiz de la Peña, *La otra dimensión. Escatología cristiana*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 1986, p. 297-298.

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

I - THE SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT OF LOUISE DE MARILLAC

In all families, the last words spoken by a father or a mother are a lasting memory and guidance for our lives; we venerate them. For the Daughters of Charity and those who belong to the Vincentian Family, the final words of St. Louise de Marillac are a very precious inheritance.

Beginning February 4, 1660, Mademoiselle Le Gras was confined to bed because of swelling in her left arm and a high fever. She received the Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist. Then, she spoke to her son Michel, his wife Gabrielle and their daughter Louise Renée, saying:

“I pray to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit by the power that he has given to fathers and mothers to bless their children, that he give you his blessing, and detach you from the things of this earth, and attach you to him. Live as good Christians.”⁴

Then she turned to the Daughters of Charity and gave them her blessing, recommending to them the love of their vocation and fidelity to the service of the poor. In mid-February, Louise was somewhat better, which was attributed to the intercession of St. Charles Borromeo and St. Francis de Sales, whose relics had been placed on her bed.

On March 9, the fever returned, and she had gangrene in her arm. On the 12th, she asked for Communion, which she prepared to receive with much fervor and joy the following day. The pastor of St. Laurent, who came to administer the Sacraments, asked her to bless her Daughters.

And so, Mademoiselle Le Gras pronounced these words, which she left as a testament and as her final desire:

“My dear Sisters, I continue to ask God for His blessings for you and pray that He will grant you the grace to persevere in your vocation in order to serve him in the manner that he asks of you.

4. Gobillon, p. 151-152.

Take good care of the service of the poor. Above all, live together in great unity and cordiality, loving one another, in imitation of the unity and life of Our Lord. Pray earnestly to the Blessed Virgin, that she may be your only Mother.”⁵

II - SAINT LOUISE’S BLESSING OF THE COMPANY

The account of these events invites us to consider the deep meaning of St. Louise’s **blessing** for her son (and his family) and for the Daughters of Charity.

The blessing that Saint Louise gives expresses a desire and a petition to God:

- For her son and his family, that they separate themselves from the things of the world and be attached to God, living as good Christians.
- For the Daughters of Charity, that they love their vocation and be faithful to the service of the poor.

As we contemplate this scene, it naturally brings to mind blessings by Biblical patriarchs before their death.⁶

All blessings really come from God, but they are not God’s alone. The person who blesses plays a significant role as well, knowing he or she is empowered by God to communicate the divine blessing. Already when God blesses Abraham⁷, some powers exist so that man passes it on from generation to generation: “*God’s blessing is meant to be joined to the conscious decision of he who passed it on at solemn moments.*”⁸ On the part of the one who blesses, blessing requires an active transmission and a specific desire to be granted to the other.

Biblical patriarchs’ blessings at the end of their days include the following elements and characteristics:

5. Saint Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*. Ed. Louise Sullivan. New York: New City Press, 1991, p. 835.

6. Cf. Gen 27:1-45; Gen 47:28 - 48:22; Gen 49:1-28.

7. Cf. Gen 17.

8. Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary, Westminster*: John Knox Press, p. 416.

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

- 1) The blessing is, first of all an **invocation of God** from whom all good and all blessing comes.
- 2) It is a **proclamation** (ascending blessing) of all that God has worked in the life of the patriarch and the life of the people. It is gratitude, acknowledgement.
- 3) It is the **expression of the desire** that the wonders God has worked in the life of the patriarch take place in the life of the one who is being blessed (descending blessing).
- 4) It becomes **prophetic words** that shape subsequent history for his descendants with the creative power of his word of blessing.⁹
- 5) It has an **irrevocable character**.¹⁰

Reflecting on Saint Louise’s blessing, we find the same traits that characterize patriarchs’ blessings. The comparison is inevitable, given that we are explicitly told that Saint Louise did this by the power that God has given to fathers and mothers to bless their children:

Saint Louise begins by **invoking God**: “... *I continue to ask God for His blessings for you...*”

Saint Louise also **proclaims** her happiness and joy for what God had done in her life. Gobillon asserts: “*She added that she was dying in high esteem of their vocation*” (p. 62). The solemn recognition of all the favors received from God during her life appears even more clearly in her official will and testament. The expressions in the “spiritual testament” summarize the mother’s **desires** for her Daughters: “*Take good care...*”

The words of her spiritual testament are also **prophetic** for posterity; they summarize the entire history of the Company. They have turned out to be the prophetic announcement of the mission that the Company would carry out in the Church and in the world.

9. The blessing of Jacob, described in Genesis 49:1-28, is particularly significant in this respect. G. von Rad discusses it p. 421.

10. As seen in the case of the patriarch Isaac’s blessing (Gen 27:1-45), although obtained by trickery. Commentary in G. von Rad, p. 274.

Other testaments can be revoked by one making them; the spiritual testament of Saint Louise, as a testament-blessing, is **irrevocable**. Gobillon added that she then said to the Daughters of Charity: “*were she to live a hundred years, she would still recommend the same thing to them.*”¹¹

What we know as the “spiritual testament” of Saint Louise is her blessing for the Daughters of Charity, her blessing for the Company. Saint Vincent de Paul himself, in the conferences he held to speak about the virtues of Saint Louise, did not hesitate to acknowledge her power to intercede for her Daughters: “*Sisters, ask God fervently to give you the grace, through the prayers of Mademoiselle Le Gras.*”¹²

III - THE FINAL WISH ENTRUSTED TO THE SISTERS

As Mother of this new religious family, Saint Louise expressed her final wish for her Daughters.

All founders are aware that their specific experience of following Christ, which gave meaning to their lives, should be passed on to their spiritual family in order to transmit their same energy to it.¹³ Therefore, during their lifetime founders emphasize the specific characteristics of their way of following Christ in the Church (their spirituality). They do so through their letters, advice and writing of Rules. They do so by working for the formation of the members of the new group, assuring its official recognition in society and in the Church, and, above all, through their own lives, which serve as a model and necessary point of reference. And when they anticipate that their days are coming to an end, they leave the meaning of the life of the new association for posterity. Some write testaments or farewell letters. Other speak with special solemnity of their final wish. All want to express this as clearly as possible so there would not be any misinterpretations later.

11. Gobillon, p. 62

12. Coste X, p. 574

13. Fabio Ciardi, *Los fundadores, hombres del Espíritu. Para una teología del carisma de Fundador*. Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1983, p. 312-313.

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

As an example, we can see this in the Testament of Saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226): *“In virtue of obedience, I strictly forbid any of my friars, clerics or lay brothers, to interpret the Rule or these words, saying, ‘This is what they mean’. God inspired me to write the Rule and these words plainly and simply, and so you too must understand them plainly and simply, and live by them, doing good to the last.”*¹⁴

We can view Saint Louise’s spiritual testament as the expression of her final wish for the Company. Although Saint Vincent would protest that *“he never thought of it, nor did M. Portail, nor Mademoiselle,”* Saint Louise is really a “Foundress”, and at the hour of her death, she wanted to pass on the inspiration that comes from the wealth of her experience. It is Saint Vincent himself who asserts, *“If you want to be good Daughters of Charity, you must consider her virtues.... We’ve seen this beautiful portrait before us; now it’s on high. It remains for us to pattern ourselves on it”* (Conference on the Virtues of Louise de Marillac, July 3, 1660. Coste X, p. 582).

The spiritual testament of Saint Louise as a summary of her own life and as an **expression of her final wish** is for the Daughters of Charity the mirror in which they must constantly examine themselves: *“I don’t know what else to say...except that the life of Mademoiselle Le Gras is a mirror in which we have only to look at ourselves”* (Conference on the Virtues of Louise de Marillac, July 3, 1660. Coste X, p. 577).

IV - PERSEVERANCE IN YOUR VOCATION IN ORDER TO SERVE GOD IN THE MANNER THAT HE ASKS OF YOU

Throughout her life Saint Louise passionately sought to serve the Lord in the **way of life** that He wanted.

In her youth, she wanted to become a nun, but she heard, through the voice of the superior of the Capuchins, that this was not the way of life God desired for her: *“...he thought God had some other design on her.”*¹⁵

14, St. Francis of Assisi, *The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi*, tr. by Paschal Robinson, 1905. p. 85-86.

15. Gobillon, p. 4

When, after her marriage, her faith was tested, and she wondered in the middle of her dark night of faith if marriage was the life God asked of her, she was consoled and comforted in her light of Pentecost 1623 as she was given to understand that she “*should remain with [her] husband.*”¹⁶ Since this was God’s wish, she dedicated herself completely to her husband: “*I was alone with him to help him...*”¹⁷

When she was widowed, always with this desire to serve the Lord according to the life He asked of her, she renewed her vow of widowhood¹⁸ and wrote her Rule of Life in the World.¹⁹ With Saint Vincent’s approval, she began a new way of life, following “*the plan of God in my daily life through the practice of holy obedience.*”²⁰

In her passionate striving to live every moment serving the Lord in the way of life He wished, she experienced consolation. “*Our Lord inspired me to receive Him as the Spouse of my soul and that this Communion was a manner of espousal. I felt myself more closely united to Him by this consideration which was extraordinary for me. I also felt moved to leave everything to follow my Spouse; to look upon Him as such in the future...*”²¹

Certainly the words, “*My dear Sisters, I continue to ask God for His blessings for you and pray that He will grant you the grace to persevere in your vocation to serve him and in the manner that he asks of you,*” summarize, at the hour of her death, her entire life journey. They are the best testimony of Louise de Marillac’s life.

“*Serve [the Lord] in the manner that he asks of you*” is the substance of Saint Louise’s blessing for the Company, her intercessory prayer for each one of the Sisters, and her unwavering wish. This “*manner*” is for Saint Louise a “*holy occupation*”²² because, for the Daughters of

16. *Spiritual Writings* A. 2, p. 1

17. *La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux origines: Documents*. Ed. Elisabeth Charpy. Tours, 1989. D. 839.

18. *Spiritual Writings* A. 3, p. 694

19. *Spiritual Writings* A. 1, p. 689-691

20. *Spiritual Writings* L. 111, p. 122

21. *Spiritual Writings* A. 50, 705

22. *Spiritual Writings* L. 34, p. 43

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

Charity, “the love and service of God and neighbor is their sole reason for existence.”²³ In this way of life, the Sisters can “enjoy the sweetness and consolation which come from serving the poor without having to be concerned about other things.”²⁴

The vocation of a Daughter of Charity is one of God’s greatest graces. The secretary who transcribed the conference held December 25, 1648, wrote: “*Mademoiselle, our Most Honored Superioress, commented that we must love our vocation because it’s a mission given to us by God... On the third point, regarding the means that may help to increase in us the love of our vocation, the following was said: ‘The first means is to ask God for it every day and to declare often that we don’t want to yield to temptations, from whatever source they come. Another means is to reflect that Our Lord says that He regards as done to himself whatever we do to the least of His brothers and sisters... This will suffice to give us a love for our vocation. Another means is to love persons who are poor as members of Jesus Christ, as He recommends us to do.’*”²⁵

The greatness of our vocation demands a commitment of our entire life: the commitment to live and die in the Company: “*we do not accept anyone who does not intend to live and die in the Company.*”²⁶ “*I learned from our Most Honored Father that you take great pains with the good girls who present themselves for the Company to learn if they desire to come solely to serve God and not just to see Paris, if they intend to live and die in the Company...*”²⁷

The vocation to serve persons who are poor also implies *availability to go from one place to another*. The ability to work and save money is also a condition that Louise de Marillac demanded of someone who wished to become a Daughter of Charity because, otherwise, “*she would be far from possessing the qualities necessary to persevere in the life of the Daughters of Charity.*”²⁸

23. *Spiritual Writings* L. 134, p. 766

24. *Spiritual Writings* L. 318, p. 366

25. Coste IX, p. 355-357

26. *Spiritual Writings* L. 486, 513

27. *Spiritual Writings* L. 434, p. 470

28. *Spiritual Writings* L. 479, p. 509

This way of life involves an attitude of humility, simplicity and charity. *“Those who serve the poor... must act only as poor persons.”*²⁹ *“Be very careful, my dear Sister, that there is nothing in the hospital contrary to the humility and simplicity of the Daughters of Charity...”*³⁰

The service of those who are poor requires good preparation. Louise de Marillac herself would take responsibility to assure the first Daughters of Charity had the needed formation. *“It takes a long time to form the girls and to furnish them with what they need personally as well as with all they must know in order to serve the poor.”*³¹

V - TAKE GREAT CARE OF SERVICE OF THE POOR

When we examine the medallion of the **Lord of Charity**, painted by Saint Louise, we can discern, even if it is hardly visible, *“Come, blessed of my Father,”* on the left side of Our Lord’s heart.

The Sisters who gathered around Saint Vincent to speak about the virtues of Mademoiselle Le Gras after her death recalled the great care she had for the service of poor³²: *“She had deep affection for persons who were poor and took great pleasure in serving them. I’ve seen her take in poor persons who were leaving prison; she washed their feet, bandaged their wounds, and dressed them in her own son’s clothing”*; *“She likewise showed great charity toward persons who were poor and was happy when she was able to serve them”*; *“She also had a great charity for the poor.”*

“Come, blessed of my Father.”

Saint Vincent’s secretary left us a note written by a servant of Saint Louise that reflects her lifestyle **during the years of her marriage**: *“In her youth, she piously and devotedly served those who were poor. She brought them candies and jellies, cookies and other sweets; she would comb them hair, clean their scabs and remove their lice and prepare them for burial... She would leave her husband’s company to go up a hill to care for a poor man shivering with cold although it was raining and hailing.”*³³

29. *Spiritual Writings* L. 284b, p. 321

30. *Spiritual Writings* L. 480, p. 509

31. *Spiritual Writings* L. 486, p. 513

32. Coste X, p. 570, p. 578

33. *Documents*, Doc. 809

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

In May 1629, Vincent sent Louise on mission: “Go, therefore, Mademoiselle, go in the name of Our Lord.”³⁴ These initial visits to the **Confraternities of Charity**, in which she carried out an important work directing and encouraging them for the service of poor persons, had opened the door to establishing Charities in Parisian parishes as well: the first Confraternity was established in her own parish (1630) and then in other parishes to care for poor persons in the city whereas Confraternities of Charity had only been in the countryside up to that time.

“Come, blessed of my Father.”

Providence led Louise de Marillac to pass from the animation of the Confraternities of Charity to the foundation, with Vincent, of the Confraternity and later the foundation of the **Company of the Daughters of Charity** and to the service of Christ in each of the **forms of poverty of her time**.

“I was sick.”

For the sick in Hôtel-Dieu of Paris, then in the hospital of Angers and in so many others, for those sick in their homes and even in the streets, Louise insisted: “Do you provide towels at the beds of the sick? Do you maintain their cleanliness? Especially, my dear Sisters, do you have a great love for their salvation? It is this in particular that our good God expects of you.”³⁵

“I was a foundling.”

*“Those poor little creatures were receiving very little assistance - one wet nurse for four or five babies! They were being sold for eight sous apiece to beggars who would break their arms and legs to arouse pity so the people would give them alms...”*³⁶

Louise began a new work: twelve babies, chosen by Divine Providence. Two years later, in 1640, all the abandoned children of Paris, more than four hundred. It was necessary to feed them, to make sure they would be raised well, to go into the villages to find good host families for each child.

34. Coste I, p. 64-65 (L. 39)

35. *Spiritual Writings* L. 160, p. 182

36. Coste XIIIb, p. 421 (Doc. 195)

“I was an uneducated girl.”

Louise, beginning with the first visits to the Confraternities of Charity, took books and wall-hangings with the alphabet with her to teach letters to the little girls, and she prepared the most talented to teach others in turn, like Marguerite Naseau. She established a little school in her home for the poor girls of her neighborhood. She formed her Daughters to be able to take responsibility for girls’ education so that in each house there was always a Sister to take care of the poor and the sick and another to take care of the school. She encouraged them, saying, *“I am also certain that you will find great pleasure in teaching, as best you can, these little creatures, redeemed by the blood of the Son of God, so that they may praise and glorify Him forever.”*³⁷

“I was in prison, I was a galley slave.”

Once named chaplain of the galley slaves, Vincent became aware that they had been abandoned both materially and spiritually: *“I’ve seen those poor men treated like animals; that caused God to be moved with compassion. They inspired pity in Him; as a result, His Goodness did two things on their behalf: first, He had a house bought for them; second, He willed to arrange matters in such a way as to have them served by His own daughters, because to say a Daughter of Charity is to say a daughter of God.”*³⁸

In 1640, the daughters of God, the Daughters of Charity began a new work with Louise de Marillac, who had already been visiting the prisoners of the Tournelle with other people of her parish since 1632.

She chose the best Sisters for this service and formed them in the way to carry out this work: *“the sisters must never reproach them nor speak rudely to them. Moreover, the galley slaves should be treated with great compassion, as much for their spiritual state as for their most pitiful corporal state.”*³⁹

37. *Spiritual Writings* L. 367, p. 421

38. Coste X, p. 103

39. *Spiritual Writings* A. 91, p. 741

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

“I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was naked.”

There were so many vagabonds, beggars and poor persons in the streets of Paris that it was impossible to put a figure on them. The authorities thought the solution was to lock them up in an abandoned fortress and asked Vincent to be in charge of it with the help of his collaborators. Louise dissuaded him as she had already begun the Hospice of the Name of Jesus with 40 poor people who lived there in a family setting; it inspired many other establishments: *“...persons sheltered there will be helped to become participants in the merits of the life and death of Jesus Christ and thereby to gain eternal salvation as much by the instruction they receive as by the good use they make of their time.”*⁴⁰

“You served me in persons with mental illness.”

St. Vincent, who was in charge of the “Petites Maisons” on the property of St. Lazare, which sheltered *“old men and sick men, the incorrigible poor, the disabled, women with epilepsy...without means without a functioning mind,”* asked Louise and the Sisters to go there to help them. *“Let’s bless and thank God for entrusting to us the care of these poor men, deprived of their intelligence and reason; for, in serving them, we see and touch the extent and diversity of human misery. Through this knowledge we will be better suited to work effectively for the neighbor.”*⁴¹

“You helped me when I was a victim of war.”

The wars filled the streets of Paris with beggars by successive waves: *“during these times of affliction...our Sisters... never stopped serving the sick poor. In Paris you would not believe the amount of alms given to the poor who had no bread. I believe that this has drawn down God’s mercy upon us so that we might have peace.”*⁴² *“We have more troubles here than ever. Paris is swarming with poor persons because the armies have forced the poor country folk to seek refuge here. Meetings are held daily to see how they can be helped...”* The Daughters of Charity *“prepare and distribute the soup daily for thirteen hundred bashful poor at the home of Mademoiselle Le Gras, and for eight hundred refugees in the faubourg Saint-Denis. In Saint-Paul parish alone four or five Sisters make the distribution to five thousand poor persons, in addition to the*

40. *Spiritual Writings* A. 99, p. 794

41. *Coste* XI, p. 19

42. *Spiritual Writings* L. 244, p. 280

sixty to eighty patients they have on their hands.”⁴³ Louise also had the courage to send the Daughters of Charity to the battlefields, when there were challenges to address on a personal level and in terms of the care of the sick: “In fact, you will see a great amount of misery that you cannot relieve... Share their trials with them; do all you can to provide them with a little assistance and remain at peace.”⁴⁴

During her final illness, after having recommended to the Sisters: “Take great care of the service of the poor’... she added that she was dying in high esteem of their vocation, and that, were she to live a hundred years, she would still recommend the same thing to them.”⁴⁵

How many times had Louise repeated that the poor are the members of Jesus Christ, that she was a servant of Jesus Christ and of his members, the poor, and that she desired to live and die as a true Sister of Charity and servant of the members of Jesus Christ!⁴⁶ She could therefore confidently hear the words of the Lord of Charity: “Come, blessed of my Father.” A collection of engravings aptly summarizes Saint Louise’s life of service of persons who are poor based on Matthew 25, which the Church calls “the works of mercy.” The words of her spiritual testament, “Take good care of the service of the poor;” sum up her entire life.

In her correspondence with the Sisters, Saint Louise insisted on the need to seek out and care for all poor persons. “I urge you, Sister, to accept the poor whenever possible.”⁴⁷ If persons who are sick or poor do not come to the house, you must go out to look for them: “Praise God that you have only one patient in your hospital. That will give you more opportunities to help the sick of the area ...”⁴⁸ “I beg you, my dear Sister, to take turns teaching school, looking after the house and nursing the sick in the villages.”⁴⁹ Wherever they are, poor persons, all poor persons, should be cared for.

43. Coste IV, p. 386 (L. 1505), p. 400 (L. 1511)

44. *Spiritual Writings* L. 353, p. 396

45. Gobillon, p. 62

46. Cf. *Spiritual Writings* L. 1, L. 547, L. 104b, L. 424; *Documents* Doc. 847, p. 922

47. *Spiritual Writings* L. 171, p. 230

48. *Spiritual Writings* L. 344b, p. 394

49. *Spiritual Writings* L. 354, p. 375

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

The service of persons who are poor always requires corporal and spiritual care. Poor persons must be cared for holistically. “*Let us love Love,*” Saint Louise wrote as she contemplated Christ nailed to the Cross; service of those who are poor is the **response of love to a call of Love.**⁵⁰ “*Let us then, my dear Sisters, apply ourselves diligently to the corporal and spiritual service of the sick poor for the love of Jesus Crucified.*”⁵¹

Every act of service should be filled with this Love: “*...to serve your sick poor in a spirit of gentleness and great compassion, in imitation of Our Lord who acted this way with the most unfortunate... it is not enough to have good intentions or for our wills to be inclined to do good solely for the love of God because, when we received the commandment to love God with all our heart, we also received a second commandment which is to love our neighbor. In order to do this we must give good example.*”⁵²

Since Jesus Christ, the Crucified Lord, wished to put himself last, those who are the least in this world, **those who are poor, are His members and our masters.** In the correspondence of Saint Louise and in her writings, we find many phrases that stress that we find Christ in the Poor and that we serve him in his poor members: *the members of Jesus*⁵³; *our masters*⁵⁴; *poor creatures that His goodness wills us to look upon as His members*⁵⁵; *our dear masters*⁵⁶; *these souls, redeemed by the blood of the Son of God*⁵⁷; *your masters, and His dear members*⁵⁸; *our dear masters... the members of Jesus Christ*⁵⁹; *we serve Our Lord in the person of the poor*⁶⁰; *servant of Jesus Christ and His members*⁶¹; *creatures redeemed by the blood of the Son of God*⁶²; *members of Jesus Christ our masters.*⁶³

50. Cf. *Spiritual Writings* A. 27, p. 827-829

51. *Spiritual Writings* L. 531b, p. 515

52. *Spiritual Writings* L. 383, p. 434-435

53. *Spiritual Writings* L. 1, p. 6

54. *Spiritual Writings* L. 43, p. 12

55. *Spiritual Writings* L. 9, p. 18

56. *Spiritual Writings* L. 426, p. 36

57. *Spiritual Writings* L. 41, p. 50

58. *Spiritual Writings* L. 547, p. 81

59. *Spiritual Writings* L. 104b, p. 113

60. *Spiritual Writings* L. 276, p. 314

61. *Spiritual Writings* L. 389, p. 409

62. *Spiritual Writings* L. 367, p. 421

63. *Spiritual Writings* L. 424, p. 468

Based on this solid conviction that the poor are the privileged members of Christ and thus, “our Lords”, Louise focused on the care, attention and preference her Daughters of Charity should have for them,⁶⁴ and she herself devoted all her energy to serving them. She dedicated herself without sparing any effort to form the Daughters of Charity in the spirit and the organization of the service of poor persons, which was the driving force behind her entire life and her vocation.

Saint Louise gave these instructions to the Sisters sent to Arras in 1656: *“They are going there under the same conditions as all the other Sisters go to other places where they are sent, that is, to serve the sick poor corporally and spiritually and to observe as much as possible their Rules and exercises, as if they were in their House, recalling that the service of those who are poor should always be preferred to all other things, this being their primary purpose.”*⁶⁵

Because the poor are members of Jesus Christ, leaving God for God does not present any problem: *“we are leaving God for God if we leave one of our spiritual exercises for the service of the poor.”*⁶⁶

VI - LIVE TOGETHER IN GREAT UNION AND CORDIALITY IN IMITATION OF THE UNION AND LIFE OF OUR LORD

Saint Louise wrote to the Sisters on mission in Valpuseaux (a small village about fifty kilometers southwest of Paris): *“O my dear Sisters, it seems to me that you will be living in great union and cordiality!”*⁶⁷ This expression sprang from her motherly heart, sure of the Sisters’ fidelity. She continually reminded the Sisters that Daughters of Charity are called and assembled by God, who is love.

In the draft of the rule prepared by Saint Louise and in the first rule presented for approval by the Archbishop of Paris in 1645, we read *“... that they are called Daughters of Charity; that is, Sisters who make*

64. Cf. *Spiritual Writings* A. 84, A. 92

65. *Documents* Doc. 664

66. *Spiritual Writings* L. 439, p. 510-511

67. *Spiritual Writings* L. 270, p. 321

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

*profession of loving God and the neighbor; consequently, besides the sovereign love they should have for God, they should excel in love of the neighbor, especially of their companions.”*⁶⁸ It was Saint Louise who wrote in her own hand the conference Saint Vincent gave to the first Sisters on *Cordial Respect* (January 1, 1644).

At a particularly significant moment in her service of the Company, in October 1644, Saint Louise asked permission of Saint Vincent to make a pilgrimage to Chartres. Soon afterwards, she wrote him an account of her trip: *“I prayed [for the Company]... that He might be the strong and loving bond that unites the hearts of all the sisters in imitation of the union of the three Divine Persons.”*⁶⁹

The Triune God is the foundation and the constant inspiration for *relationships in community*. To Sister Elisabeth Hellot, who would be her secretary for many years, Saint Louise wrote very simply, inspired by the friendship that characterized their relationship: *“Let us truly love each other in Him, but let us love Him in each other since we are His.”*⁷⁰

Differences in personality, background or education are a treasure for the community. In the middle of a letter with a lot of news for the Sisters, we find this reference that appears quite naturally and recalls the unity of the first Christian communities: *“I believe you to be of but one heart, since Daughters of Charity must become so on account of the union which exists among them.”*⁷¹

At the beginnings of this new form of community life in the Church, Saint Louise encouraged the first Sisters to create a positive fraternal environment among themselves, overcoming the difficulties inherent for people living together, all the more so given that most of them came from the country. *“I beg all our sisters... to renew you in the spirit of unity and cordiality that the Daughters of Charity must possess through the practice of this same charity which is accompanied by all the Christian virtues, particularly mutual support which is our dearest virtue. I recommend*

68. Coste XIIIb, p. 126 (Doc. 145)

69. *Spiritual Writings* L. 111, p. 122

70. *Spiritual Writings* L. 146, p. 159

71. *Spiritual Writings* L. 182, p. 206

this to you, as much as I can, as something which is absolutely necessary since it leads us never to see the faults of another with bitterness but rather always to excuse them while humbling ourselves. I beg you, my dear Sister, to ask for this spirit, which is the spirit of Our Lord, for our entire Company..."⁷²

Louise encouraged Sister Laurence Dubois, who had just gone to Bernay to replace Sister Barbe Angiboust as Sister Servant (January 19, 1655) to live out communion and a spirit of communion. *"I have the impression that the two of you are living together in great peace and with the desire of animating one another to strive for union and cordiality. This creates a climate in which you communicate with one another, telling one another what you did while you were apart and letting one another know where you are going when you leave the house... The same applies to your community exercises. If one of you is sad, let her overcome herself so as to recreate with her sister. At the same time, let the one who is cheerful moderate her exuberance so as to accommodate herself to the mood of her sister and, little by little, draw her out of her melancholy. All this should be done for the love of God..."*⁷³

After the collapse of the ceiling on the eve of Pentecost 1642, which Saint Louise interpreted as a grace God granted the Company, she wrote about how to live in conformity with this special care shown by Divine Providence. The Company should have great devotion to the Feast of Pentecost, and the Sisters should live in great union with each other: *"It seemed to me that in order to be faithful to God we must live in great union with one another. Since the Holy Spirit is the union of the Father and the Son, the life which we have freely undertaken must be lived in this great union of hearts. This will prevent us from becoming annoyed by the actions of others and enable us to bear with one another and to live together with cordiality and gentleness. The familiar exchanges that we propose to have each Friday and the monthly Conferences, should we be permitted to have them, can help to facilitate this practice."*⁷⁴

72. *Spiritual Writings* L. 275, p. 313

73. *Spiritual Writings* L. 425, p. 463

74. *Spiritual Writings* A. 75, p. 768

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

Jesus told His friends that the world will recognize them as His disciples if they love one another as He has loved them (cf. Jn 13:34-35). The communion the first Christian communities lived attracted many gentiles to the Gospel.

In a letter to the Daughters of Charity in Chantilly (January 1650), Saint Louise emphasized the importance of fraternal witness in community, which is prophetic and a sign of the aroma of Christ (2 Cor 2:15) amid the poor persons they served: *“I praise God with all my heart for the grace His goodness has granted you to be a source of edification [literally, aroma] where He has seen fit to place you. However, be sure to thank Him for it through the practice of the virtues He asks of you, especially great cordiality and mutual understanding among you. Am I not wrong in recommending this virtue to you, my dear Sisters, because without it you would be unable to be not only good Daughters of Charity, but even good Christians?”*⁷⁵

A community that lives in sisterly love is an epiphany of God, a manifestation of God: God is present within the community. A little less than a year before her death, Saint Louise wrote to Sister Catherine Gesse (May 4, 1659): *“Because I am confident that my letters will not be lost, I am taking advantage of this safe route of delivery to write to you to rejoice with you, by thanking God for the graces His goodness has bestowed upon you, enabling you to continue to love His service by observing your Rules especially by the cordiality and support you show one another. I cannot tell you what a consolation this is for me. So long as these holy practices exist among you, you can be certain that God is with you. I beg Him with all my heart to continue to grant you His graces...”*⁷⁶

These words are the very expression of Louise’s life: a life of charity. This is what the Sisters said in the conferences held with Saint Vincent to speak about her virtues:

- *“Father, she showed as much affection for one Sister as for another in such a way that she tried to please everyone.”*

75. *Spiritual Writings* L. 276, p. 314

76. *Spiritual Writings* L. 619, p. 639

- *“I’ve always recognized that she had great charity and forbearance for us, so much so that she wore herself out.”*

- *“Father, she was so kind to me that sometimes, when she saw that I was troubled, she would treat me very gently.”*

- *“She had great love and charity for all the Sisters, always bearing with them and excusing them.”*

- *“She had great charity for the Sisters and was afraid of annoying them.”*

- *“I heard her say that she loved all our Sisters very much and wanted all of us to be as perfect as our model Jesus Christ.”*

- *“One day, during her last illness, I asked her what she would ask God for me and for all our Sisters. She said she was asking Him to grant us the grace to live in great union and charity as true Daughters of Charity, as He desires of us.”⁷⁷*

VII - THE BLESSED VIRGIN, YOUR ONLY MOTHER

In all likelihood, Saint Louise did not know her mother, but she always looked to the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. In her writings, Saint Louise frequently mentions the Virgin Mary: she invokes her in all sorts of circumstances; she offers her as a model for herself and her Daughters; she consecrates the Company of the Daughters of Charity to her; her imagination and skill even make a place for Mary in her painting.

Saint Louise wrote a prayer of Oblation to the Blessed Virgin, placing herself and her son under Mary’s protection after the death of her husband, Antoine Le Gras: *“Most Holy Virgin, deign to take my son and me into Your care. Welcome the choice I make of you as our protectress. Accept my vows and my prayers as well as my heart which I give entirely to you so as to glorify God for the choice He made of you to be the Mother of His Son.”⁷⁸*

77. Coste X, p. 569-590

78. *Spiritual Writings* A. 4, p. 695

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

In her Rule of Life in the World, Saint Louise listed several devotional practices in honor of the Virgin Mary.⁷⁹ Saint Louise explained and recommended the Hail Mary and the Rosary in the catechism she wrote.⁸⁰ Saint Louise composed a little chaplet⁸¹, although it seems Saint Vincent did not authorize it. This devotion of Saint Louise has endured in the traditional prayer of the Daughters of Charity between the mysteries of the Rosary: *“Most Holy Virgin, I believe and confess...”* Saint Louise had the habit of invoking the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin in her prayers: *“for the love which you bear for the Holy Virgin.”*⁸² Saint Louise entrusted to the Blessed Virgin what was most dear to her in this world: her son and the Company of the Daughters of Charity. She wanted the Company to be dedicated to Mary and to always consider her its Only Mother.⁸³

Her correspondence with Saint Vincent and her personal writings clearly show her desire and convictions. Saint Louise asked permission of Saint Vincent to make a pilgrimage to Chartres: *“I beg you most humbly to allow me to make a pilgrimage to Chartres during your absence so that I may entrust all our needs and the suggestions I have made to you to the care of the Blessed Virgin. The time has surely come for me to reflect on myself in the sight of God. I must tell you that I am convinced that the good of our little Company requires it.”*⁸⁴

Louise gave an account of her pilgrimage to Chartres to Saint Vincent: *“On Monday [October 17, 1644], Feast of the Dedication of the Church of Chartres, I offered to God the designs of His Providence on the Company of the Daughters of Charity. I offered the said Company entirely to Him, asking Him to destroy it rather than let it be established contrary to His holy will. I asked for it, through the prayers of the Holy Virgin, Mother and Guardian of the said Company, the purity of which it stands in need. Looking upon the Blessed Virgin as the fulfillment of the promises of God to mankind, and seeing the fulfillment of the vow of the Blessed Virgin in*

79. *Spiritual Writings* A. 1, p. 689-691

80. *Documents* Doc. 824

81. *Spiritual Writings* L. 303b, p. 140

82. *Spiritual Writings* A. 26, p. 819

83. Cf. *Spiritual Writings* L. 110, L. 111, L. 245, L. 598, L. 602, A. 22, M. 35b; Coste X, p. 500

84. *Spiritual Writings* L. 110, p. 120

the accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation, I asked Him for the grace of fidelity for the Company through the merits of the Blood of the Son of God and of Mary. I prayed also that He might be the strong and loving bond that unites the hearts of all the sisters in imitation of the union of the three Divine Persons. In my prayers for myself, I placed in the hands of the Blessed Virgin the decision to be made..."⁸⁵

Louise asked Vincent that the Company be consecrated to Mary and take her as its Only Mother: *"My Most Honored Father, How can I express to your Charity, in the name of the entire Company of our sisters, how fortunate we would consider ourselves if tomorrow, at the holy altar, you placed us under the protection of the Holy Virgin? I beg your Charity to obtain for us the grace to be able, henceforth, to look upon her as our only Mother since, until now, her Son has never allowed anyone to usurp this title in a public act. Please approve this request for the love of God and implore for us the grace to do what we must and will do, if your Charity sees fit and is willing to teach us."*⁸⁶

In his conference of December 8, 1658, Vincent de Paul made this prayer: *"Since the Company of Charity has been established under the standard of your perfection, if we have hitherto called you our Mother, we now entreat you to accept the offering we make you of the Company in general and each of its members in particular. And because you allow us to call you Mother, and you are the Mother of Mercy, the channel through which all mercy flows; and because, as we believe, you obtained from God the establishment of this Company, be pleased to take it under Your protection."*⁸⁷

On several occasions, Louise referred to the Blessed Virgin as the Only Mother: *"...to give greater honor to the Holy Virgin and to renew the dependence of the Company upon her, as her most unworthy daughters, who look on her also as our most praiseworthy and only Mother."*⁸⁸ *"... the Blessed Virgin our true and only Mother."*⁸⁹ *Like a true Daughter of*

85. *Spiritual Writings* L. 111, p. 122

86. *Spiritual Writings* L. 602, p. 621-622

87. Coste X, p. 500

88. *Spiritual Writings* M. 35b, p. 735

89. *Spiritual Writings* L. 245, p. 281

“I continue to ask God for His blessings for you.”

Charity, you must accept all that is said to you by the one who, here on earth, represents your true Superior in heaven... ”⁹⁰

The phrase in her spiritual testament, “*Pray earnestly to the Blessed Virgin, that she may be your only Mother,*” is the ultimate summary, the solemn witness of an entire life of gratitude to the Virgin Mary, her only Mother.

Conclusion

Therefore, March 15, 1660, did not mark the death of Louise de Marillac but rather the dawning of her fullness of life. Her first biographer described a phenomenon that occurred around Louise de Marillac’s tomb in the parish of Saint Laurent: “*From time to time a kind of soft haze emanates from it, spreading a fragrance like that of violets and irises. Many people can testify to that, and what is more surprising is that the Sisters of Charity who come and pray at her tomb sometimes go away so fragrant with this perfume that they carry it with them to the sick sisters in the infirmary of the motherhouse. If it were worth considering in this context, I could add that I myself have experienced it several times. I could also say that after taking every possible measure to find out if it might arise from natural causes, I could not find any to which it could be attributed.*”⁹¹ Then Nicolas Gobillon invites us to understand the significance and meaning of this phenomenon: “*But whatever might be the nature of the fragrance which rises from the tomb of this servant of the poor, an entirely spiritual one arises from the example of her life, more precious than any perfume. This spiritual fragrance is a miracle of grace, and the most glorious sign of her holiness. It is this true fragrance which penetrates her daughters’ hearts, and which draws them so gently and powerfully to imitate her. It is this fragrance which pervades every parish and every pastor, inspiring them to love and care for the poor. Finally it is this fragrance which has not only spread throughout the earth in God’s church, but which has risen up to his throne, and which he has received as an acceptable sacrifice.*”⁹²

90. *Spiritual Writings* L. 598, p. 618

91. Gobillon, p. 65. Louise de Marillac had asked in her will to be buried beside the deceased Sisters in the parish cemetery of Saint Laurent. Her final wish was only partially respected: she was buried inside the church, against the wall where the Sisters were buried.

92. Gobillon, p. 65

The fragrance of violets and irises would continue and expand among the Daughters of Charity. Louise organized the holistic formation of all those who came to the Company. She helped them to discern the authenticity of their vocation: giving themselves totally to God and serving Him in those who are poor. She encouraged their prayer life. She supported their perseverance when difficulties arose in the service of those who are poor. She created a real family environment among the Sisters. She acted decisively to assure that the Company would have the appropriate juridical status, above all insisting that it come under the authority of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. And, most importantly, she imbued her Daughters with the real spirit of Charity, stressing excellence in the service of poor persons.

Let's listen to Vincent de Paul speaking about the life of Louise de Marillac, as if speaking directly to you: *"Yes, we have this picture, and you must consider it a model to inspire you to do likewise... You should also recall how she tended to conform all her actions to those of Our Lord. She did what Saint Paul said, 'It is no longer I who live, but Jesus who lives in me.' In this way she strove to make herself like her Master by imitating His virtues... See what a portrait that is! And how are you to make use of it, dear Sisters? By striving to pattern your lives on hers. O mon Dieu, what a beautiful picture! What humility, faith, prudence, sound judgment, and always the concern to conform her actions to those of Our Lord!"*⁹³ Saint Vincent's invitation is still relevant: *"It remains for us to pattern ourselves on it."*⁹⁴

Father Corpus DELGADO, CM

93. Coste X, p. 585

94. Coste X, p. 582

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**Most Holy Virgin,
you know the emotions of my heart
today at the thought
of your Divine Son in the Crib
and how great this mystery seemed to me
when I considered that it was
the introduction of the law of grace
granted to all mankind,
which until then
had been held captive by the guilt of
original sin,
that deprived all souls
of the vision of God
for which they had been created.**

**O holy time of grace!
Why are our souls not in a continuous
state of joy and happiness?**

Spiritual Writings, A. 14b

