

*E*choes *of the Company*



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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Year of Consecrated Life

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Retreat in preparation for the Renovation 2015

**Sanctify them in the truth.
Your word is truth (Jn 17:17)**

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Spiritual
Life

In the Gospel according to Saint John, when the time has come, Jesus shares the Passover meal, performs the act of washing the feet, and delivers His testament... He is approaching His Passover and prays for His disciples. Jesus asks His Father to sanctify¹ His disciples. It is through His passion, death and resurrection that we are sanctified, freed from sin, saved. Through Him, with Him and in Him, “given to God for the service of those who are poor”, the annual renovation of vows gives the Daughters of Charity the possibility to enter with a stronger faith into the mystery of their sanctification that Christ wishes to share with all His disciples, through the history of this world.

Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I sanctify myself for them, so that they also may be sanctified in truth (Jn 17:17-19).

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end (Jn 13:1).

This verse ushers us into the hour when Jesus walks toward His passion, death and resurrection. Yes, the hour has come. The love of the Father and of humanity is given over in

1. The Ecumenical Translation of the Bible in French and other English translations use “consecrate”.

the Paschal mystery of the Son. We must pass through it in order to give ourselves, loving by living our Paschal mystery.

I invite you during this day of retreat in preparation for the renovation of your vows to welcome this mystery of Christ’s love for His disciples. This love precedes us and welcomes us. Year after year, your ‘yes’, your acceptance of the love of Christ crucified, dedicates you to the service of persons who are poor. In this special time, we pray with Jesus, meditating on Jesus’ greatest prayer, found in chapter 17 of the Gospel according to Saint John. It will be with us throughout our reflection.

When Jesus had said this, he raised his eyes to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you, just as you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to all you gave him. Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ. I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do. Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began. I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you gave me is from you, because the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me” (Jn 17:1-8).

Rereading the aims for the Year of Consecrated Life, I suggest that we take them up for this day of reflection, meditation, prayer and thanksgiving.

I. THE FIRST AIM IS TO LOOK TO THE PAST WITH GRATITUDE.

We raise up our gratitude and our thanksgiving to God the Father in union with Christ. Let us receive this passage from the Gospel according to Saint Luke. Let us enter into Jesus’s praise in order to confidently review our past: a path of faith and service in the Company with the least among us.

At that very moment he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to

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the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father; and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.” Turning to the disciples in private he said, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it” (Lk 10:21-24).

This passage from Luke takes place when the seventy-two disciples, whom Jesus had sent out on mission, return full of joy. They say: “*Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name*” (Lk 10:17).

The disciples are happy, but Jesus invites them to rejoice not because demons are subject to them but because their names are written in heaven. The disciples were able to observe that God acts powerfully through the Name of Jesus of Nazareth and that God really has given complete authority to His Son. God was able to touch the hearts of these Galileans, who were neither especially learned nor necessarily experienced; He made of them messengers of the Kingdom of God, and their names are already written in heaven. Jesus thanks the Father for all of this. “*Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!*”

Jesus appears to brush aside their victories over Satan. What He considers more important for His disciples is that their names are written in heaven. Living out our consecration is much more than simply chasing away the devil or triumphing over evil. Our faith is a deeply positive faith. It makes us grow in our love for God and the service of persons living in poverty. Because it is a matter of practicing love, we can always do more for others and for Christ. Love knows no limits; we can never say that we’ve “made it.”

Carrying out the will of His Father leads Christ to suffer difficulties, fatigue, hunger and rejection. But He does not grow discouraged. Christ has an endless reserve of energy for His Father. He loves His Father. In that way, He teaches us a profound truth about our human nature. “*Man cannot live without love,*” Pope John Paul II wrote in his first encyclical.²

2. *Redemptor hominis* (1979), no. 10

“He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.”

Father, sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I sanctify myself for them, so that they also may be sanctified in truth (Jn 17:17-19).

Jesus prays for our sanctification. Through His Paschal Mystery, He frees us from any form of self-sufficiency. In Jesus, we find the right relationship with God, others and ourselves. In a world dominated by technology and virtual communication, discernment is necessary in order to tend to our vocation.

The vow of chastity calls us to patiently, lucidly and steadfastly live our life consecrated to God and to those who are poor. Let us listen anew to this call for today. I quote Constitution 29:

In following Jesus Christ, the Daughters of Charity commit themselves by vow to a life of chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. They embrace chastity as a gift that frees their heart and gives it the dimensions of the heart of Jesus Christ for an unconditional gift and total availability in the service of those who are poor.

In a spirit of gratitude and joy, they live chastity, a source of spiritual fecundity and a sign of the Covenant between God and His people. As a response of love to a call of Love, chastity involves participation in the Paschal Mystery, the mystery of death and life.

It demands transcending a certain loneliness of heart and calls for behavior that makes it a clear, genuine Gospel witness.

The vow of chastity helps us pass from our dreams to reality. I am not all-powerful. I need others. The boldness of charity is accomplished in a simple and authentic life. Our hearts are made to open up to a universal dimension. We are then able to live the Gospel in the midst of this era where distress and violence disfigure so many persons. In his Apostolic Letter to all consecrated people, Pope Francis shares several expectations

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with us. I bring out this one:

I trust that, rather than living in some utopia, you will find ways to create 'alternate spaces', where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive. Monasteries, communities, centers of spirituality, schools, hospitals, family shelters – all these are places which the charity and creativity born of your charisms have brought into being, and with constant creativity must continue to bring into being. They should increasingly be the leaven for a society inspired by the Gospel, a 'city on a hill', which testifies to the truth and the power of Jesus' words (Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter to all consecrated people, II, no. 2).

Jesus raised His eyes to heaven and said, "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, because they are yours, and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father; keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are. When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely. I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world" (Jn 17:9-16).

II. THE SECOND AIM OF THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE CALLS US TO LIVE THE PRESENT WITH PASSION.

Therefore, we must learn to better live the present. It means simply taking the time to recognize that I am alive, that I'm breathing, that my heart is beating and that reality is made known through my senses. In the Gospel Jesus continually presents His listeners with everyday wonders to contemplate. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges us:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they?

Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wildflowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?

So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil (Mt 6:25-34).

There are many things about which to worry. Our lives are filled with concerns. They are caused by fear. Fear of some danger or another, fear of the future, worry even about the present day and what we're going to do, as well as fear for everything we own. In our society, we want to insure everything. Not just our houses and our possessions, but even our lives! It's normal to have insurance. But what Jesus criticizes energetically is a mentality that would consist of placing all our security in belongings. What He criticizes even more strongly is the exaggerated worry that this signifies: worry about everything, for what we own, for the present and the future, for our very lives. However, from experience and trusting in Divine Providence, we believe that "sufficient for a day is its own evil." Worrying has never solved any problems. What resolves problems is trust and faith.

Thus, day after day, we advance toward Jesus' Kingdom. Often, what wears us out are looking back to past events and the fear of the future whereas, when we live in the present moment, we mysteriously find strength. What I must live through today, I do so by grace. If I must face more difficult situations tomorrow, God will grant me more grace. God's

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grace is given just as we need it, day after day. Living the present moment implies accepting our weakness by giving up the pretension that we can rewrite the past and control the future and making do with the present.

Lord, give me enough trust to entrust tomorrow to You and to only seek, day after day, Your Kingdom and its justice, accepting the daily suffering of giving birth to that Kingdom.

Father, sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I sanctify myself for them, so that they also may be sanctified in truth (Jn 17:17-19).

In what we call the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' intent is to make us reflect on another level, that of the Kingdom of Heaven. He wants to open our minds to God's way of acting in the domain that is His own. The key words are not efficiency, profitability and market-driven, but saving and giving life in abundance! Isn't that what we ask in the Our Father? "Give us this day our daily bread."

The vow of poverty unites us to Jesus' condition. He became poor to sanctify us and make us like Him. Reading Constitution 30a, we discover this same spirit defining our vow of poverty. Our treasure is Jesus and Jesus alone.

The Son of God assumed poverty in a spirit of abandonment to the Father and as a sign of His mission in the world. In following Him, the Daughters of Charity acknowledge that all that they have comes from God. Happy to have no other treasure than God, they give thanks for this and, by their vow of poverty, commit themselves to total dependence in the use and disposal of the goods of the Company, as well as in the use of their personal goods.

This poverty finds its fullness in poverty of spirit. The poor in spirit are blessed; they possess the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, they accept with serenity contradictions, failures, their own limitations, and those of others. Poverty of spirit is openness to the Spirit and to the love of all persons. It inspires the Daughters of Charity to place at the service of their brothers and sisters their person, their talents, their time, and their

work, as well as material goods, which they consider the patrimony of the most deprived.

The vow of poverty frees us and spurs us on for a new missionary momentum. Thanks to God and thanks to each Sister, you are able to conceive the attitudes and actions that give life. In his apostolic letter for this graced year, Pope Francis challenges us, and I repeat his words:

Don't be closed in on yourselves, don't be stifled by petty squabbles, don't remain a hostage to your own problems. These will be resolved if you go forth and help others to resolve their own problems, and proclaim the Good News. You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love. I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray (Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter to all consecrated people, II, no. 4).

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them" (Jn 17:20-26).

III. TO EMBRACE THE FUTURE WITH HOPE SHOULD BE THE THIRD AIM OF THIS YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE.

In our lives, there are many transformations we cannot anticipate, but we must discern those to be adopted. The Kingdom of God, the presence of Christ in our lives shines through in these many little unexpected, imperceptible and often inexplicable transformations. The Kingdom of

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God is germinating. The Kingdom of God is life with God, life in God in the light and love of God. Let us listen to this passage from Saint Mark's Gospel:

Jesus said, "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come."

He said, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade."

With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private (Mk 4:26-34).

What is the Kingdom of God? *"It is Jesus Himself,"* Benedict XVI reminded us. Our soul is the essential place where the Kingdom of God is found. God wants to live and grow within us!

If we patiently harmonize with His grace, His divine life will grow in us like the seed grows in the field. The Medieval mystic Meister Eckhart said it beautifully: *"The seed of God is in us. Given an intelligent and hard-working farmer, it will thrive and grow up into God, whose seed it is; and accordingly its fruits will be God-nature. Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds into nut trees, and God-seed into God."*

Why does Jesus speak in this way, with these little stories we call parables? What is in His heart that makes Him address us in this way? When he speaks, this gushes forth from His heart. He is filled with the urgent need to speak about God, about the Kingdom of God. This is why He came: to reveal who God really is and who we are. However, He speaks to people who do not understand, people who are hesitant, distrusting and sometimes contentious.

For Jesus, the mystery of God is so great that He offers more and more parables since none of them exhausts the mystery. So many images, comparisons and stories are needed to approach the mystery of God: it is like a seed, a net, a field, a man who found a treasure. Jesus offers so many images, responses that spring from His heart. Brother Alois of Taizé, in his Lenten conference at Notre Dame of Paris, said:

*"A parable is a simple, accessible story, but one that refers to a reality of a totally different and much higher order. The meaning of a parable is inexhaustible; a parable doesn't say things once and for all; it endlessly challenges those who listen and re-listen to it."*³

Father, sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I sanctify myself for them, so that they also may be sanctified in truth (Jn 17:17-19).

Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to the growth of a seed. In this natural phenomenon, He sees an image of the love that drives Him. Once sown, the seed, as tiny and vulnerable as it is, will bear fruit in an incomprehensible way. Christ's words touch the depths of our hearts and transform us. The Word was made flesh; the Word is made flesh in us. The Son of God teaches us obedience: *"Behold, I come to do your will."*

The vow of obedience unites us to Jesus who humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto the cross. I have picked out these paragraphs from Constitution 31:

a. All obedience in faith is patterned on the attitude of the Son of God who, to carry out the Father's loving plan, became obedient unto death and the death of the Cross. In following Him and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Daughters of Charity make to God the offering of their freedom and, by their vow of obedience, commit themselves to obey their Superiors, in accordance with the Constitutions and Statutes.

c. Availability helps all the Sisters to transcend their own opinions and interests for the common good, and enables the Company to provide the services entrusted to it.

3. Lenten conference, March 8, 2015

Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth.

d. The obedience the Daughters of Charity have freely chosen entails sacrifices. Far from diminishing the dignity of the person, however, it enhances it by increasing the freedom of the children of God.

Father, sanctify us in the truth: Your word is truth. “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path.” Sanctify us by the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.

Given to You in the service of persons who are poor, help us, Lord, to become islands of mercy together, as Pope Francis invited us in this Lenten Season:

A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God. A heart which lets itself be pierced by the Spirit so as to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters. And, ultimately, a poor heart, one which realizes its own poverty and gives itself freely for others.

During this Lent, then, brothers and sisters, let us all ask the Lord: “Fac cor nostrum secundum cor tuum”: Make our hearts like yours (Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). In this way we will receive a heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed, indifferent or prey to the globalization of indifference.

Let us entrust to the Virgin Mary the Daughters of Charity who will renew their vows on the feast of the Annunciation. With Saint John Paul II, let us pray:

Mary... to you, our Mother,
who desire the spiritual and apostolic renewal
of your sons and daughters
in a response of love and complete dedication to Christ,
we address our confident prayer.
You who did the will of the Father,
ever ready in obedience,
courageous in poverty
and receptive in fruitful virginity,
obtain from your divine Son

that all who have received the gift of following him
in the consecrated life
may be enabled to bear witness to that gift by their transfigured lives,
as they joyfully make their way with all their brothers and sisters
towards our heavenly homeland and the light
which will never grow dim.

We ask you this,
that in everyone and in everything
glory, adoration and love may be given to the Most High Lord
of all things,
who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit
(Vita Consecrata no. 112).

Father Bernard SCHOEPFER, CM
Director General

*To prepare ourselves for a
“Holy Year of Mercy”*

December 8, 2015 - November 20, 2016
with Mary, Mother of Mercy

INTRODUCTION

Through the Year of Consecrated Life begun November 30, 2014, Pope Francis particularly prompted consecrated persons to give new life to their enthusiasm for following Christ more closely. This Year will draw to a close February 2, 2016. However, he will open a “Holy Year of Mercy” on December 8, 2015, in honor of the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council on December 8, 1965. By this extraordinary Jubilee, Pope Francis reminds the entire Church of the fundamental elements of Christianity, a religion of love, faith and saving pardon: *“the whole Church, which is in such need of mercy, for we are sinners, will be able to find in this Jubilee the joy of rediscovering and rendering fruitful God’s mercy, with which we are all called to give comfort to every man and every woman of our time.”*

We will thus have the grace of living the last three months of the Year of Consecrated Life at the same time as this Holy Year whose theme is mercy. For us, Daughters of Charity, it will be a very special call to pursue our vocation journey by focusing in a renewed way on the merciful Christ in order to commit ourselves more fully on this path of mercy in our personal, community and apostolic lives. Saint John XXIII had already invited us to this in his speech at the opening of the Second Vatican Council: *“The Catholic Church... is to show herself to the world as the loving mother of all mankind; gentle, patient, and full of tenderness and sympathy for her separated children”* (no. 32).

How could we not call to mind the pontificate of Saint John Paul II, which was deeply marked by mercy? This pope drew our attention to the mystery of mercy at the heart of theology and ministry. In 1980 he published an encyclical, “God, who is rich in mercy” (*Dives in misericordia*) recalling how clearly, in the Old Testament, the Lord proved that He was a God of mercy whose love was stronger than His people’s sins and infidelity; nonetheless, this still remained masked. So, God went out in search of lost humanity by sending His own Son. Jesus reveals God’s true identity: “He is mercy.” This divine mercy is made manifest in the very person of Jesus.

In April 2000, Saint John Paul II canonized Sister Faustina, apostle of divine mercy, and announced the institution of “**Divine Mercy Sunday**”, the first Sunday after Easter. The feast of Easter shows that God’s life is stronger than death and our sins; it unleashes the power of divine mercy. The Second Sunday of Easter has since become the opportunity to solemnly celebrate divine mercy, source of hope for all. This solemnity thus invites us to continually receive the merciful love of the Risen Lord so that Paschal joy enlightens us and makes us missionary.

On April 2, 2005, Saint John Paul II’s death during vespers of the Second Sunday of Easter was like God’s signature to confirm the prophetic intuition of this pope of mercy. He was canonized in Rome on April 27, 2014.

In 1980, Saint John Paul II wrote, *“It is obvious that the Church professes the mercy of God, revealed in the crucified and risen Christ, not only by the word of her teaching but above all through the deepest pulsation of the life of the whole People of God. By means of this testimony of life, the Church fulfills the mission proper to the People of God, the mission which is a sharing in and, in a sense, a continuation of the messianic mission of Christ Himself”* (DM no. 13).

Enter into the secrets of divine mercy

As Saints Peter and Paul said, *“God... the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement”* (2 Cor 1:3); *“God... in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable”* (1 P 1:3-4); God

To Prepare ourselves for a “Holy Year of Mercy”

“raised us up” and “seated us with Him in the heavens” (cf. Ep 2:4-7). Entering into the secrets of divine mercy first of all entails becoming more aware of what God has done for us and continues to do. Through Christ’s resurrection, we have become children of God; God makes us full members of the Trinitarian family; He makes us His adopted children for our happiness. Divine mercy also means believing that His love is faithful despite our sins and our breaking the Covenant, thanks to Jesus who created a path to free us by taking upon Himself our unwillingness to love, our straying, our self-sufficiency... “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29).

Imitate Christ in travelling a path of mercy

The Lord calls us to live as children of God, to be in His image and likeness and to let His merciful face show through us. He expects a personal response that involves our freedom and is expressed in the concrete reality of our lives: choosing the path of mercy that opens up a future where, humanly speaking, it seems that it doesn’t or no longer exists.

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). In this way, we bring joy to the heart of our heavenly Father. Saint Paul says it with different words: “So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma” (Eph 5:1-2). Seeking to imitate God means becoming more and more His children and building a more just and fraternal world. The more we are aware that God is good, patient and merciful, the more we can become good, patient and merciful toward others.

Imitating God is a great challenge for our nature, wounded by sin. We indeed experience on a daily basis the effects of sin in us and around us: violence, bitterness, resentment, jealousy... and we can be tempted to rebellion or discouragement. However, it is in the depths of our poverty that divine mercy reaches out to us. God loathes sin but does not reject the sinner and wants to teach him to live anew out of his heart and not just on a head-level. Jesus says, “Do not judge,” because judgment condemns; mercy forgives. The head is what judges, reasons and invents a thousand reasons to prove the other person is wrong and does not deserve our forgiveness. However, with the merciful Christ, we no longer belong

to the spirit of the world, we no longer think as the world thinks, we no longer reason as the world reasons, we no longer perceive as the world perceives, and we become capable of exercising forbearance, compassion and forgiveness.

Saint Paul reminds us that this is only possible through grace and not through our own merits (cf. Eph 2:8). The great grace in our lives is thus accepting divine mercy, which reconciles us with a past that sometimes may have been difficult. Only mercy restores peace in our hearts and the joy of building community while resisting the powers of evil. Living out mercy is thus not optional because our happiness is at stake. Jesus gives us a share in His work of liberation, and the Church has a vocation to bear witness to God’s unconditional mercy.

Loving with merciful love is the gift of His own life that God gives us, a grace that may take us a long time to understand, ask for and dare to accept. Therefore, in order to help us in this, Christ gives us His Mother so that she might teach us to become reconciled sisters and brothers.

ONE OF CHRIST’S ACTS OF MERCY ON THE CROSS: THE GIFT OF HIS MOTHER

Among Christ’s acts of love on the Cross, there is the gift of His mother to human kind. Of course, His final breath, because it is the total gift, is infinitely greater than everything that came before His death, but who can describe the greatness of the mystery of the spiritual motherhood by which Jesus makes us children of the Holy Virgin? The Son of God is so good as to give us His own mother so that she might be ours. This bears witness to a love of which only the merciful heart of Jesus is capable.

“Mother of mercy” is one of the many titles the Church has given Mary to describe her role in salvation history. When the Church calls her “Mother of mercy”, it’s almost her proper name that it gives her; Mary is the one who helps her sinful children in their journey of faith and intercedes for them. In the *Salve Regina*, we name her “Mother of mercy”; it is to her whom we lift up our cries and sighs; she is our advocate who turns her eyes of mercy toward us and shows unto us the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus. Saint Bernard’s prayer, the *Memorare*, is also a prayer of absolute trust in Mary’s merciful heart.

To Prepare ourselves for a “Holy Year of Mercy”

Our Founders liked to invoke Mary as the **Mother of Mercy** (cf. C. 15b), and Saint Louise explained that she truly is so because she is the Immaculate Mother of the Son of God: “*With good reason the Church addresses her as the Mother of Mercy because she is also the Mother of Grace*” (Spiritual Writings, A.14b, p. 775). Saint Vincent advised us to love her deeply in order to imitate her, albeit in a much more modest way, in our daily lives: “*Sisters, let’s have recourse to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Mercy and your great patroness*” (CCD X, p. 500).

Following the example of Saint Louise, Sister Evelyne invited us in her February 2 letter to take Mary as our Mother ever more fully, not just in our hearts, but in our everyday lives, our local communities and our ministries. Choosing the Mother of mercy means choosing her anew each day in order to be in agreement with the choice of Jesus who wanted to give her to us.

Saint John Paul II, in his encyclical *Dives in misericordia*, in article 9, clearly defined the place of the Virgin Mary, the first beneficiary of divine mercy. It is not a question of a brief Marian allusion, which the encyclical could have done just as well without; on the contrary, for the Pope, understanding the depth of divine mercy cannot dispense with looking at and listening to what Mary reveals to us. We must look to her “*who obtained mercy in a particular and exceptional way, as no other person has... Mary, then, is the one who has the deepest knowledge of the mystery of God’s mercy. She knows its price, she knows how great it is*” (DM no. 9).

The mystery of Mary, Mother of mercy, remains a secret between her and her Son, infinitely greater than what human words can express. Only the light of the Holy Spirit can help us understand a little of this mystery in the two important aspects of Mary’s life: on the one hand, her divine motherhood; on the other hand, her spiritual motherhood for all human beings.

* God’s first gift of mercy to Mary is **her divine motherhood**. Mary is the one who would give birth to the Son of God, in whom divine mercy is made visible. By giving birth to Him who is the very font of mercy, Mary accomplishes the greatest act of mercy in the history of the world possible for a human creature. She therefore received another special

grace of mercy, **her Immaculate Conception**.

* God’s second gift of mercy to her is **her spiritual motherhood**. At the foot of the Cross, Mary becomes the mother of all men and women; she receives the mission of accompanying them, teaching them how to be open to the Spirit and helping them to experience the divine mercy that will transform their lives.

Let us revisit the adventure that Mary lived through; let us allow ourselves to be guided down the path of the Good News that consists of discovering that we are in God’s hands, that there is meaning to our lives and that, even if our lives seem in pretty bad shape, the Lord finds His way. We come from Him and we are going toward Him. Our work is essentially to allow ourselves to be shaped by divine mercy.

I – MARY’S DIVINE MOTHERHOOD

“*Mary is Mother of Mercy because her Son, Jesus Christ, was sent by the Father as the revelation of God’s mercy*” (*Veritatis Splendor* no. 118).

1 - MARY’S IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

CHOSEN TO BE THE MOTHER OF CHRIST, MARY IS BORN “IMMACULATE” OUT OF PURE MERCY

Everything that is divine is made up of goodness, compassion and mercy. All that Mary is comes from a merciful choice of God from all eternity: “*He has looked with favor on His lowly servant*”. We could say that, before Mary is the mother of mercy, she is first the daughter of mercy.

THE MYSTERY OF MARY’S IMMACULATE CONCEPTION REVEALS SOMETHING OF THE FATHER’S MERCY TO US

The creation of the world is not God’s masterpiece, even if this creation should continually arouse our admiration and thanksgiving. God’s masterpiece is men and women, as we know from the Genesis account. The epitome of women is Mary, she who was chosen in an extraordinary way out of a profusion of love that proclaims God’s mercy.

To Prepare ourselves for a “Holy Year of Mercy”

Ever since original sin, God’s love communicated to a created being takes **the form of merciful love**. Like each one of us, Mary was saved by Jesus Christ, who died and rose from the dead, but she was saved in advance. She is the first person redeemed, “the most perfectly redeemed above all others”, and the masterpiece of divine mercy. Anticipating the mystery of the Cross, the Father’s compassionate mercy totally and entirely enveloped the heart of this simple creature, Mary, our human sister. No stain marred Mary, no heaviness weighed her down and the life of God flowed abundantly in her.

Therefore, the first reason that we can legitimately call Mary the Mother of mercy is that she was conceived without sin in order to be the Mother of the Son of God. In her, everything is simple; it is a simplicity of fullness, not of lack.

BUT HER IMMACULATE CONCEPTION DOESN’T TAKE AWAY ANY OF THE WEALTH OF HER FEMININE PERSONALITY; QUITE THE CONTRARY!

Before Jesus’ incarnation, Mary had found favor with God; the angel Gabriel greets her with the name, “full of grace”. She is like a vase filled to the rim, God’s grace is so abundant in her and so perfectly does her conformity to God’s gift empty her of any selfishness. Mary exists by grace alone.

2 - MARY’S DIVINE MOTHERHOOD

In Nazareth, God gives Himself to Mary out of pure mercy; He comes to her and offers her His grace even though she has asked for nothing. Mary enters into the unconditional nature of the gift, and this gift is also a call to enter into a lively and dynamic exchange. God expects that Mary will welcome Him into her heart. In the first pages of his Gospel, Saint Luke leads us to contemplate her attitude in her response to the angel’s announcement and her way of advancing along the path of faith.

IN NAZARETH, MARY CONCEIVES IN HER WOMB THE DIVINE MERCY INCARNATED IN JESUS

THROUGH FAITH, MARY OPENS HERSELF ENTIRELY TO GOD

When Mary understands what God is asking of her, she tells Him “yes” with astounding simplicity. Filled with the Spirit, she makes an act of faith and acceptance of God’s gift which is also an act of sacrifice: “*May it be done to me according to your word.*” Mary is that ability to fully welcome God’s gift. By her consent, which involves a radical emptying of herself, she allows God to fully accomplish His great plan of mercy for the world. She is totally for God and becomes His collaborator in the gift of His Son to the world.

If Mary is free from hesitation, that doesn’t mean that she didn’t have to make an effort or suffer: Mary needs faith, but also courage. In her immaculate heart, she perfectly welcomes God’s gift, but the sacrifice accepted in order to conform to God’s will (giving up her life plans, her reputation, etc.) already reveals the sorrowful heart that she will progressively acquire with the help of the Spirit and that will conform her to Christ the Servant.

THROUGH THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT, GOD BECOMES FLESH IN MARY

Mary’s heart, already completely filled with God, expands even more under the influence of the Spirit who appears in her. Divine mercy is conceived in Mary’s breast; it becomes flesh in her womb.

IN EIN KAREM, MARY BRINGS HUMANITY THE DIVINE MERCY INCARNATED IN JESUS

THE VISITATION

From this inner experience of divine mercy, bold and attentive charity springs forth in Mary. Indeed, after having received the One who is divine mercy, Mary is immediately driven down human paths in order to share what she has received. She sets off in haste to the hill country of Judea. Just as all grace is a mission and must be shared, the grace of Mary’s divine motherhood is for all humanity. Mary didn’t keep this Son for herself or for her personal fulfilment; she received Him to give Him to the world with total detachment.

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Bearing divine mercy within her, this presence in the depths of her heart is what makes her visit significant. It is no longer Mary alone who greets Elizabeth, it is the God of mercy as a little embryo who greets her through Mary’s greeting. The moment Elizabeth opens the door of her house and hears Mary’s voice, she receives divine mercy. This produces a two-fold beneficial effect: her heart is filled with the fullness of the Spirit, and John the Baptist leaps in her womb. Thus, through Mary, God gives mercy to tired humanity. Mary’s condition as mother, in its own way, has the same influence as Christ. Clearly, Mary’s presence was not essential to cause the elation of the child and his mother, but God wanted it to be this way.

THEN, UNDER THE ACTION OF THE SPIRIT, MARY SINGS THE CANTICLE OF MERCY

“His mercy is from age to age” (Lk 1:50). This verse 50 governs the entire Magnificat; in a single phrase that is extremely simple but extraordinarily spiritually dense, Mary summarizes the whole Bible, which she knows and continually meditates. She demonstrates complete trust in God’s eternal mercy. Having experienced it herself, Mary knows that **God is gift and forgiveness... eternally**. And, if He corrects the rich, proud and powerful, it is for their own good because the spirit of possessiveness, pride and domination is a sickness for human hearts, whether they realize it or not. All others, the humble, the hungry, etc., God lifts up and fills with the fullness of His mercy. Through this canticle, Mary implicitly professes that her Child is divine mercy incarnated for the world.

DURING NINE MONTHS, MARY RECEIVES THE DIVINE MERCY GROWING IN HER

Mary remains about three months with her cousin and then returns to her home (Lk 1:56). She continues to live in this grace granted her the first day in this gift of divine mercy that she received and that unfurls gradually in her womb. In the words of Saint Paul, Mary can say, *“it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”*

IN BETHLEHEM, MARY GIVES BIRTH TO THE SON OF GOD; SHE GIVES BIRTH TO THE DIVINE MERCY INCARNATED IN JESUS

MARY GIVES JESUS TO THE WORLD

The mystery of Christmas is divine mercy incarnated in Jesus who comes to dwell among His own. When the shepherds and magi contemplate this little child, they don’t imagine that they are contemplating the Father’s merciful love, yet they are filled with it since they leave radiant. Having become “a new creation”, they sing God’s praises.

MARY GIVES JESUS HER MOTHERLY HEART

Enthralled with her child, Mary swaddles Him, feeds Him, holds Him in her arms; she is there for His first steps, teaches Him to speak, to get dressed and to pray. She teaches Him loyalty, self-denial, forgiveness of insults and all the natural and supernatural virtues. Saint Luke mentions twice how the child Jesus progresses. He grows not just physically; His heart and mind develop and prove themselves thanks to how He was raised. In Jesus the man, there is thus something of His mother, not just the traits of her face, but also something of her heart.

THROUGHOUT HIS HIDDEN LIFE, MARY AND JESUS FORM A SINGLE “WE”

Jesus reflects the love of the Father in His life, and Mary “keeps in her heart” everything concerning her Son and everything she receives from Him (cf. Lk 2:51). A physical communion exists between she and Jesus, a communion of the mother and the Son of God who became flesh in her. Yet this union is based on a spiritual communion that establishes a single “we” between them, a “we” of infinite depth. Mary is one with her Son; the two of them are one for the salvation of the world. Jesus unites His mother to His redeeming work, and their presence together shines forth divine mercy.

DURING JESUS’ PUBLIC MINISTRY, MARY PARTICIPATES IN THE REVELATION OF DIVINE MERCY INCARNATED IN JESUS

JESUS, GOD’S MERCY IN THE DEPTHS OF OUR POVERTY

To Prepare ourselves for a “Holy Year of Mercy”

From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus asserts that He has come for sinners and to console this world that has fallen into the sadness of sin, this world filled with wounds that need healing. Jesus speaks of mercy, but these are not just words: He is Himself divine mercy, the gentleness of God who comes to bind up the wounds of human sin, the hand held out to bring us out of sin.

Like the father of the prodigal son, Jesus is haunted by what is wounded in us and rushes with extravagant love into all that is poor and weak in each individual in order to bring His mercy there. Everything that seems lost holds an irresistible attraction for Him. He goes out into the bushes to seek the one who has strayed. He does not fear shedding His blood nor being stuck by the thorns into which the sheep has gone and got caught. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus’ joy is to stay “in our house,” with us - “*Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house*” (Lk 19:5) - and to offer us His mercy with as much love as He showed the thief in agony beside Him on Calvary. Each day Jesus passes by on the path of our sinful lives and says to us: “come down quickly, my child, I want to enter into your life, into your heart, and make you feel my mercy.” In order to discover the Father’s mercy that Jesus offers us, we are invited, like Zacchaeus, to hear Jesus’ call to “come down quickly”, leaving behind our pride and self-sufficiency to open ourselves to His mercy.

God’s boundless and endless goodness is of a completely different order than the goodness we might have for each other. It is of a completely different magnitude that we cannot imagine. God is good in an unbelievable way; He eternally looks on us with compassion, consoles us and heals us so that we might rediscover the joy of living in His love. It is “*the absolute revelation of the mercy that Mary proclaimed on the threshold of her kinswoman’s house: ‘His mercy is...from generation to generation’*” (DM no. 9).

MARY, THE MOTHER OF DIVINE MERCY

And “*the mother of Jesus was there.*” In his Gospel, Saint John highlights Mary’s presence at Cana and at the Cross, i.e., at the beginning and the end of Jesus’ ministry. By carefully showing us Mary present at the

beginning and conclusion of her Son’s apostolic life, John suggests by this very fact that the mother of Jesus is there all throughout the Gospel. She follows her Son and discretely accompanies Him all during His public life because, in the mutual love between Mary and Jesus, there is a very close relationship. Mary’s maternal love, born of the Holy Spirit, grows at all times under the influence of this same Spirit. Mary doesn’t need to speak because Jesus knows that she is there, powerfully present, in communion with Him by the intensity of her love.

Jesus clearly announces three times to His disciples that He must suffer in Jerusalem and be put to death. Was Mary present for these announcements of her Son’s passion? We do not know. But we can suppose that Jesus wouldn’t have left His mother in the dark about what He had told others. From the start, at the presentation of the child in the temple, the Holy Spirit had warned Mary: her heart would be pierced with a sword of sadness. At the wedding feast of Cana, Jesus had also mysteriously explained to her the path that she would undertake as well. Mary was prepared to share in the redeeming mission of her Son, in which she is an active participant.

Mary’s participation in God’s plan is important, but it does not add to the work of Jesus. It is Christ who does everything. Mary does not take His place, she does not add anything to Him, but she is entirely on the side of acceptance, of faith: she purely and simply receives God’s gift. Mary does everything as well, but her part is only availability and offering.

ON GOLGOTHA, JESUS DIES OUT OF LOVE

Jesus’ death on the Cross is the ultimate act of mercy that achieves its fullness in the gift of the Spirit.

In order to take all sinners into His arms and show them the Father’s mercy, Jesus does not hesitate to descend to the depths, even deeper than human destitution: he goes as far as dying out of love. The Cross brings the striking proof of the greatest love for all sinners. His arms wide open, Jesus crucified reveals the merciful face of God to all the criminals who we are on this earth. In the Passion, it is each and every one of us that Christ bears in His heart. Each one of us can say with Saint Paul: “*Christ loved [me] and handed himself over for [me]*” (Eph 5:2). We are each personally loved by Him with a faithful, limitless love. This faith vision

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of Christ who hands Himself over for me, personally, is very moving.

During His Passion, Jesus goes so far as to Himself need mercy from men. Of course, God didn't need us in order to become even more merciful, but He wished to allow Himself to be consoled by His creatures. On Holy Thursday in Gethsemane, Jesus does not receive the love from His disciples that He had even asked from them. But on Good Friday on the Cross, he did receive it through His mother and the beloved disciple (cf. *DM* no. 7).

“NO ONE HAS RECEIVED INTO HIS HEART, AS MUCH AS MARY DID... THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS” (*DM*, no. 9).

At the foot of the Cross, Mary loves her Son more than ever: her love is increased by understanding that she alone could receive from her union with Jesus. Before the greatness of the love of her Son on the Cross, Mary understands that God's mercy is boundless (cf. *Lumen Gentium* no. 58). Deeply united to Jesus's self-emptying, she is totally offering of herself to follow Him in His humiliation and to participate in God's plan for the world. It is at this moment that Jesus gives His mother to the beloved disciple. The gift of His mother to all people is the infinitely merciful act of Jesus crucified.

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS, MARY RECEIVES HER VOCATION AS UNIVERSAL MOTHER.

Jesus' words from the Cross, “*Woman, behold your son,*” **come suddenly into Mary's heart**, announcing to her an event as important and producing an effect as significant as the words of the angel Gabriel: “From this day on, Mary, the Immaculate one, will be the mother of all sinful men.”

As at the Annunciation, Mary has asked for nothing and, here again, she enters into the free and unconditional nature of God's gift. The Holy Spirit, the author of this second birthing, will descend upon her with as much power as the first time. When Mary hears those words, “*Woman, behold your son,*” she **receives** from the Spirit, through the heart of Jesus, **an outpouring of love** in an extraordinary quantity that corresponds to her new mission. Jesus' request wouldn't make any sense if He hadn't

filled Mary's heart with a new “descent of the Holy Spirit”, giving her the capacity to love all persons as He Himself loved them on the Cross.

The Virgin's spiritual motherhood comes from an overabundant outpouring from Jesus' merciful heart. Mary's heart becomes like Jesus' merciful heart. In these two hearts, you could say there is just one love, one sacrifice, one total gift, and one perfect offering. God the Father, Jesus the Son and Mary His Mother participate in the same will, the same charity, the same sacrifice. “*Behold your mother*”... you will find nothing but divine mercy in her! Mary's heart at the foot of the Cross is Jesus' heart on the Cross.

MARY CONTINUES TO LOVE ALL PERSONS AS JESUS DOES

In asking His mother to accept the sacrifice of taking the disciple John as her son in His place, Jesus asks her to love as her own children not only His apostles but also His executioners, those who insult and blaspheme Him and the whole nation that has condemned Him. On the Cross, Jesus' heart loves all people without excluding the most criminal among them; at the foot of the Cross, Mary's heart loves them all like her Son. The torrents of mercy from the heart of Jesus crucified that swept through Mary's heart flooded it with an ocean of love, enabling her to love each one of her children without consideration of their faults.

With Christ, Mary asked Father to forgive those who did not know what they were doing; she must no longer consider the revolting indignity in men but the image of Christ restored by the blood of the Cross. On Calvary, Mary continues to **love as Jesus does**.

II – MARY'S SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD

The second reason that Mary is the Mother of mercy is her spiritual motherhood, her mission of accompanying the Church in its earthly pilgrimage here below.

In 1979, Saint John Paul II said in his first encyclical *Redemptor hominis*: “*Mary must be on all the ways for the Church's daily life. Through her maternal presence the Church acquires certainty that she is truly living the life of her Master and Lord and that she is living the mystery of the*

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Redemption in all its life-giving profundity and fullness” (Redemptor hominis, 22).

At the Annunciation, Mary’s divine motherhood, announced by the Angel, took place in the peace of her *immaculate heart*; at the foot of the Cross, her spiritual motherhood, announced by Jesus Himself, took place in her *sorrowful heart*. In reality, at the Annunciation, God had already implicitly granted Mary this gift of universal maternity because all persons were already contained in a real albeit obscure way in Jesus’ humanity, conceived in her. Jesus came for all; through Him, in Him and with Him, Mary at the Annunciation therefore implicitly became the mother of all. But, at the foot of the Cross, Mary became this explicitly.

Through her consent, Mary participates fully in the merciful work of the world’s salvation; she initiates the era of torrents of God’s mercy for all sinful humanity. Whatever our wretchedness, Mary cannot remain indifferent, and Jesus her Son cannot refuse her anything because she never refused God anything.

1 - MARY, MEDIATOR OF DIVINE MERCY

Let’s contemplate Mary’s unique and incomparable maternal mercy during the days of the Paschal Triduum.

IN JOHN’S HOME

On the evening of Good Friday, the apostles have disappeared, they are dispersed and they no longer expect anything. John himself does not believe in the resurrection; he would confess as much on Easter morning. However, from that hour on, he takes Mary into his home and in that way will have a part in her faith and enter into close relationship with her mercifulness.

On Holy Saturday, the Church, born from Jesus’ pierced side, comes down to one person: Mary, the believer. But John is with Mary and can fall within her faith; his house is no longer exactly his house as it has grown with the presence of “his mother”.

On Sunday morning, Peter and John are reunited, leave the house together and run to the tomb. We could reflect on the encounter between Mary and the apostle Peter. We can be sure it occurred because Mary is with John and John is with Peter. We could wonder at what point Peter arrived in John’s house and who went to find him. Even if the Gospel says nothing about this, we can imagine the trusting welcome Mary gave to Peter, the merciful way she looked on him and the forgiving words she spoke to him. The secret of the birth of the Church is hidden in the merciful heart of Mary, united to the heart of her Son.

IN JERUSALEM, AT THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

This is why, in the Acts of the Apostles, we find Mary at prayer with the disciples (Acts 1:14). Saint Luke mentions her discrete presence in the primitive Church. She continues her spiritual motherhood by placing herself at the service of all. As Christian life is the life of Christ in us, with us and through us, all of this interests Mary.

MARY SEES HER SON IN THE DISCIPLE AND IN THE ASSEMBLED CHURCH

During the forty days between Easter and the Ascension, Mary is with John and the other apostles. John cannot part from her whom Jesus gave him as mother, and Mary can’t distance herself from those whom Jesus gave her as sons. In faith, she recognizes her Son in the disciples, and, day after day, they become Mary’s children.

THROUGH MARY, IT IS JESUS WHO LOVES THE DISCIPLES

Mary is not some vague loving presence; her action is effective. She loves the disciples with a powerful mercy that can only be compared to that of Jesus dying on the Cross for them. She does not consider their straying; she does not reproach them for abandoning or denying Christ. Rather, she consoles them, comforts them, bears their suffering, repeats Jesus’ trusting words and passes on to them the Spirit received at the foot of the Cross. The love of Jesus’ heart lives again in the love of her maternal heart.

MARY GIVES BIRTH TO THE “BROTHERS OF JESUS”

In a way, it is Mary who will draw down the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Church, this Spirit whom she received at the Annunciation and welcomed at the Cross when Jesus, bowing His head, “handed over His spirit”. The disciples share in Mary’s faith; with her, they understand what they are, not individually, but as the Body of Christ. Mary births them to life in the Spirit of Jesus; their hearts become a place where the Risen Lord can pour forth the promised Spirit who will be given them in abundance on the day of Pentecost.

How long does Mary’s presence with John last? We do not know. What is certain is the radical transformation of John’s character under the influence of the Mother of mercy. In the Gospels, we can observe his ambitious and quick-tempered character. Shortly before the Passion, he demands the first place. In his letters, John demonstrates a very different attitude. One thing alone counts for him: the merciful love that God shows us and the merciful love that we should demonstrate for each other.

TODAY, IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

How long did Mary remain on earth after Jesus’ Ascension? We don’t know that either. But what is important is knowing that Mary participated fully in the resurrection of Christ and that she is alive with Him in Heaven. Her Assumption allows her to be present like her risen Son is and to accompany the life of the Church and of the world.

In Heaven, Mary keeps all the qualities she demonstrated on earth and does so in our favor. Given that she was united to the Holy Spirit here on earth, how much more so is the Spirit united to her in Heaven with even greater intensity and even more power. Her greatest desire is that we live even more from the Spirit of God in every dimension of our human, spiritual and apostolic lives.

As Mother, she feels incomparable love for all of us, her children, like how she felt toward Jesus. Everything that she has, she gives to us; she is concerned for our happiness and growth; she takes care of us in our need or danger; she suffers to see us misunderstood or rejected; she remains near to us during times of great loneliness, terrible suffering or death.

Mother of mercy, she has a sort of special vocation for coming to help us in our poverty. Although we are sinners, she loves each of us personally. Even if we do not think of her, we still have a place in her heart, in all times and places.

The Second Vatican Council, more than any previous Council, spoke about the Virgin Mary, dedicating the last chapter of the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, to her. It encourages us to take Mary “into our homes” and join in her faith and total availability in order to go to God since Mary’s mediation is more reception than gift. She is not detrimental to Christ’s role as the only Mediator but, on the contrary, contributes to uniting us to Him. Christ is very close to us, and we have access to Christ to the extent that we are able to go to Him and welcome the gift that He gives us. And yet our liberty is too often inconsistent: we slow down, fall into routine, grow tepid, become mediocre and sin... in reality, we are the ones who are far from Him. Our heart and our eyes are too often closed, like Thomas, the disciple who hesitates and doubts. Mary, totally aligned with faith and acceptance, can compensate for our lack of faith and promote our union with Christ. *“The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows His power... In no way does it impede, but rather does it foster the immediate union of the faithful with Christ”* (LG no. 60, cf. RM 38, 2).

God’s grace is never lacking, but our human freedom can accept it to a lesser or greater extent. Only Mary is totally one with God through her faith (it’s not that she is the author of grace; she does not produce it, but she receives it perfectly), and she excels in opening our hearts to Christ. This is how Mary can accompany us on our faith journeys and why we cannot do without her.

2 – DURING HER APPARITIONS, MARY SHOWS GOD’S MERCY

The spiritual maternity of Mary does not stop in time but lasts still today (cf. LG no. 62). Mary is there, present at every moment of our day. From time to time, according to God’s will, she appears where He wishes and when He wishes, but she does not claim to add anything to the Revelation, sealed by Jesus Christ; she just wants to further unveil its

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unfathomable riches. During her many apparitions, the Virgin Mary has addressed individuals of all social strata: poor and rich, believers and non-believers... those who see her always discover her maternal closeness and divine mercy. We only have to think of Alphonse Ratisbonne, Catherine Labouré or Bernadette Soubirous.

WITH ALPHONSE RATISBONNE

On January 20, 1842, in Sant’Andrea delle Fratte Church in Rome, Ratisbonne, a fiercely anticlerical young Jewish man, saw a light, that of Mary Immaculate, shining before his eyes. Through her, he encountered the Mother of mercy: *“She was standing and very beautiful, full of majesty, utterly merciful...”* Touched by her beauty and especially her merciful attitude, he contemplated her hands full of tenderness and forgiveness and found that he was unconditionally loved. *“All I was aware of about the Virgin was a mantle of mercy...I fixed my eyes on her hands and I saw in them the expression of forgiveness and mercy... In the presence of the Most Blessed Virgin, although she did not say a word, I understood the horror of the state I found myself in, the enormity of sin... in a word, I understood everything.”* During the apparition, Mary did not speak; she was there in an attitude of silent closeness. It is surely not without reason that Mary said nothing: as Jesus refuses to dwell on fault or guilt, Mary is not astonished by how this man has gone astray, any more than she dwelled on Peter’s denial. She did not limit Ratisbonne to his irony or accusations; she did not reproach him or give his advice; she loved him as he is, simply saw his true dignity and showed him great trust. Mary’s silence is not an inability to speak but rather a silence of communion that offers itself. Her attitude recalls the attitude of the father in the parable of the prodigal son who feels the joy of being merciful: *“because this son of mine was dead and has come to life again.”* For Ratisbonne, this was a revelation, an authentic and profound encounter with God: Jesus embraced him with His infinite mercy and invited him to leave behind the sin that mars his beauty and prevents him from enjoying true happiness. Ratisbonne became a different man, a “new self”!

WITH CATHERINE LABOURÉ

On July 18, 1830, Catherine experienced the happiness of a heart-to-heart meeting with Mary. Mary Immaculate came to her as a mother

with her child. During the conversation, Mary, speaking with her of humanity scarred by violence and suffering, became so sad that it seemed to Catherine that she bore all the pain of the world. Catherine sensed the sin of the world and its consequences and felt Mary’s compassion and concern for the salvation of each person. As a result, she felt invited by Mary to pray for each person: *“Come to the foot of this altar,”* the altar representing Christ’s sacrifice for the salvation of the world: Here is my body handed over for sinners; here is my blood, poured out for sinners; do this in memory of me. God never stops giving Himself in the heart of a world marked by sin, but each person remains free to accept Him.

On November 27, 1830, Mary revealed herself as she who is *conceived without sin but who also offers her children divine mercy*. Born immaculate, Mary gives all that she receives from God. There is no trace of sin in her that could cause a loss of divine mercy. Mary passes it on unreservedly; she is its privileged channel. The beams of the *“beautifully glittering rays”* emanating from her hands reveal all that the Mother of God does for her children. Torrents of divine mercy flow over us through her. Mary never ceases pouring out the fullness of this mercy on us in order to make us like the merciful Child whom she had on earth and to help us exercise this mercy toward each other.

Saint Catherine Labouré herself is a ‘message’ that the Virgin passes on to us. Her holiness is her astonishing discretion, her transparency that allowed her to see everything in God and accept everything in Him. Catherine faithfully transmitted the Medal’s message: *Mary Immaculate’s identity and her universal mission as Mother of mercy*. By her humility and self-effacing manner that were so characteristic of her 46 years of service in Reuilly, Catherine was just as useful and luminous as at the moment of the apparitions. She never sought to step in or put herself forward; she simply spread the divine mercy that she had experienced through the person of Mary in 1830. It is said that Catherine is the saint of silence, but we should also speak of her missionary influence because her very ordinary holiness continues to touch individuals’ hearts, whatever their history or country.

WITH BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS

To Prepare ourselves for a “Holy Year of Mercy”

On February 11, 1858, in Lourdes, Bernadette went out to look for wood in the grotto of Massabielle; there, she heard a gust of wind and saw a flash of light. After recognizing the presence of Mary, who looked at her as a person, Bernadette became capable of accomplishing the acts Mary asked of her during the four penitential apparitions (8th to 11th) and to clear the grotto of its grass and mud. Why? Because it hid an immense treasure that absolutely had to come to light: a spring. The human heart, wounded by sin, is symbolized by the bitter grass and the mud, but at its deepest level, there is the very life of God that gushes forth like a spring. These acts Bernadette did are Biblical acts. They express in their own way the mystery of the Incarnation, the humbling of God made man, the disfigured Suffering Servant: *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes upon Himself and takes away the sins of the world”* with all its bitterness.

Indeed, the merciful Jesus comes out to us in the heart of our wretchedness to help us rediscover the spring of our baptism that flows in the depths of our hearts and that is so often obstructed by little grains of accumulated sand or perhaps heaps of mud.

On March 25, during the 16th apparition, Mary would reveal her identity to Bernadette: *“I am the Immaculate Conception”*. By this name, Mary confirmed to the Church what she had received out of pure divine mercy, the grace of being immaculate for the virginal conception of Jesus, who is divine mercy incarnate.

THE CALL TO PRAY AND DO PENANCE OUT OF LOVE FOR SINNERS

It indeed seems that through these apparitions, God wanted to show us the path of mercy. These apparitions of Mary are for us sinners; each one of them calls us to penance and prayer for sinners.

THE APPARITION TO RATISBONNE appeared as a result of the Miraculous medal accompanied by the faith and prayer of a chain of believers: Mr. de Bussières, Father Théodore Ratisbonne and the members of Our Lady of Victories Association, whose purpose is to pray for the conversion of sinners, the Count of Laferronnays who offered his life for the conversion of this young Jewish man... and how many other believers throughout the world who prayed to God.

AT THE RUE DU BAC, MARY LEFT THE CHURCH THE MEDAL AND A SHORT INVOCATION because Mary Immaculate is not just a model to contemplate but also she who continually intercedes for us with the Father.

- *“O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us.”* This short invocation has a particularity: its simplicity. With simplicity of heart, we ask Mary Immaculate’s intercession, thereby acknowledging the mission she received from God, her mission to be our teacher of the spiritual life. She teaches us to abandon anything that is pride of spirit or an overly-intellectual discourse and to pray for each other.

- *“who have recourse to you.”* With this little addition, we sincerely admit to Mary that her presence alongside us is indispensable because of our limited faith, compassion and mercy... Poor sinners, powerless to free ourselves from our sin on our own, we can have recourse to her assistance, she who draws us to the heart of divine mercy. Mary Immaculate, the first to be saved, teaches us trust in God and helps us believe that no sin can separate us from Him if we open ourselves to His grace so that He may heal us.

IN LOURDES, during the four penitential apparitions, Mary repeated from time to time: *“Do you want to pray for the conversion of sinners and do penance for them?”* Although Bernadette felt she herself was a sinner, Mary called her to participate with Christ in the salvation of her sinful brothers, to bring divine mercy *“where sin abounds.”* Mary Immaculate reminded the Church of its duty of solidarity and prayer for sinners because everything experienced by a member of the body concerns the entire body, and God does not want a single one of His children to be lost. *“The insistent invitation of Mary Most Holy to penance is nothing but the manifestation of her maternal concern for the fate of the human family, in need of conversion and forgiveness,”* John Paul II said in 1997, in his message for the World Day of the Sick.

THE MYSTERY OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

God is a mystery of communion. He wants happiness for all His children; He wants to give His infinite mercy to each one; therefore, He gives us a share in His work of salvation: this is the mystery of the communion

To Prepare ourselves for a “Holy Year of Mercy”

of saints. In each of her apparitions, the Virgin Mary reminds us of our spiritual solidarity with all of our human brothers and sisters.

When we hear the call to pray for sinners, we naturally think of reciting prayers. This is good, but it is more a matter of entering into a life of communion with God. Standing in God’s presence, we bring all those whom we hold in our hearts before God. Intercession for our brothers and sisters is thus not reduced to a pious devotion; it is an act of mercy on our part.

Even more, we should not be content to pray for sinners; we are also invited to do penance. Here again, we might naturally think of “doing” penances. Of course, feelings must gradually take concrete form in small sacrifices of love, but we should also understand the “conversion of heart” that consists of turning toward God and working to build up His Kingdom of love.

“In this solidarity with all men, living or dead, which is founded on the communion of saints, the least of our acts done in charity resounds to the profit of all” (Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 953).

CONCLUSION

To the palmist’s prayer, *“Show us, Lord, your mercy; grant us your salvation,”* (Ps 85:8), Mary responds affirmatively, *“He has mercy... in every generation.”* For twenty centuries, Mary in Heaven has continually exulted the Lord and rejoiced that God looked upon His lowly servant and lifts up the lowly. She continues to be overwhelmed by the mystery of God’s mercy who reaches out to His people; she marvels that all generations, including ours, are in the hands, you could say, of God’s mercy. Mary repeats to us today something that is important for us, men and women of the 21st century: the necessity of our salvation.

**Virgin Mary, today
we want to thank you for who you are.**

Thank you, Mary, for having accepted to be the Mother of Jesus, the definitive incarnation of divine mercy.

Thank you for having accepted the mission of being the Mother of all humankind.

Thank you for being present beside us.

Thank you for helping us better understand what we are called to become.

You, the Immaculate One out of pure divine mercy,
you are not an exceptional being;
on the contrary, you are the rule of life according to God;
we are the ones who are the exception!

We thank you, Mary, for reminding us that we are always offered grace and that, in God’s mind, we are all beings of grace, “immaculate ones” radically forgiven in order to let divine mercy pass through us.

Teach us to welcome it each day.

You, the servant of the Father’s loving plan,
you are the woman completely open to His will.

We thank you for having followed Christ even to his emptying and for having welcomed His infinite mercy at the foot of the Cross.

Teach us to fully receive divine mercy in order to be, like you, open to His will.

You, Mother of mercy,
you pour out torrents of divine mercy on all your children.

We thank you, Mary, for reminding us that divine mercy must spread into all the dimensions of our being: will, intelligence, memory...

Teach us to no longer have any other thoughts and desires than ones of mercy and to no longer speak words other than merciful ones in order to spread divine mercy among persons who are poor.

Sister Anne PRÉVOST
Daughter of Charity

**Designation of Visitatrixes
and Appointment of Provincial Directors**

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*News
from the
Provinces*

DESIGNATION OF VISITATRIXES

PROVINCE OF MOZAMBIQUE: Sister Ester Lucas JOSE MARIA was re-designated Visitatrix, July 2, 2014.

PROVINCE OF GREAT BRITAIN: Sister Marie RAW was re-designated Visitatrix, July 2, 2014.

REGION OF ALBANIA: Sister Elizabeta SALIQUNAJ was designated Regional Superior, replacing Sister Tonja TUSHI, July 15, 2014.

PROVINCE OF CONGO: Sister Jacqueline GBANGA was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Angèle MBULA, September 10, 2014.

PROVINCE OF SLOVENIA: Sister Bernarda TRCEK was re-designated Visitatrix, September 10, 2014.

PROVINCE OF THE NEAR EAST: Sister Marie Madeleine BOUSTANY was re-designated Visitatrix, September 24, 2014.

PROVINCE OF LOS ALTOS HILLS: Sister Marjory Ann BAEZ was re-designated Visitatrix, October 8, 2014.

PROVINCE OF CHELMNO - POZNAN: Sister Malgorzata PRANGA was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Hanna Maria CYBULA, October 22, 2014.

PROVINCE OF EQUATOR: Sister Ana Maria MALDONADO AGUILAR was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Piedad ROJAS ENCALADA, November 19, 2014.

PROVINCE OF NAPLES: Sister Maria Rosaria MATRANGA was re-designated Visitatrix, December 17, 2014.

PROVINCE OF SOUTH INDIA: Sister Rose CHIRAYIL was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Rose KIDENGEAN, December 29, 2014.

PROVINCE OF NORTH INDIA: Sister Cristo KUMARI was re-designated Visitatrix, January 13, 2015.

PROVINCE OF INDONESIA: Sister Engelina DIAH WULANDARI was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Victorin SISWATI, January 28, 2015.

PROVINCE OF FORTALEZA: Sister Ana Amelia Guedes da CUNHA was re-designated Visitatrix, February 11, 2015.

PROVINCE OF AUSTRALIA: Sister Celine QUADROS was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Pauline FLYNN, February 11, 2015.

PROVINCE OF PERU: Sister Caty Cipriana VARGAS RODRIGUEZ was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Miguelina FLORIDO, February 25, 2015.

PROVINCE OF PAMPLONA: Sister Juana Maria BELZUNEGUI LIZARRAGA was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Maria Soledad GARCIA IMAS, February 25, 2015.

PROVINCE OF MEXICO: Sister Alicia Margarita CORTES was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Maria Graciela RUBIO MONCADA, March 18, 2015.

PROVINCE OF THE NEAR EAST: Father Antoine Pierre NAKAD was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, December 30, 2014.

PROVINCE OF INDONESIA: Father Willibrordus MURDANI was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, December 30, 2014.

PROVINCE OF CONGO: Father Justin ILUKU MOTYA BIKOPO was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a three-year term, December 30, 2014.

ANNOUNCEMENT

After some 40 years, the task of the Vincentian Translation Project is complete. The final volume of the English Edition of Pierre Coste's 14-volume series of the work of Saint Vincent de Paul was published in September 2014. Therefore, the project's offices are closing. The volumes, however, will remain available. They have been shipped to the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal building in Philadelphia, where the Vincentians will see to their storage and future sale. If you wish to obtain any of the volumes of the series, Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, the contact person there is:

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Province of Slovakia

“If you have faith... you will move mountains.”

Looking back at my vocation story and the experiences I have had up to now, I see how the Lord has guided me through obstacles, especially political ones, because my vocation was born in the middle of the Communist regime that governed our country for 40 years until 1989.

I was 27 years old when, for the first time, I participated in a retreat during which I felt the call to consecrated life. However, this was at a particularly difficult time for the life of the Church. Religious congregations had been suppressed, and if there were new vocations, they had to be formed in hiding, which was very dangerous. Often even within a family, parents wouldn't know that their daughter was a Sister.

I worked as a manager in a large accounting firm where I met Sister Marta, whom I only providentially learned was a Daughter of Charity because she didn't wear a habit. She introduced me to the superiors, and I began initial formation in the greatest secrecy. Each month I participated in a formation meeting, which took place either in an apartment or in one of the official communities, but always late at night in order to avoid attracting the attention of the police. The Sister responsible for formation helped us discover the Vincentian charism and the spirit of the Company. Regular communications helped me to move forward despite external difficulties.

Marian devotion has always had an essential role in my life. All throughout my formation, I depended greatly on Mary's protection. I had entrusted my vocation and my future to her. Thanks to her intercession, I was able to overcome all my fears and concerns and give myself totally to the Lord in order to serve Him in the poor. I made my vows for the first time on the Feast of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, November 27, 1978. My heart leapt with joy and gratitude for the priceless gift of

Sisters' Testimonies

my vocation. At that time, I felt that I should change my career in order to serve poor persons and assist them more directly. I had to wait seven years before receiving an offer to work in a clinic for elderly persons as a nursing assistant.

My decision to terminate my contract shocked all the colleagues with whom I had worked for 20 years. This change was incomprehensible for them because the work I was going to do seemed degrading or humiliating to them. They said things to me like, "You must have lost your mind to exchange such a good position for a job that anyone could do." I must admit that, even for me, this change was not easy. I liked my work as an accountant, but I had prayed to the Lord to give me the strength to leave my comfort zone to serve Him in the poorest of the poor. I placed everything in His hands, and He granted me great inner peace. I was well supported by my Sisters and the priest who was my spiritual director.

I began my new service as a nursing assistant with elderly and abandoned people. I visited them in their homes, like our first Sisters. The Visitatrix then sent another Sister to this ministry so that I was not alone doing it. The woman who was the director of this work was a communist. She valued our service and entrusted responsibility for a ward with 16 patients to us. This was an excellent opportunity to be closer to the patients, especially for spiritual service. Many patients were reconciled to God and rediscovered their faith. This was a major risk because pastoral care was not allowed in the establishment, but we did it very discretely. One of us accompanied the priest to sick persons' homes, and the other kept guard at the door. Each time, we entrusted it all to the Blessed Virgin and the Founders, asking that they might watch over us as well as those who wanted to receive the sacraments.

Trials were not lacking. One day, an atheist colleague denounced us to the director, saying that we went to church before coming to work. She told us, "What you do in your private life does not interest me." However, as a communist, she had total authority to fire us. She even added that God's protection was with us. Through her words, the Lord assured me that He was truly my shepherd and that He led me by right paths even if I had to go through deep valleys.

After the fall of the totalitarian regime in 1989, religious freedom was restored to our country. The Church was able to recover some of the goods that had been confiscated during communism, although they were greatly damaged. Several houses were returned to us, including one in Kosice, where I was living in an apartment. After repairing the house, a local community was established there. It was a real exodus, a return to the country, especially for those who had been deported to the Czech Republic. At that time, the Sisters who were living in hiding were able to put on the habit of the Daughters of Charity. What had been impossible became a reality.

When we revealed our real identity to the director of the establishment, she was very surprised but asked us to remain and work there as Sisters wearing the habit. When we arrived dressed that way on September 12, 1991, our colleagues were stunned. It provoked many questions and remarks, as many positive as negative ones, and as many amusing as hesitant reactions, but the Lord was present to help us as well get used to this major change and, in the words of Saint Vincent, turn the medal and look at persons, events and the future with the light of faith.

As I look back on my past, I am convinced that God was present in all the situations and trials that I experienced. I can bear witness that He blesses our loving service of those who are poor, responds to our trust in Him and gives us the necessary graces to faithfully live our vocation.

Sister Alžbeta KIŠIDAYOVÁ
Daughter of Charity

Province of the Philippines

In the Service of Pastoral Communities in Bongao Tawi-Tawi

I am 73 years old and 50 years vocation. After Seminary, I was sent to San Juan de Dios Hospital in Pasay City, Metro Manila. My Sister Servant, who was Spanish, was very affirming and loving. When I was preparing to pronounce my vows for the first time, I got sick. Knowing that good health is very important in order to serve the poor, I wrote Mother Guillemin that I would delay my vows for the first time, which was an experience of total abandonment to Divine Providence and God's will. With God's grace, I was able to surpass that trial and many other difficulties.

Ultimately, I have served God for a long time in apostolates in education, health, pastoral care and social service. I could say that my 50 years in the Company are an experience of God's GRACES:

- Gratitude for the trust of my superiors
- Renewal of my commitment thanks to the ongoing formation I have received
- Adoration of God present in prayer and persons
- Communion and presence in the local community
- Events as opportunities for growth
- Service of God in our masters the poor

At age 63, learning I had cancer, I had to undergo treatment. This trial rooted me more deeply in God and led me further down the path of obedience: to my doctors, my Superiors and even my very self as I discovered the importance of listening to my body. My passion for God and for the service of the poor deepened.

Then I was assigned to pastoral communities serving the indigenous people like the Mangyan in Mindoro, the Aetas in Boracay and now the Bajau in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, part of Mindanao. We are three Sisters in the local community. We help the Bajau children in Village Learning Center through education, formation and feeding programs: 32 kindergarten and pre-kindergarten children, 56 elementary students and 3 secondary school students. We also provide formation to the mothers.

Every day we cook meals for the children, who often eat only one meal a day. Their parents, who are fishermen, earn a very meager income, which hardly supports the family's needs.

I also volunteer in the pastoral care of the sick in the hospital for the poor in Bongao. Having experienced illness, I find it easier to enter into the suffering of those who are sick and listen to them: *"[You] must be to serve the sick poor with great gentleness and cordiality, sympathizing with them in their sufferings and listening to their little complaints, as a good mother should because they look upon you as their nursing mothers and as persons sent by God to assist them. So, you're destined to represent the Goodness of God... for they are your masters and mine as well"* (CCD X, p. 267-268. Conference 85, "Service of the sick and care of one's own health", November 11, 1657).

To conclude, I would like express my gratitude to God for giving me the strength needed to joyfully serve Him in those persons living in situations of poverty. I would also like to affirm my conviction that illness and physical diminishments in the later years can never dampen one's fervor for selfless giving since it draws its strength and energy from the Charity of Jesus Crucified.

Sister Clara E. MESADA
Daughter of Charity

Province of Amazonia

Being God's presence in the world

I am a Daughter of Charity from the Province of Amazonia, and I am going to share my vocation journey over my 44 years of vocation.

First of all, I have had the grace of belonging to 13 different local communities with many Sisters of various age groups, in different contexts, whether in education, health care or a presence in working-class areas. I have worked as a nurse caring for sick poor persons in Daughter of Charity hospitals and in public health centers. In the Province of Fortaleza, I was the director of a hospital, Sister Servant and Provincial Councillor.

When the region of Amazonia was established, I was appointed regional Councillor for four years and then Seminary Directress and Provincial Treasurer. I strove to carry out all of the ministries entrusted to me generously and responsibly, despite my limitations. When I left each ministry, I also did so lovingly and with a peaceful conscience, knowing I had fulfilled my mission despite my humble state. However, I didn't always succeed in the ministries asked of me by the Company. For example, in the ministry as Seminary Directress entrusted to me ten years ago: forming Sisters was very difficult for me, and I had to leave the position in an unpleasant way.

Now, after prayer and reflection, I can look back with gratitude on this difficult period of my life. If I hadn't experienced this failure, I would have continued to think, in my pride, that I was able to perform a ministry for which I was not qualified. God has a plan for each one of us, and He helped me to discover what He wished of me. What is most important is to be available for what He wants at the time and in the way that He desires.

Four years later, I was asked to become the Provincial Treasurer. I hesitated a lot; I was very reluctant, and then, motivated by my commitment and sense of belonging to the Company, I said yes. Six months later, I had to ask to be relieved of this ministry. I could no longer continue for several reasons, and, fortunately, my request was accepted.

I continued my journey, placing my gifts at the service of the Community, wherever the Lord sent me, collaborating with my Sister Servants and the other Sisters in the local community. When we have been responsible for a specific ministry within the Company, our experiences can enrich and support the person now exercising the service of authority. In my experience, living dependence in little things on a daily basis greatly helps me to be a simpler and humbler Daughter of Charity.

I have always tried to direct my life toward the two focal points of the Daughters of Charity: Jesus Christ and persons who are poor. The conviction that I was chosen by God and that I am unconditionally loved by Him gives me courage to confront the challenges I encounter as well as enthusiasm and joy in my mission with those who are poor.

I am sure that God is not found just in one ministry or another. I find God wherever I give love and enthusiasm, so it is important for me to daily renew my YES to the Lord. I am passionate about fraternal life in community, and I am concerned when I see that it is not sufficiently a reflection of the Trinity as presented in our Constitutions and Statutes. I seek to live a unified life, even if I am very far from reaching this goal that I so desire.

Four years ago, I was sent to a region in the Diocese of Roraima, in the far north of Brazil, to begin a ministry with migrants. The Sisters who work in pastoral ministry for indigenous people had begun to make visits in this area, but the Bishop saw the need for a local community of Sisters to serve the poor persons in Iracema who had nothing.

For three years there were two of us; we belonged to the local community of St. Louise de Marillac Boa Vista-Roraima, 93 kilometers away, which meant we had to travel back and forth.

Sisters' Testimonies

In 2013, the Province established the Sr. Lindalva local community in Iracema-Roraima, to which I belong. We serve in pastoral ministry in this city with about four thousand residents. We also want to go out into the rural area, but this would require that a Sister have a driver's license. It is a difficult mission. These people have very few resources and are deprived of everything, even the religious belief that they had in their native regions.

Four months ago, I was asked to again take on the role of Sister Servant of this local community. After much hesitation, because I don't think I have the qualities for the service of authority, I accepted, and I make great efforts to do it well despite the difficulties.

My goal in this wonderful stage of my life is to continue my journey as Daughter of Charity, seeking to perform my ministry with love, totally given and in a responsible way because, despite it all, during these years I have spent in the Company, I have felt how much this God of love has helped me to love Him better in the person of the poor in the different ministries and places where I have been assigned. My desire is to be a merciful presence of God through my life for those who are poor, the Sisters in my local community and all those whom I meet. I conclude by saying, "If I had a thousand lives to live, I would give them all to the Lord."

Sister Maria Enide MICHILES
Daughter of Charity

Origins of the Company and Returning to the Source

*"You can be very certain God is your founder."
(CCD IX, p. 192)*

Introduction

In the Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, the Second Vatican Council spoke of *returning to the source*: "*The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time. This renewal [must be advanced] under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church*" (PC, 2).

Pope Francis also invites us "*to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel: new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world*" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 11).

I would like us to focus on three expressions from Vatican II, repeated by Pope Francis, that speak to us about the future: return to the source, renewal and adaptation under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church. We will look at the origins of the Company in this way, keeping these three principles in mind:

- Returning to the source must be ongoing to prevent falling into routine.

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*Session for
Daughters
of Charity
7-10 Years
Vocation*

Session for Daughters of Charity 7-10 years vocation

- The renewal and adaptation of consecrated life includes looking to the beginnings, the present and the changing conditions of life. Discernment leads us to look at all change as sacred ground and a sign of God's passage.

- Changes made under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church prevent superficiality and worldliness.

When we scale a mountain, we contemplate the wonders of creation and sometimes find the headwaters of a spring. The climb is tiring, but when we reach the summit, we feel joy and a sense of peace so deep that we forget our fatigue. We have an extraordinary view of the horizon from all sides, we admire the clarity of the water, and we feel the cool, clean air... all this prompts us to praise the Lord and to thank Him. I hope that this will be our experience today.

1 - THE BEGINNING OF THE COMPANY UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now we will look at the spring from which the water of charity flows, that is, the Company in the Church. We all know the lives of our founders and, in particular, Saint Louise de Marillac's spiritual experience. Through the experience of the *lumière* or light of Pentecost, she understood God's call to become part of the Company. She did not see completely clearly, but, little by little, with the help of Vincent de Paul, her mission became clearer. At that time, problems were arising in the Confraternities of Charity that Vincent had founded... He recognized that "things were not going well" and sent Louise to reorganize the Confraternities of Charity. In her visits, she became aware of young women who wished to give themselves to God for the service of persons who are poor.

Marguerite Naseau was a sign from God for the Founders. Her death in February 1633 opened up new paths in their discernment process. Saint Vincent asserted in 1642 that this peasant girl who gave herself to God had no other teacher than God. An evangelizer, she showed the way to others... Saint Vincent said of her, "*That was how God wanted it... She attracted to this other girls, whom she had helped to detach themselves from all superficial things and to embrace a devout life*" (CCD IX, p. 66). Other young women followed Marguerite Naseau, and "*they began to meet and come together almost imperceptibly*" (CCD IX, p. 166).

Although we do not know why, around Pentecost 1633, Vincent was still undecided about bringing these young women together in community. This is clear in a letter he wrote to Louise:

"With regard to your employment, my mind is not yet enlightened enough before God concerning a difficulty which prevents me from seeing whether it is the Will of His Divine Majesty. I beg you, Mademoiselle, to recommend this matter to Him during these days in which He communicates more abundantly the blessings of the Holy Spirit, rather, the Holy Spirit Himself. Let us persist, therefore, in our prayers, and may you remain quite cheerful" (CCD I, p. 200, L. 138).

Vincent's retreat in August or September 1633 was decisive, and the Holy Spirit shed abundant light on the situation. At the end of this retreat, Vincent wrote a letter that served as a green light:

"I beg you, Mademoiselle, in the name of Our Lord, to do all in your power to take care of yourself, no longer as a private individual but as a person upon whose health a number of others are dependent. Today is the eighth day of our little retreat; I hope to continue to the tenth with the help of God. I think your good angel did what you told me in the letter you wrote me. Four or five days ago, he communicated with mine concerning the Charity of your young women. It is true; he prompted me to recall it often and I gave that good work serious thought. We shall talk about it, God willing, on Friday or Saturday, if you do not write to me sooner" (CCD I, p. 215-216, L. 151).

Vincent used the image of a conversation between their guardian angels to describe the final phase of the discernment. The foundation took place November 29, 1633: the young women gathered in Louise's home as evening fell. We have no minutes nor written documents recording this moment; it is the fruit of the Spirit... One thing is very clear: God's call to mission. In Louise's house, the community lived out "*coming and going*" for the service of those who are poor.

Louise formed the young women in the "*solid virtues*" needed for the mission of serving the sick poor and instructing children. The Sisters were the servants of the poor, auxiliaries of the Ladies of Charity, but they had no juridical status of their own. The Company was thus born

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for the mission of taking on the service done by the Confraternities of Charity. Louise taught them to pray, teach catechism, care for the sick and relate well with the ladies. She helped them grow in faith, hope, charity, humility and simplicity. The young women were members of the Confraternities of Charity and as such, they had to consider and live out the service they performed not as just a profession but as a continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ.

A Rule would be needed to organize their lives and mission. Louise drafted it and Vincent approved it. It laid down the spiritual profile of the Daughter of Charity. Its content was not so much juridical as related to charism. As the spiritual father of the fledgling Company, Vincent explained it during the first conference of July 31, 1634, when he emphasized the charismatic, pedagogical and ascetic value of observing it. He encouraged them to live service of those who are poor based on an incarnational spirituality. From the beginning, he made clear the meaning of *“leaving God for God”* and asserted that *“to serve those who are poor is to go to God”* (CCD IX, p. 5), based on Chapter 25 of Matthew’s Gospel.

To help the Sisters be faithful to the Rules, the founder repeated his convictions in many ways: *“God has inspired in you this way of life... He has inspired your rule and your form of life.”*

Some years later, on the feast of Christmas, December 25, 1648, St. Vincent spoke to the Sisters about love of their vocation and again affirmed, *“God is the author of the Company,”* evoking Marguerite Naseau as the model of love of vocation because she was faithful to what Heaven inspired in her and accepted the guidance of God’s Spirit.

In 1655, when Vincent told the Sisters of the approval of the Company by Cardinal de Retz, he reaffirmed the importance of faith in every aspect of their lives:

“To be true Daughters of Charity you must do what the Son of God did when He was on earth... He worked constantly for His neighbor, visiting and healing the sick and instructing the ignorant for their salvation” (CCD IX, p. 14).

This motivation appears quite clearly in the first regulation and then in the Rules. It sets down that they must give themselves totally to God as good Christians and true Daughters of Charity. This requires an intense spiritual life: prayer, Mass, living in God’s presence, spiritual sharing, reading, silence and unity of life; the same goes for community life: cordiality and communion in imitation of the Holy Trinity. Vincent expressed his conviction clearly: *“it’s the beginning of a very great blessing that will perhaps last forever... because it’s a good thing and fitting that it should survive...”* (CCD IX, p. 9-10).

2 - THE COMPANY IS STRENGTHENED UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (1636-1655)

The first Rule having established the foundations of the specific vocation and charism, the Spirit raised up vocations, and the Company grew. In 1636 the Foundress and the first Sisters had to move to the village of La Chapelle. Duly organized, the Sisters offered their service to poor persons in the Confraternities of parishes in Paris and the surrounding area, cared for the sick at Hôtel Dieu and taught in the schools of the Charities. A progressive growth can be observed beginning in 1636. Under the influence of the Spirit who worked through the Ladies, Bishops or hospital administrators, their works expanded: hospital and school in Liancourt (1636), foundlings, hospital and school in Saint Germain en Laye, hospital and school in Richelieu, all in 1638. The Sisters began to care for the galley slaves in Paris and in Nanteuil-le-Haudouin and took on responsibility for Saint Jean Hospital in Angers (1639)... From 1640 to 1646, the number of foundations outside Paris increased: Sedan, Issy, Fontenay-aux-Roses, Nantes and others... Some of these works quickly took on a certain social significance and relevance: the work for abandoned children, for the galley slaves and care for the sick in hospitals.

The administrators of the Hospital of Angers, Madame de Goussault and the Abbé de Vaux requested that the Founders send Sisters to care for the sick. Louise de Marillac herself went with three Sisters to prepare and set up this new foundation. The Abbé de Vaux would be the advisor and “spiritual director” for the local community. She signed the contract with the power granted by the Superior General, as the Directress and Superioress, on February 1, 1640. Louise then assured follow-up for the community through very regular correspondence with the Sisters

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and close communication with the Abbé de Vaux. The hospital, which was in a deplorable state, was quickly turned around. Learning of this, the Administrators of the hospital of Nantes in turn asked for assistance from the Sisters.

Vocations increased at the same pace as the works. Louise evaluated the intentions of the young women who wanted to serve persons who were poor. Vincent was directly involved in the discernment. In his May 27, 1636, letter to Louise, he wrote:

*“Yesterday, because I was being hard pressed by Madame de Combalet to send her the Sister... I spoke to Marie Denyse about it. She seemed to me better suited for the situation, but she gave me an answer worthy of a girl with a vocation from God to the Charity, which was that she had left her father and mother to give herself to the service of the poor for the love of God, and she begged me to excuse her if she could not change her intention in order to go and serve that great lady. After that, I spoke to Barbe, the older one, without telling her for whom or why, and sent her to wait for me at Madame de Combalet’s house. There I told her that this good lady would employ her part-time in her service and part-time with the poor of the parish. She began to cry, but since she consented, I placed her in the hands of one of the ladies-in-waiting of that great lady. However, I was quite astonished when immediately afterwards she returned to Abbé de Loyac’s house where I was, just opposite. She told me that she was startled to see such a grand court, that she could not live there, and begged me to take her away. She said that Our Lord had given her to the poor and she entreated me to send her back to them. It really astounded the Abbé to see such contempt for the grandeur of the world, and made me tell that fine Sister to go back to the lady’s house and that, if she did not feel comfortable there, she might return to Saint-Nicolas in four or five days. What do you think of that, Mademoiselle? Are you not delighted to **see the strength of the spirit of God** in those two poor young women and the contempt that He has given them for the world and its greatness? You could not believe the ardor that this has given me for the Charity” (CCD I, p. 322-3).*

Vincent, sure that the Spirit of God inspired and guided these young women to act this way, felt encouraged by their witness of charity. The Founders gradually set conditions for admission: be an authentic

Christian, have a good mind, good health, a joyful character and also be willing to live in community and observe the Rule. They would not admit women who were too young or too old, who had health problems, behavior not in conformity with the Rules, a melancholy, shallow or superficial character, and little interest in prayer or work...

The growth of the Company and its solid establishment did not occur without crises. Vincent and Louise were not dismayed nor shocked by this. They calmly confronted crises and reviewed events. They saw them as part of any living institution. Every crisis is a call to conversion and growth.

The conference of January 6, 1642, is a real review of life... After diagnosing the symptoms and causes of the crisis, Vincent and Louise offered concrete means to remedy it:

- Recalling the origins of the Company (Conf. July 1642).
- Looking to Jesus Christ crucified (cf. *Spiritual Writings* A. 21 and A. 21b).
- Pronouncing of vows as confirmation of the total gift of self (March 25, 1642).
- Living the *spirit of the Company* (Conf. January 25, 1643).
- Contemplating the seal of the Company with its motto to recall the humiliated love of Jesus Christ (1643).
- Encouraging each other in their vocation (Conf. January 25, 1643 and Conf. June 14, 1643).

The Founders began to encourage the practice of private vows between 1640 and 1642, at the request of some Sisters (Conf. July 5, 1640). Vows were seen as a means to conform oneself to Christ, servant and evangelizer of those who are poor. As the years passed, the nature and characteristics of vows would become better defined.

An important factor shaping the Company and its prospects for the future was the establishment of the Mother House in the parish of Saint Laurent (1641). As the members continued to increase, the house at La Chapelle became too small and was too far from Saint Lazare, even as Vincent was coming more frequently to give spiritual conferences to the Sisters. The Founders thus bought two houses close to Saint Lazare, in which to

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establish the third Mother House, where it would remain until the French Revolution. As the Saint-Denis neighborhood needed a school for poor girls, Louise de Marillac asked the Cantor of the Cathedral of Paris for authorization to establish one, and it was granted.

From then on, the Mother House became the institutional headquarters of the Company, with its General Council, a place for the community to gather and communicate with the Superiors, the unified center that transmitted the charism, the formation center and the center from which Sisters were sent on mission. Here, at the Mother House, the majority of the conferences given by Saint Vincent took place; this is where the documents for ecclesial and civil approval of the Company were prepared, and this is where documents explaining the charism were preserved: it was the beginning of the Archives to conserve history for the future; it was the place of belonging.

3 - THE PROCESS OF THE APPROVAL OF THE COMPANY UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT

From 1633 until 1644, the Company existed in the Church of France, but simply as an auxiliary entity to the Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity. The Founders did not rush into ecclesial approval. A certain prudence was necessary given the environment surrounding consecrated life implying, at that time, the cloister. Would the Archbishop of Paris accept that something new was being born in the Church, and would he dare approve it?

Previously, when the English Mary Ward wanted to found the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she was treated as a heretic by the bishops who dissolved her schools and the community and imprisoned her for some years. Mary Ward died in 1645 after Pope Urban VIII freed her from prison and recognized the charism of this founder.

After this event, Vincent and Louise understood that the moment had come to begin the process for ecclesial approval of the Company as an institution of the Church independent of the Ladies of Charity.

When Saint Louise made her pilgrimage to Chartres in October 1644, she was thinking of the establishment of the Company, that is, its ecclesial

approval. This is evident in the account she makes to Saint Vincent of her trip:

*“We arrived in Chartres on Friday, October 14. My devotion for Saturday was to render to God, in the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin, the thanks I owe Him for the many graces that I have received from His goodness. Sunday’s devotions were for the needs of my son. On Monday, 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”* (Spiritual Writings, p. 121-122, L. 111).

Immediately after the pilgrimage to Chartres, the Founders began the process for approval. First, Vincent drew up a document on the origins of the Company, its members, location, services offered and the state of the Company. In it, its beginnings are described as an act of Divine Providence that anticipated their way of living and the Regulation of the Confraternity. Saint Vincent sent this document to Saint Louise, who suggested some very sound changes:

“Is it necessary to be so lengthy in the praises of the above mentioned Sisters which begin with the words: ‘And what is more worthy of consideration’? Would it not suffice to say that, ‘in addition to the corporal service they render to the above-mentioned sick poor, God is blessing the little reminders they give them for their salvation, both to those who are going to die and to those who are going to recover; in order to help them to live well, which is producing very good results and clearly shows...’ (the action of Providence)

I would like to mention the other places where they are primarily and say: ‘in the past few days or recently at Saint-Denis Hospital’; to mention Sedan and also that those in the rural areas serve in instructing children as well as in caring for the sick and dressing wounds.

That no mention be made of the good being done by the above-mentioned demoiselle either at present or in the future” (CCD II, p. 598-599, L. 772).

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In the official request that Saint Vincent addressed to the Archbishop of Paris, it was clear that the Confraternities of Charity are the fruit of the missions preached by the priests of the Congregation of the Mission. Among the reasons for seeking approval, he said that it is **something good and a necessity for the Church** since the humble nature of the services that the Sisters carry out is incompatible with the Ladies' status. He clearly detailed the humble background of the Sisters and their desire to give themselves permanently to God in the service of persons who are poor. He also described their effectiveness in the apostolate and the means to live it out:

- Spiritual and professional formation,
- Unified administration that makes the mission easier,
- The availability of the Sisters for the different types of service,
- Community as an essential support for the Sisters' mission and vocation.

The document indicates that the Company already enjoys God's blessing, made visible in flourishing vocations, the Sisters' humble and poor lifestyle and, above all, the people's approval.

Almost a year passed before the final approval on November 20, 1646, signed by Jean François Paul de Gondi, coadjutor and vicar general of the Archbishop of Paris (who also held the title of Archbishop of Corinth).

This initial approval was diocesan although the Sisters were already present in other dioceses. The Company was recognized in the Church as a confraternity made up of auxiliaries to the Ladies yet independent from them. The title they were given was "Servants of the Poor of the Charity". The government and leadership of the Confraternity would be exercised by Vincent during his lifetime, as delegate of the Archbishop in a personal capacity, but after his death, the Sisters would be placed under the authority of the archbishop and his successors. (CCD XIIIb, 131-138).

Saint Louise immediately presented her objections. First, she preferred the name "*Daughters of Charity*" (CCD III, p. 132, L. 898); next, she was strongly opposed to dependence on the archbishop or bishop (CCD III, p. 132). She worried that they would interfere with the Sisters' Rule and change their way of life (CCD III, p. 132). She also defended the

secular character of the Company (CCD IV, p. 6, L. 1208).

Saint Louise's disagreement delayed sharing the approval with the Sisters for nearly a year. It was not communicated until May 30, 1647, during a *Conference on the Rules*.

As usual, Vincent asked the Sisters to speak about the meaning of their Rules. After explaining some of the points, he said that the content of the Rules is a summary of the Gospel inspired by the Spirit of God and adapted to the lifestyle of the Daughters of Charity. Toward the end of the conference, he added:

"Up to the present, you haven't been a body independent of the Ladies of the Confraternity of Charity; but now, Sisters, God wills that you form a special body which, however, without being separated from that of the Ladies, will still have its particular functions and spiritual exercises. Until now you've worked with no other obligation; now God wants to bind you more closely by the approval He has permitted the Most Reverend and Most Illustrious Archbishop of Paris to give to your Rules and your way of life. This is the petition presented to him; here are the Rules, then here's the approval. I'll read them for you one after the other" (CCD IX, p. 255).

THE COMPANY DEVELOPS AND ADOPTS STRUCTURES

On June 28, 1646, the first meeting of the Council of the Company took place (CCD XIIIb, 240-251).

At the end of 1646, the Petition for the Letters Patent was sent to King Louis XIV for civil approval of the Company of the Daughters of Charity (CCD XIIIb, p. 139-141). In 1647 Queen Anne of Austria sent a petition to Pope Innocent X requesting that the Daughters of Charity remain in perpetuity under the direction of Saint Vincent and his successors (CCD XIIIb, p. 141-143). Who asked her to write this letter? We do not know.

In April 1650, Saint Louise spoke with the Procurator General so that the Company might be approved as a secular entity in order to be able to go to the homes of poor persons. The Procurator had a favorable response but asked for time to reflect on the matter (CCD IV, p. 6)

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In 1651, the original documents of ecclesial (canonical) approval, which had been presented to the secretary of the Parliament for civil approval of the Company, disappeared. The loss of the documents happened after the secretary's death, so it was necessary to seek ecclesial approval again (CCD IV, p. 276, L. 1425). Saint Vincent drew up a new request, sent to His Eminence Cardinal de Retz, who had sought refuge in Rome (CCD XI, p. 165), changing some items at Louise de Marillac's insistence.

On January 18, 1655, the Company received ecclesial approval by Cardinal de Retz, archbishop of Paris, with a special clause: *"And since God has blessed the efforts our dearly beloved Vincent de Paul has made for the success of this pious intention, we have entrusted and confided to him and by these present letters do entrust and confide to him for life the leadership and direction of the Society and Confraternity and, after him, to his successors as Superiors General of the Congregation of the Mission"* (CCD XIIIb, p. 146).

After the erection and ecclesial approval of the Company, the Founders gave it institutional solidity.

- Drafting and signing the Act of Establishment of the Company, August 8, 1655 (CCD XIIIb, p. 225-228)
- Commented reading of the Approval of the Company during the conference of August 8, 1655 (CCD X, p. 79-86)
- Letters Patent for civil approval by the King of the Daughters of Charity in November 1657 (CCD XIIIb, p. 230-235)
- ... The Company was registered in Parliament on December 16, 1658 (CCD XIIIb, p. 236-7).
- In 1659, the documents of approval were sent to Fr. Jolly, superior of the house in Rome, so he could try to obtain approval by the Holy See (CCD VIII, p. 160, L. 2994).

With institutional soundness, the boldness of charity in the service of persons living in poverty continued, and Sisters were sent to field hospitals and to care for those with mental illness... The obedient and available Sisters were ready to respond to new poverties according to the Founder's requests. Yes, God was present and powerfully at work.

On July 8, 1668, after the death of the Founders, approval by the Holy See came through the Cardinal de Vendôme, legate *ad latere* of Pope Clement IX (*Genesis of the Company: 1633-1968*, p. 36-38).

CONCLUSION

This journey has shown the long river of charity that has been flowing since the birth of the Company. Convinced that the Company was something good for the Church and of its vital importance, the Founders strove to leave it on solid footing for coming generations. Saint Vincent was already saying in 1646, *"And that, Sisters, was the beginning of your Company. As it wasn't then what it is now, there's reason to believe that it's still not what it will be when God has perfected it as He wants it; for, Sisters, don't think that Communities are formed all at once"* (CCD IX, p. 194, Conf. of February 13, 1646). He knew that communities are created and constantly recreated and need time and discernment to respond to God's plan.

The act of establishment of the Company presents us with the keys for a historical vision that apply both to the past and to our day:

Believe that *God's goodness chose to bless this little work of His hands* and wants it to continue in His Church as God's gift to those who are poor. It is our responsibility to trust and live in fidelity and gratitude.

Give thanks for the ecclesial approval that recognizes the Company as a necessary institution of charity in the life of the Church for the care of those who are poor. It is up to us to maintain our strong sense of belonging to the Church.

Fidelity to the Rules and Constitutions is what has allowed it to continue the mission of Jesus Christ and to pursue it in the future. We must be faithful to the charism.

Exemption from bishops' authority and dependence on the Superior Generals of the Congregation of the Mission, Saint Vincent de Paul and his successors, is a means of unity and fidelity to the charism. We must assure the continuation of this insight of Saint Louise, inspired by the Spirit.

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Good leadership in the Company on the General, Provincial and local level, from the time of Saint Louise up to the present, guarantees fidelity and social recognition in the Church. We must attentively look after our personal formation and that of Sister Servants.

Availability is essential for the mission. From the beginnings up to our day, it has been a witness that attracts vocations and a means for the missionary expansion of the Company. Let us live it out with a new missionary momentum under the watchful gaze of the Virgin Mary, mother of the Church and of the Company.

Sister Maria Angeles INFANTE
Daughter of Charity

Pope Francis chose
the first vespers
for Divine Mercy Sunday,
the evening of Saturday, April 11, 2015,
to publish the document
promulgating
THE HOLY YEAR OF MERCY,
which in technical terms is called
the “bull of indication”
of this Extraordinary Jubilee.

A pontifical “bull” is
a document of special importance,
bearing the Pope’s seal.

A bull of indication of a Holy Year
indicates the time and places
of the celebration of a Jubilee
as well as the objectives
of the Pope who convokes it
and the means suggested to the Baptized
in order to prepare for
this special year of grace.

