

*E*choes of the Company



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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**The boldness
of holiness
for a new
missionary
momentum**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SPIRITUAL LIFE

| | |
|---|-----|
| Letter of September 27, 2019..... | 288 |
| Sister Kathleen Appler, Superioress General | |

SESSION FOR SISTERS 11-24 YEARS VOCATION

| | |
|---|-----|
| Moral conscience, an essential guide that also needs to be formed..... | 290 |
| Father Alain Thomasset, SJ | |
| Attitude of Servant..... | 312 |
| Sister Iliana Suarez, Daughter of Charity | |

NEWS FROM THE PROVINCES

Sisters' Testimonies

| | |
|--|-----|
| Provinces of Chelmno-Poznan, Krakow and Slovakia..... | 332 |
| Assistance in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) Zone in Ukraine Sisters who served in the ATO Zone | |
| Province of Madagascar..... | 342 |
| “Every person is a sacred story, in God’s image” Sister Francine, Daughter of Charity | |

HISTORY OF THE COMPANY

On the path to beatification

| | |
|--|-----|
| Sister Gabriella (Teresa) Borgarino, Daughter of Charity (1880-1949)..... | 347 |
| Servant of God “A Life for the Mission” Sister Adele Bollati, Daughter of Charity | |

Letter of September 27, 2019

Dear Sisters,

*The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ
be with us forever!*

“*Happy feast of Saint Vincent de Paul!*” I do not ordinarily write you for the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, but I am taking advantage of it this year to share some good news that will delight many of you and surely the hearts of our Founders in heaven.

In the coming months, the Diocese of Nanterre, where Suresnes is located, will begin the process for the beatification of Marguerite Naseau. At the initiative of the parish priest of Clichy, an initial meeting took place, and the bishop, Monsignor Matthieu ROUGE, is favorable to this project, which the Company will support. The General Council has suggested the names of three Daughters of Charity to the bishop who, as the petitioner of the cause, must himself appoint the members of the historical commission as well as the postulator, who will work to prepare the necessary documents. I cannot provide any more details at this time as the process must first start, but I wanted to inform you now.

Today, after a long process of reflection, prayer, and discernment, the Provinces of Thailand and of St. Louise de Marillac-Asia will join to form the single

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*Spiritual
Life*

Province of St. Louise de Marillac-Asia, which will include nine countries, the most of all the Provinces of the Company. The Sisters of the Province of Thailand just celebrated fifty years of their presence in the Thailand mission. Let us give thanks to God for all that was experienced in each of these two Provinces and for all that will be in the future. Let us pray for the Sisters who are going through this transition. What began quietly with the one “*who had the happiness of showing others the way*” (CCD IX, 65) continues to inspire new responses to the needs of those who are poor!

Let us entrust to Saint Vincent’s intercession all the victims of conflicts, wars, and natural disasters just as we remember in prayer our Sisters suffering physically due to illness or accidents.

Affectionately united with you in prayer,

Sister Kathleen APPLER
Daughter of Charity

Moral conscience,
an essential guide
that also needs to be formed

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INTRODUCTION: THE PRIMACY OF CONSCIENCE

Session for
Sisters

11-24 Years
Vocation

The question of conscience holds an important place both in Christian thought and in the contemporary world's moral reflection.

Catholic tradition has long asserted the primacy, the dignity and the inviolability of moral conscience. According to this thinking, no one should be forced to act against his or her conscience. Tradition also states that conscience is “*the proximate norm of personal morality.*”¹ This means that we should act in conformity with the judgment of our conscience in all cases. However, Catholic tradition also always ventured to remind us that we have an obligation to “form our conscience.” Indeed, it “*is not an infallible judge; it can make mistakes.*”² We should explain this paradox: the issue is to obey a personal authority while recognizing its weakness and the necessity of its formation.

Moreover, our contemporaries and modern thought demand respect of conscience and recognition of its importance. Most people are convinced that the

1. The Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (VS) of John Paul II (1993), no. 60 reminds us of this.

2. VS 62.

conscience is part of what makes up the human person and his dignity. The affirmation of the right of individual conscience appeared in the 18th century as a defense of personal freedom against the despotism of the monarchy and political oppression. It found expression in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and in ideas spread by the French Revolution: democracy, tolerance, plurality of thought, debate, etc. We should also recall that the Church fought this modern valorization of conscience. In the 19th century, it considered this promotion of rights an anti-clerical attack and an incitement to disobedience of an objective morality defined by the Church. Our contemporaries, who above all cherish respect of individuality, enjoy valuing conscience, which derives in large part from the ancient Christian tradition, but they have more difficulty hearing that this authority does not exist in isolation, independent of any influence and standards.

That being the case, what exactly is conscience? What is its place in the moral decision-making process? How is it formed? Can it be mistaken, and in this case, should we follow it? What is its role in relation to moral law, norms, civil laws and the teachings of the Church? Before looking at how our conscience is formed, it is appropriate to recall its elements and what justifies its primacy.

I. PRAISE OF CONSCIENCE

1. Psychological consciousness, introspective consciousness and moral conscience

In order to grasp the moral dimension of conscience, we first need to differentiate it from *psychological consciousness*.³ The latter is awareness of self and one's actions, a person's presence to himself: to his body, feelings, environment, actions and inner states such as thoughts, memories, joys, plans, sufferings, desires, intentions, regrets...

3. In French, the word for "consciousness" and "conscience" is one in the same. [translator's note]

Moral Conscience

Unlike animals, for which consciousness is only sensory, the human consciousness is also intellectual. Animals live without reflecting, without soul-searching; their consciousness is simple. Human consciousness is *introspective*: we have the capacity to actively reconsider our sensations, feelings, ideas, past actions and decisions and to make a judgment on them.

Moral conscience, for its part, is the ability to compare our behavior with a moral rule or to make a value judgment of this behavior. This conscience distinguishes good from evil, either in retrospect, looking back in a sort of examination of conscience, or proactively, looking forward to shed light on the future.

2. The different elements of conscience

Classic thought distinguishes *three levels* within moral conscience.

1) Conscience is first the fundamental ability to know what is good, to recognize the *major principals* of moral life (do what is good, avoid what is evil, do not lie, do not steal, do not kill...). Theological tradition, including that of Thomas Aquinas, speaks of “synderesis” or ‘antecedent conscience”. Catholic tradition considers this inalienable human capacity as the light of the Creator who dwells in His creature even despite sin. It indicates the fundamental dignity of the human person and the freedom that remains despite the effects of sin on human judgment. Within the worst criminal remains this capacity, albeit confused, to grasp the essential of what is good and evil.

2) A second level concerns the process of discovering a specific good that should be done or an evil that should be avoided. This is the level of *moral reasoning*. In such circumstances, what are the good things at play, the values to promote, possible conflicts, hierarchies to establish between different demands, etc.? In a given situation, is something a lie or necessary discretion? In what case can we speak of theft when I use a collective good?, etc.

3) The third level corresponds to the specific judgment of the good that I should do in a particular situation. This level is the one that allows for passing from reasoning and moral evaluation to the *concrete decision* that I must personally make and that commits me. Finally, after weighing the different factors, what should I do in response to this problem? What should I say in a given situation? This final level is the conscience that I must obey in order to be my true self. It is the inviolable and sacred center of the person.

In the Catholic tradition, levels 2 and 3 form the “actual conscience”; Thomas Aquinas also spoke of practical reason. These levels require development and formation, for error or blindness can enter into moral life on these levels. This is the case when, out of ignorance or neglect, I am insensitive to a certain issue or blind to an evil to avoid. For many years, for example, the conscience of westerners was insensitive to the ravages of slavery, until it discovered that it was a serious offense against human rights.

Conscience thus plays a central role in moral life. It enlightens and judges, allows or forbids, advises or orders, blames or encourages. It is a personal guide, the most intimate and closest learning tool that we have. However, like any compass, it must be set accurately.

3. Conscience and freedom

One of the most beautiful ways to speak about the inalienable role of individual conscience is to show the action of people who were able to stand up to an unfair social order and remain free in an oppressive situation. The example of members of the French Resistance during the Second World War or of dissidents in former Soviet countries reminds us of the strength of a conscience that is able to say no to totalitarianism and lies. Conscience is exactly what invites me to make a personal decision. It is a sign of my freedom and calls me to answer for myself, my actions and my intentions. I exercise this freedom over my instinctive impulses

Moral Conscience

(my non-introspective animal side) but also over others: social pressure, popular opinion, widespread customs, upbringing, potentially unjust civil laws...

While conscience makes me free, it makes me free before an authority that is beyond me and serves as ultimate reference: for an atheist, this might be the sense of humanity; for a believer, it is God Himself, the source and end of our existence, Creator of our being. Conscience is a trace of the transcendence of God in us, a sign of a liberty desired by God in a special way.

The example of Thomas More is instructive. Lord Chancellor of the Kingdom of England under King Henry VIII (1478-1535), he wanted to remain faithful to the Catholic faith and resigned from his position after Henry VIII's divorce and remarriage to Anne Boleyn. He would be imprisoned for refusing to recognize the King as supreme leader of the Church of England (refusing to sign the act of supremacy in 1534) and executed for treason in 1535. The play by Robert Bolt, *A Man for all Seasons*, presents Thomas More as a man who obeys his conscience.

The following dialogue is indicative of the power and significance of the judgment of individual conscience.

Duke of Norfolk – We are at war with the Pope. For the Pope's a prince, isn't he?

Thomas More – He is.

Norfolk – And a bad one?

Thomas More – Rather bad. He's also the descendant of Saint Peter, our only link with Christ.

Norfolk – A tenuous link.

Thomas More – Oh, yes, quite tenuous.

Norfolk – So you believe. And will you forfeit all you have... which includes the respect of your country, for a belief?

Thomas More – The apostolic succession of the Pope is... it is a belief, you cannot see it, you cannot touch it, it is

a theory... But what matters to me is not if it is true or false... Because what matters is that I believe it, or rather, no..., not that I *believe* it, but that I believe it.

In the following dialogue, Thomas More shows that liberty and judgment of conscience on the third level extend to no one other than oneself. In conscience, each person is alone with God. As the Council wrote, “*Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths*” (GS 16).

Norfolk – Oh, confound all this! I’m not a scholar, as Lord Cromwell [prosecutor] continually points out, and I don’t know if the marriage [of the King] was lawful or not... but damn it, Thomas, look at these names [that signed the act of supremacy]. Why can’t you do as I did, and come with us, for fellowship?

Thomas More – And when we die, and you are sent to heaven for doing your conscience... and I am sent to hell for not doing mine, will you come with me, for fellowship?

Archbishop Crammer- So, those of us whose names are there, are damned, Sir Thomas?

Thomas More – I have no window to look into another man’s conscience. I condemn no one.

4. The teachings of the Second Vatican Council

The most important conciliar text on conscience is the one already quoted from *Gaudium et Spes*, article 16. It presents the conscience as the secret core of the person, the inviolable sanctuary where a person places himself before God. This definition makes clear that conscience is what determines the humanity or the dignity of the human person. It is the place where people hear the command to do good and avoid evil and where their capacity to judge good and evil resides.

Moral Conscience

“In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths” (Gaudium et Spes no. 16).

The Council alludes here to the letter to the Romans, in which Saint Paul declares that all people possess a law within them.

“For when the Gentiles who do not have the [Jewish] law by nature observe the prescriptions of the law, they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them...” (Rom 2:14-15)

Speaking of the conscience as a secret place means that it is not so easy to have access to it (indeed, conscience can be clouded or mistaken), but it is also what makes people moral beings, unlike animals. It testifies to the mystery of the person whom we cannot judge from outside. It is also a sanctuary, the Council says, surely indicating that no one has the right to trample someone’s conscience underfoot, violate it or penetrate it by force, for it compels respect. In this place, people have an intimate relationship with their Creator who inspires their behavior: do this and avoid that if you want to act as a human person.

It is fitting, though, to emphasize the final sentence of the paragraph as well, which shows the possible erring ways of conscience, to which we will return.

“Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for a man who cares

but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin” (GS 16).

Other conciliar texts do not return to the first principal of obedience to the voice of conscience. The documents insist vigorously on Christians’ responsibilities, including in the delicate question of the transmission of life. They also emphasize, however, the points of reference given by the magisterium and the necessary formation of conscience to help it conform to the divine plan. Speaking of the role of lay people in the world, the Council declares,

“It is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city; from priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment. Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role” (GS 43).

Concerning a couple’s decision to give birth to additional children, the Council indicates the elements that the spouses should use in their discernment.

“...with docile reverence toward God, [they] will make decisions by common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church herself. The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God. But in their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always

Moral Conscience

be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel" (GS 50).

We should also point out the importance of the declaration on religious freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, among the teachings of the Council. It affirms freedom of conscience in religious matters as a fundamental right connected to the recognition of the dignity of the human person. This freedom is accompanied by an obligation to seek the truth.

These texts offer many insights for our topic. In response to the impression often felt in the Church that morality consists in obeying external norms and rules without leaving any place for personal choice or freedom, they indicate that personal conscience has the final responsibility. The judgment that they make before God is charged with the responsibility to decide in an upright and just way. This conscience or "responsibility" is the place where the "divine law in the earthly city" takes concrete form. This means that it is the place for practical translation of God's loving plan here and now. It is, moreover, the court that decides, having taken into account different elements of the situation, the good of the community and of society, etc. Like an orchestra conductor, the conscience listens to the various voices that compose the music of the moment and comes down in favor of one interpretation among many, among different obligations, to make a choice. However, the texts specify that this choice supposes a conscience "enlightened by Christian wisdom" and the teaching authority of the Church, "empowered to interpret divine law." This is what now needs clarification. While moral life can never be reduced to obeying rules or laws, it also needs norms to find its bearings.

II. NECESSITY OF THE FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE

Our conscience is the ultimate judge of our actions; this does not make it an isolated and self-sufficient authority or even a

skill given us all at once without any need for learning. Because it touches the core of the person and his history in relationship with God and the world, the ‘alchemy’ of the conscience is that of the mystery of an entire life. It witnesses to the greatness of our freedom but also to the traps in which the human mind sometimes gets stuck.

1. Illusions of the conscience: conformity, blind obedience, solipsism

We often believe we are free while, in fact, we go along with the dictates of fads or prevailing opinion without thinking about it too much. *Conformity* is a cowardly and passive attitude, even if it is sometimes initially inevitable. It is also a disease of the mind that prevents us from thinking. We act like everyone else, in part because we are dependent on the group to which we belong and its judgment of us. Young people, in particular, are often very susceptible to others’ view of them. They want to fit in to calm their anxiety about their identity or value. They can demand loud and clear a freedom to “do what I want” while they are often still far from real freedom and real conscience, which suppose being able to take a critical step back to look at “what I do and what I chose”.

Social sciences have also showed the importance of education, environment and, frankly, the social and historical conditioning of our behaviors, which often merely repeat (under the cover of personal decisions) the norms and values or trends of the moment.

Another illusion of the conscience consists in believing that we do our duty in good faith by *blindly obeying* authorities. Moral conscience can go astray by invoking obedience to laws or superiors (as shown in the trials of some Nazi criminals). Indeed, the conscience can be subjected to intense conditioning: that of an overly severe superego (an internalization of values and norms) that provokes repression of desires and rigid behaviors, but also the conditioning of ideologies (intellectual constructions designed

Moral Conscience

to keep in place oppressive powers by giving them an apparently moral legitimacy). We could think of the ideology of apartheid or, more recently, ethnic cleansing, which masked situations of unjustifiable oppression.

An ethic of duty has also created an attitude of excessive obedience, even a submission without discernment, to authorities. I think of the powerlessness of some people (and particularly consecrated women) to resist sexual advances of those in positions of authority, especially priests. We can thus find this attitude in the Church when pronouncements by priests or bishops exempt some Christians from thinking and making responsible decisions (clericalism). Obeying a norm without trying to understand whether it applies in given circumstances is not sufficient to assure an ethical decision. The decision may even be immoral if the person fails to apply his or her own judgment. If it is not sufficient to obey our conscience to decide well, the same is true for obedience to the law.

Another frequent perversion of the conscience, almost the opposite of the previous one, consists in judging only for oneself and by oneself without taking into account what concerns other people. This *solipsistic* attitude results in neglecting duties to one's neighbor and leads to laxity regarding unjustifiable situations, out of selfishness or cowardice.

The sense of indifference or powerlessness as well as a narrow vision of solidarity that stops at the front door contribute to allowing "structures of sin" (social structures that crush the weak) to remain in place. Conformity and solipsism can sometimes reinforce each other such that people allow an unjust situation to continue without reacting or such that they act in favor of their individual interests, ignoring the common good.

2. Insights from culture, moral norms and revelation

In order to avoid these dangers, we have the duty to enlighten our conscience, to make it grow. This is why we can be held responsible for neglecting to enlighten our conscience. We must not mistake the conscience for a permanent inner light or flawless lucidity. Nor is it simply given us; each of us must acquire it and bring it to the point that it should be. If man is subject to his own judgment (in the words of Scripture and Saint Thomas)⁴, he has the task of *forming* his own judgment.

Children enter into a culture that gives structure to relationships

As psychoanalysis teaches us, moral judgment is formed in relationships with others from early childhood through foundational taboos found in all cultures that introduce children into humanity. There are taboos, for example, against incest, murder and lying. Taboos are laws that constitute and form the subject and his personal conscience. It involves leaving the undifferentiated confusion with the (natural or familial) milieu to deal with difference and relations, triggering personal identity and an opening of the social space. Taboos can restrict freedom but above all, they are what make freedom and exchange possible by preventing the violence of indifferentiation or the absence of unique identities. In this sense, the conscience is a law, the need to be the subject of one's own behavior. Once a young person and then an adult, a person should use this faculty to seek what in his actions contributes to humanization.

4. Cf. "God in the beginning created human beings and made them subject to their own free choice" (Sirach 15:14). Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentes*, Book III, Chapter 113, no. 5: "The rational creature is not only governed by divine providence, but is also capable to some extent of grasping the notion of providence, whereas other creatures share in providence merely by being subject to providence. Thus the rational creature is partaker in providence, not merely by being governed, but by governing: for it governs itself by its own acts, and also other beings."

Moral Conscience

The duty of building humanizing social relationships

A demand of myself to myself, moral law is present in all people and indicates the duty that my action be *humanizing*, building humanity in me and around me. This results in an invitation to go beyond my own interests or immediate perceptions to subject myself to the condition by which I become human, the law that the conscience finds in itself. Born of relationships, the conscience thus finds its meaning in creating this relationship. It seeks to make human society one where all people see all others as a brother or sister.

As we see, it would be erroneous to oppose law and conscience, taboo and freedom. The conscience needs the law to take its own shape. This is what the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* expresses when it states, with other words, that the conscience ultimately testifies to the *truth* of humanity, demonstrating “*the authority of the natural law and of the practical reason with reference to the supreme good, whose attractiveness the human person perceives and whose commandments he accepts.*”⁵ The conscience, which is the most personal place of each person, is also what bears witness in us to an objective reality that is beyond us.

The role of norms: making the desire for humanization concrete

In practical terms, the conscience, formed in relationship with others, is never egotistical withdrawal but a freedom that cannot exist without taking into account the relationship with our neighbor and insights from culture, law and practices. No one is born to morality alone nor in isolation from a milieu that teaches the

5. VS 60. The article continues, “*Conscience is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil. Rather there is profoundly imprinted upon it a principle of obedience vis-à-vis the objective norm which establishes and conditions the correspondence of its decisions with the commands and prohibitions which are at the basis of human behavior.*”

'job' of being a man or woman. The conscience is enlightened by human wisdom and all the norms that society, in its prior ethical experience, bequeaths to the generations that follow. We should thus understand the role of moral norms as aiming to give concrete expression to what can make each person more human, individually and in society. Xavier Thévenot has taught us,

*“Behaviors that make people grow in humanity are in conformity with ethical demands. A moral norm is what helps us see an action in the light of an ultimate goal to reach, namely, the greatest possible realization of our humanity in us... The ethical norm traces out paths of humanization in a specific area of life.”*⁶

Therefore, not all norms are necessarily formative for the conscience because, this author clarifies, some norms are only environmental conformity. *“We should guard against confusing moral normativeness with social normativeness. The latter is satisfied with behavior conforming to prevalent social stereotypes.”*

If everyone is using drugs in my neighborhood, we could say that using drugs is a social norm. Similarly, if my whole family is racist, and I was raised in that environment, in all likelihood, I will naturally be racist: my conscience will be malformed. Nothing could qualify these norms as moral since they do not contribute to humanization. Moral norms, for their part, conform to reason; they express human experience in the desire for a good life and make these experiences objective.

They serve in this way as references for action because putting ourselves at their school protects our judgment from our pure subjectivity, which can stray into selfishness. To go back to the previous examples, the obligation to respect my body and health can help me to realize why using drugs is dangerous. Similarly, the injunction against discrimination and the duty to treat all hu-

6. Thévenot, Xavier, “Les homosexualités. Eléments de réflexion éthique” [Homosexualities: Elements for an Ethical Reflection], *Études*, March 1983, p. 342, note 11.

Moral Conscience

man beings equally as people help me fight against the influence of my racist upbringing.

The ethical reference points provided by the Church

The Gospel and revelation also enlighten Christians' conscience. The conscience is enlightened by culture and reason but also by the light of the revelation made in Jesus Christ that shows what man truly is. Jesus' will is not available directly but through the Christian experience assisted by the Holy Spirit and meditation on Scripture, read in the great tradition of the Church and in communion with the magisterium. Therefore, the magisterium also has the role of formulating norms that serve as reference points for ethical decisions. They are authorized interpretations of this truth about the human person that each individual must seek (cf. VS no. 60).

III. HOW TO DECIDE?

Ultimately, the question is that of practical decision-making in specific situations. What should I do to decide according to my personal conscience (and not according to the demands of another person) while making sure to enlighten my conscience by indications given by moral norms (and not deciding depending on my whim of the moment)?

1. Moral judgment in a real-life situation

In a famous text, Xavier Thévenot indicated with clarity the three dimensions to take into account in all ethical decisions.⁷ I will be using his argument.

All ethical decisions should first take into account the universal dimension of morality:

7. Xavier Thévenot, *Repères éthiques pour un monde nouveau [Ethical Reference Points for a New World]*, Salvator, 1982, pp. 14-17.

“Following this dimension and taking into account constants that exist in all people, morality strives to pick out fundamental precepts that will continually influence concrete action. For example, respect the other person; love your neighbor as yourself.”

These *broad principles* are valid always and everywhere and are the result of an internal logical requirement. It involves wanting my action to be recognizable as humanizing, humane, building humanity in me and around me. The philosopher Emmanuel Kant formulated this by saying, “*act only in accordance with that maxim [what inspires it deep down] through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law, that is, a law valid for all people in the same conditions of action.*”⁸

For Christian morality, the commandment of love will always remain the first precept. At the same time, these fundamental principles are formal and do not have fixed content. What does “love” mean? For couples, for example, does it mean never divorce or on the contrary, divorce in the case of failure? In society, does this mean always opposing strikes or on the contrary going on strike in the case of a serious injustice? This dimension of morality is thus both necessary as a mobilizing ideal that stimulates me to invent love in life circumstances and insufficient because the ideal must become incarnate here and now.

This is why we need the particular dimension of morality. In this aspect, it is no longer a question of seeking the ideal of humanity but what, as a rule, in a given culture and society, builds humanity, peace, human fulfillment, etc.

“Particular morality seeks to give flesh to fundamental precepts of love by establishing concrete norms. Here, a moralist would say, for example, is what it is usually good to do if you want to be fulfilled in a couple or in society: do not divorce, talk together as a couple...”

8. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:421.

Moral Conscience

It is thus a question of taking into account the particular moral norms resulting from the moral experience of our society or from the magisterium of the Church. They are reference points that mark out a path of humanization. They are a sort of pre-response to particular circumstances. These negative prescriptions indicate dead-ends where we should not go if we want to build up humanity. In relationship to the conscience, they play a role of questioning or accompanying, obliging it to take a certain distance from its initial impulses or blind desires.

We should note here that these norms, born of experience and a given context, are neither eternal nor universal. As Thomas Aquinas reminds us, in terms of morality, the more we descend into the particular, the less certain we are to express truth itself appropriately; the more morality is subject to the passage of time and culture shock, the more apt its nullification. Just think of the Church's interdiction of making a loan at interest, which remained in effect until the 18th century.

However, the moral life is not reduced to obedience to laws. The conscience must decide, taking into account a third dimension, which is that of the unique and *singular situation* in which I find myself.

“By singular, I mean that each reality and especially each person has something that is unique in all the world. It is evident that morality should take into account the uniqueness of each person and each human situation, at the pain of lack of realism. Morality thus seeks what proves possible in such a given concrete situation.”

Like a doctor, I should treat a specific individual and not man in general. Thus, in the given circumstances, should I follow my friends in a particular exploit? Should I separate from my partner, etc.? In this singular dimension, the conscience arbitrates between tensions and manages conflicts between norms that cannot all be observed at the same time. In this dimension, morality is the

art of compromise, the practice that seeks to best prioritize and harmonize the different values at play in an action.

These three dimensions of morality – the universal requirement for humanity, attentiveness to norms and accounting for the situation – should be thought out together if we want to develop our personality and make a just and upright decision. In this process, the conscience is the orchestra conductor, the referee who seeks to humanize life, evaluate the goods in play and finally decide for the best in a given situation. The conscience brings together all the reasoning and advice to engage the will and ultimately our entire person in an action. Of course, as we have seen, the conscience can be mistaken, but it can also learn from its own mistakes and constantly perfect its learning to be human.

The moral life is, by its very essence, a question of time, and personal development, like the formation of conscience, sometimes involves passages through error and disobedience. It can happen that, without any fault of our own, we are ignorant of what is evil. Tradition called this “invincible ignorance”, which does not destroy the dignity of the conscience. We are guilty of a moral failure only if we intentionally do not listen to the advice of human experience and turn a deaf ear to the imperative of educating the conscience.

This recalls what the Council said to Christian spouses deciding whether to have a child. *“The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God.”* In decision-making, the voice of authorities, including that of the Church’s magisterium, is of the order of particular norms; therefore, it could never be the final word but should be heard as the next-to-last word.

We have the duty of practicing hospitality to those voices, that is, welcoming them sincerely and making a concerted effort to understand their sense or validity in our circumstances. However, unless they make our decisions immoral, the conscience should

Moral Conscience

incorporate these norms into the totality of moral reasoning in its three dimensions.

2. Some principles for judgment

In this difficult task of decision-making in conscience, we are nonetheless not left without indications for the judgment process itself in real-life situations. The long Christian moral tradition offers us many elements to successfully judge and arbitrate conflicts that we constantly encounter. Here are some among others.

Among the moral precepts and reference points given by the ecclesial community, some are unconditional because they forbid acts that constitute a serious attack on the fundamental good of the person, for example, rape and torture. Moral reasoning cannot justify them, and we must avoid them whatever the circumstances.

The principle of the “*lesser evil*”: when we cannot prevent all evil, we deliberately choose to allow the lesser evil to persist in order to concentrate efforts on the evil that seems most serious. This principle applies when we must choose between two evils that we cannot avoid at the same time.

The principle of “*totality*”: this principle affirms that “*the part exists for the whole and, as a result, the good of the part remains subordinate to the good of the whole; the whole is determinate for the part and can dispose of it for its interest*” (Pius XII, speech to the participants in the First International Congress on Histopathology of the Nervous System, September 14, 1952). This principle is only valid where the relationship of the whole to the part is confirmed and to the extent that it exists. For example, the amputation of a diseased member to save the person himself.

The principle of *épikie* (which means equity) takes the singularity of a situation seriously and recognizes that in order to observe the spirit of the law, sometimes you have to break the letter of the law. You put yourself in the place of the lawmaker who has as-

sessed that the law does not apply in this case. The application of a precept can in fact prove to be irrational, so he stops applying it. A classic example given by Saint Thomas consists in not returning a weapon to someone who entrusted it to me if he demands it back in a state of anger, saying he intends to kill his neighbor. It involves acting according to sound reasoning intending to avoid evil, breaking the obligation to give back a good entrusted me, which in this case would be absurd.

The principle of “*double effect*” helps clarify situations in which one action produces both a good and bad effect, by applying criteria of proportionality to the harm inflicted and the desired good. This principle applies in many economic, social and conflictual situations. The merit of casuistry, which considerably developed this principle, is that it demonstrated that it is necessary to apply laws in a thoughtful way, taking into account the situation and the responsibility of people.

However, we should specify the conditions for applying it. The evil caused by seeking to avoid an evil or obtain a necessary good is justified or tolerable on four conditions:

- The act from which the evil results is good or indifferent in and of itself; it is not morally bad.
- The intention of the person acting is upright, in other words, the bad effect is sincerely undesired.
- The bad effect should be in the same immediate causal relationship as the good effect; otherwise, it would be a (bad) means to obtain a good effect and would thus be intentional.
- There should be a proportionally serious motive to allow the evil to occur.

An example of the application of this principle is the case of a pregnant woman struck by uterine cancer that requires operation. Removal of the uterus, which will cause the death of the fetus, is justified by the necessity of saving the woman’s life. The woman is saved and the fetus is destroyed in the same act.

Moral Conscience

We should add that the majority of decisions involve choosing between options that all have disadvantages or do not respect all the values that we would like to uphold. We do not make choices between black and white but between grey and grey. Moral discernment is similar to spiritual discernment in which prayer, the listening of an accompanier and a certain distance from natural inclinations play an important role. As Saint Paul says, *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit”* (Gal 5:25). The Spirit of Christ who freed us is given us to set us free (cf. Gal 5:1). For Paul, we should now judge everything according to this Spirit in order to discern the will of the Lord. In a magnificent expression, he sums up the Christian life in this way:

“I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Rom 12:1-2).

CONCLUSION: A TENSION TO LIVE

Conscience contains a constituent tension: personal judgment and sacred center of the person that must make the final decision, it is also the inner voice of the law of humanity that each person must follow and the openness to the truth that is beyond us, always to discover.

Unilateral insistence on one of these two dimensions would end in destroying its defining balance and inevitably lead to a perversion of judgment. Wanting to consider only one’s own judgment of conscience in a sovereign freedom would lead to laxness that ends up manipulating norms in function of personal interest.

In this sense, Pope John Paul II stressed the importance of objective norms of morality to address the risk of relativism and subjectivism. For him, the modern conscience risked becoming

the only master and judge of behavior, without taking objective laws of humanization into account.

Conversely, never judging the application and appropriateness of a norm out of fear of disobeying the law results in legalism and leads to a decision that does not take into account the uniqueness of the person and the singularity of circumstances, which the conscience alone can evaluate.

This is why Pope Francis cautions against excessive legalism within the Church and calls for better consideration of the role of the conscience. He thus writes on the subject of teaching on marriage.

“We find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden. We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (Amoris Laetitia 37).

The manner of managing the tension described above depends on the confidence given or not given to the formed conscience, on the conception of freedom and on the relationship to the truth. The history of the Church has shown several possibilities.

In all cases, it involves not falling into the temptation of protecting ourselves from uncertainty by recourse to a law given by others (whether it be the state or the Church) but also resisting the temptation of making our subjectivity the absolute norm for our behaviors without taking into account the otherness and the sociability that make us human together.

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Attitude of Servant

“have... the image of Jesus Christ imprinted upon my soul.”

(Spiritual Writings, A. 8, p. 717)

“Remember that you’re servants of the poor.”

(Conference of October 22, 1650 - CCD IX, 430)

I. INTRODUCTION

“... have the image of Jesus Christ imprinted upon my soul.” As title for our reflection today, I chose this desire of Saint Louise, expressed in her writings (A. 8). You may well wonder what motivated my choice. The response is simple, and I will answer with a question. Who among us does not want to find imprinted on our soul, our heart and our everyday actions the “*image of Jesus Christ,*” with all this implies of good and of blessing for others?

Honestly, it seems to me that this should be our deepest desire because it guides us. If we remain alert, we will recognize a call to configure ourselves to Christ contained in our everyday life. As a result, we must let Him “**step into our lives**”, walk in them, such that He leaves the traits of a servant in every step we take. It is like the spiritual experience of knowing we are clay in the hands of the potter; we are all the work of His hands, of His “walking” in our lives (cf. Is 64:7).

According to Constitution 1a, “*The Daughters of Charity form a Company recognized by the Church under the name of Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Servants of*

the Poor.” This ecclesial recognition, we might say, confirms that God wants us to be servants of the poor. Therefore, we necessarily want our life as servant of Christ in the poor and of the poor in Christ to be a sacrifice of praise offered each morning (cf. Ps 116:7). We repeat this praise each night, calling upon the name of the Lord so that we might rekindle the gift of God within us and learn from it to become a gift, to give ourselves.

Before entering into the content of this reflection, I would like to let these questions echo within you. Please be attentive to the feelings that the responses evoke.

INTERNALIZATION – ECHOES

- Do we want to unite our desire with Saint Louise’s desire that Jesus’ image be imprinted upon our soul, upon our heart and in our everyday life? What does this involve?
- Are we able to recognize the imprint that Jesus has gradually left in us?
- Are we able to recognize these imprints in the life of the Company?
- Do we naturally stress the specific traits of our identity as servants?
- Can we live our servant identity as a sacrifice of praise? In what concrete ways?

These questions can bring us to what we know about who we are as servants. Surely, we are thankful, but we will also need fortitude as a human virtue and a gift of the Spirit because being a servant means going against the tide. Pope Francis insistently asks this of us. *“Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living!”* (*Wake up the World*) Clearly, the life of a servant of the poor, totally and unconditionally given, can be a different way of doing things, of acting and of living today.

II. GOD’S WILL – GOD WANTS US TO BE SERVANTS

In the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, we find this affirmation. “*God gives it a body as He chooses, and to each of the seeds its own body*” (1 Cor 15:38).

Sisters, have we ever felt that a Scripture passage is fulfilled in us or in others? This verse is fulfilled in us because God has given a body to His will in desiring that the vocation and mission of the Company would be “*to honor our Lord Jesus Christ as the source and model of all charity, serving Him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor*” (Common Rules I, 1; Constitutions, p. 28). He blesses the seed that each one of us, its members, is with “*its own body,*” that of a servant.

From the first stages of our formation, we have learned that one of the characteristic traits of the Daughters of Charity is awareness of and attentiveness to doing the will of God. Listen to Saint Louise’s wish. “*I pray that the holy will of our great Master may always be accomplished by all of us and in all of us*” (Spiritual Writings, L. 127, p. 82). Our spiritual journey of light and shadows is thus a constant search for how to unite our will to God’s will so that He can make of us Daughters of Charity after His own heart and not just in name. Saint Vincent recommended, “*You must be so genuinely*” (CCD IX, 41). Consequently, I have to feel in harmony with my identity as a servant; I have to love what I am and enjoy being what I am called to be.

Formation has “structured” us spiritually and confirmed us in our vocation. Being servants, living as servants, is the sense of our entire vocation. It is not an attitude for a period of our life but rather an attitude that seals our being forever and *imprints a way of being and acting.*

The gradual growth of taking on this identity and conforming to it is a source of joy and a sign of grace’s constant work in us. In addition, it is a source of hope for those who are poor since

God's will is contained in the cry of those who are poor, in their anguished cries, and we are at their service because they are our lords and masters and we are their servants.

All that remains is for us to say with the psalmist, "*I am your servant; give me discernment that I may know how to serve you*" (cf. Ps 119:125).

INTERNALIZATION – ECHOES

Listen to the inner voice of the Spirit in this statement from Saint Vincent: "*Perfection doesn't consist in ecstasies but in doing the Will of God*" (CCD XI, 285).

- Do we freely live our servant identity as God's will?
- Does this continue to have real meaning for us?
- Does it reflect our deepest values?

III. ORIGINS – WE WERE BORN SERVANTS

I begin with a clarification. In speaking of "origins", I am not referring to the origins of the Company but simply to expressions or experiences that make evident for me that, from the beginning, the Little Company had a clear awareness that it should forge the spirit and the attitudes of a servant.

Three quotes illustrate this observation. I simply hope to elicit an understanding from the heart and a grateful memory of what has faithfully been passed on to us.

- The first quote: Saint Vincent entrusted the young women to Saint Louise to prepare them for service and place them in the Confraternities of Charity that needed them (cf. Benito Martinez).

- Second quote: In 1647, during the explanation of the Rule, Saint Vincent said, "You also, Sisters, may sign your name Servants of the Poor, who are the well-beloved of Jesus Christ!" (May 30, 1647, CCD IX, 256). (Saint Vincent suggests the name

Attitude of Servant

of “servant” for us, knowing that a name contains a mission and in a way defines it.)

- Third quote: Saint Louise wrote to a Sister Servant, telling her, “generally speaking, all our sisters consider themselves fortunate to be servants of the poor” (Spiritual Writings, L. 395, p. 682). (This sense of being fortunate can reflect joy, the first fruit of the action of the Spirit in our servant hearts.)

Now, a personal observation. Among the letters of Saint Louise, I have counted thirty of them that designate the addressee according to the following model: “To my dear Sisters, Sister Anne and Sister Marie. Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Poor.” My prayerful reflection suggests that repeating the name indicates a desire to consolidate an identity and therefore the attitudes that are consistent with the name.

The letters date from 1645-1659 when it was necessary in some way to “reinforce” what we are called to be... In my opinion, this **repetition entails a sort of teaching method.**

Here is the example of Sister Andrée.

Saint Vincent visited Sister Andrée as she was dying. In admiration, he told Saint Louise about what happened. When Vincent had asked Sister Andrée how she felt and if she had any regrets at this critical moment, she answered, “*I have no anxiety, no remorse **except for having taken too much pleasure in serving the poor.***”

He further asked, “*Eh quoi! Sister, is there nothing in the past that causes you any fear?*” She answered, “*No, Monsieur, nothing at all, other than that I had too much satisfaction when I used to go through those villages to see those good people; I used to fly, I was so overjoyed to serve them*” (CCD IX, 537).

Sister Andrée used to fly with joy... Who among us has not experienced this flying with joy? At some point, we have all known moments of intense joy in service. Perhaps we have only had a brief such experience, but it was enough to give us a sense of fullness like our Sister Andrée.

INTERNALIZATION - ECHOES

- Let us ask ourselves the question Saint Vincent asked Sister Andrée: “*Sister, is there nothing in the past that causes you any fear?*”
- Can you recall with the memory of your heart the experience that made you fly to those who are poor? Compare it with what you are experiencing now in ministry.
- Do you need to rise again to this “flight” in your servanthood?

IV. CHRIST IS THE SOURCE AND MODEL (Cf. C. 16b)

We must drink from this source and learn from this model! Therefore, we must *turn constantly to the Gospel and return to Christ with all our heart because a Daughter of Charity develops by looking to Jesus, learning from Him and from those who are poor*. We become servants by serving.

Christ is the foundation because He is the servant par excellence. In order to learn to think and feel like Him, to love life like Him, to live like Him, to have compassion with those who suffer like Him, He must be at the center of the process. He is the Teacher of life. Let us contemplate Jesus in the Gospel in order to “relearn” as servants to live a way of life as similar as possible to His, while acknowledging all our innate weaknesses.

“Behold my servant.” We must turn our eyes to Him because “*the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mt 20:28).

Attitude of Servant

Jesus washes His disciples' feet.

“Jesus rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist” (Jn 13:4-5).

- Jesus is on His knees before each of His disciples, washing their dirty feet. He accepts and carries out this service of a slave, doing the most humble work, the basest task.

- We could reflect that it is a particular stance before the “dirtiness” of others, before their defects, their failures, their sins... Everything that causes us to judge, criticize and distance ourselves impels Him to draw close, to kneel down to wash and reveal to the other person the possibility to continue going forward.

- After washing their feet, He says, “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet.” It is evident that, according to Jesus's criteria, the other person is an ongoing call to fraternity.

- We should let Jesus' words be engraved on our hearts today because a servant will be happy if she kneels down like Jesus to wash the feet of the least among us. He Himself promises us this happiness when He says, “Blessed are you if you do it” (Jn 13:17).

“As [a] servant in the Company of Charity” (CCD X, 291), as Saint Vincent calls us in his conference of November 15, 1657, do I draw close, do I kneel down before the “dirtiness” of others?

A man full of leprosy came to Him.

“Now there was a man full of leprosy in one of the towns where he was; and when he saw Jesus, he fell prostrate, pleaded with him, and said, ‘Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean.’ Jesus

stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, 'I do will it. Be made clean'" (Lk 5:12-13).

- Lepers were condemned to live in isolation on the peripheries of cities. They could not come close to anyone and had to yell from a distance so that people could get away and avoid contagion.

- Jesus did not avoid the peripheries; He went through them, running risks, exposing Himself and breaking a religious taboo about touching people considered impure. He also crossed physical limits of fear and laid his hands on the sick body that probably never felt closeness or a caring gesture from anyone. His diseased skin, mistreated over his marginalized life, was brought back to health, and He recovered the possibility to exist as a person.

- Jesus' closeness and healing touch restored this man's dignity and beauty. (Recall that in that time leprosy disfigured completely.)

"As [a] servant in the Company of Charity," are my gestures with sick, wounded and marginalized people ones of compassion and gentleness, or do I distance myself and avoid them?

He saw a tax collector named Levi.

"Jesus saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, 'Follow me.' And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him" (Lk 5:27).

- Levi was at his work desk, his usual place for business, calculations and underhanded accounting. There, Jesus called him, looked at him without judgment and invited him to make a 180 degree turn in his life, to go from the desk of his interests to the "table" of the needs of others, to share.

Attitude of Servant

- Consider in particular Levi's attitude. "And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him." Only mercy could produce such a radical and free response. Levi feels chosen in his existential truth. Jesus caused good to emerge in this man.

"As [a] servant in the Company of Charity," what do I bring out in those who are poor, in people with whom I have a relationship?

Encounter with a man with an unclean spirit

"In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God!' Jesus rebuked him and said, 'Quiet! Come out of him!' The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him" (Mk 1:23-26).

- If we carefully contemplate these verses, we observe that this encounter between Jesus and the man under the power of evil takes place in the synagogue. There, Jesus frees the man with His words. He simply speaks them forcefully with the power of good that fills Him.

- Many people live in the graves of exclusion; their wounded lives, damaged by rejection, misunderstanding or indifference, show how much they had to suffer. The only thing that can heal them is the closeness and gentleness of someone who looks at them, shows interest in them, accepts them as they are, allows them to express themselves by freeing tongues, listens to them and cares gently for their disability... this frees!

"As [a] servant in the Company of Charity," can I accept, listen and speak to someone who feels dominated by inner forces that cause him anguish?

Encounter with a man who had been sick for 38 years

“One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be well?’ The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your mat, and walk’” (Jn 5:5-8).

- Thirty-eight years is a long time... but it is clear that Jesus does not tire of encouraging the latent capacities within each person, whatever his situation of prostration over time. His way of doing so is significant. He questions the paralyzed man so that he can responsibly become aware of his desire for health and meaning. Jesus calls on his own potential and makes him express his determination.

“As servants in the Company of Charity,” do we bet on the ability of someone paralyzed in some aspect of his life for so long to change or do we consider him “lost”?

The faith of a Canaanite woman

“Jesus said in reply, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But the woman came and did him homage, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ He said in reply, ‘It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.’ She said, ‘Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.’ Then Jesus said to her in reply, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed from that hour” (Mt 15:24-28).

- Jesus opens Himself to dialogue, listens, leaves aside differences, performs the miracle and even has the freedom to praise the faith of this woman. It is clear that there is no exclusion but rather encounter.

Attitude of Servant

- She shows Him what “hunger” is beyond ethnic or religious origin. From then on, all hungers for health, bread or meaning will resonate with Him.

“As [a] servant in the Company of Charity,” do my interests coincide with those of people hurt by discrimination and exclusion?

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me” (Mt 25:35-36).

- The Lord conceals Himself in the most suffering faces, and the service offered to those who suffer will determine our relationship with Him.

- Wounded faces become “sacred ground – mission territory” where we learn and mature.

- As Daughters of Charity, it becomes impossible for us to ignore those who suffer. Our vocation creates a special sensitivity in us to suffering. This sensitivity becomes mercy, and mercy allows us to give an account for our faith.

- Let us give thanks for the possibility to give life and concrete expression to the words of this Gospel passage through simple acts thanks to our identity as servants.

“As servants in the Company of Charity,” where do we focus our attention, in the hungry, those thirsting for justice, strangers, the excluded, the sick, victims of abuse of any form, prisoners? Jesus is there!

I conclude this fourth section with a quote from Sister Lucie Rogé. *“Every Daughter of Charity gives to those who are poor*

the possibility to read the Gospel by her life” (Seminarium, 1982).

V. GOING ABOUT DOING GOOD

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that during a gathering in the house of Cornelius, Peter spoke and began to share his experience of God, an experience that had solidified thanks to living day after day with Jesus of Nazareth. Peter no longer doubts but bears witness. On this occasion, he summarized his presentation of Jesus by saying, “*He went about doing good*” (Acts 10:38).

In our beginnings, we find Marguerite Naseau, about whom we unmistakably could say, “*She went about doing good.*” In fact, we all know that Saint Vincent said, “*Everyone loved her because there was nothing in her that was not lovable*” (Conference of July 1642 - The Virtues of Marguerite Naseau, CCD IX, 66). This statement corresponds perfectly to the sense and meaning of our vocation as Daughters of Charity: we should go about doing good everywhere.

We might ask ourselves: What could help us maintain this attitude of choosing and doing good in the simplest aspects of our everyday life?

I would suggest interiority as a Gospel attitude and discernment as a Gospel skill. Between 11 and 24 years vocation is a privileged spiritual age for reinforcing this interiority, this spiritual depth. It is very important so that we can remain firm and listen to the voice of the Spirit, the voice of others, the cries of the poor... With the psalmist, let us ask God not to take from us His Holy Spirit and help us to recover the paths towards depth (cf. Ps 51:13).

INTERIORITY

Quite honestly, I consider that speaking about interiority entails speaking about depth, about the inner life, or, as Pope Francis has described it, “*the deepest root and foundation of every person*”

Attitude of Servant

(homily of June 3, 2016). The invitation to cultivate interiority thus comes to us at this time as an existential cry to orient our very self based on the essential, on the depths, on God Himself, who, as Saint Vincent said, is meaning. God is meaning!

Interiority makes us capable of living a solid faith life and letting grace transform us from the depths of our beings. We know well that people change us from within and that only what happens through and in the heart changes our lives. Interiority favors the possibility of living from what we really are, what gives us identity and substance.

Therefore, *“It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience. This requirement of interiority is all the more necessary as life often distracts us from any reflection, self-examination or introspection”* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1779).

Interiority also opens a space in interpersonal relationships; it fosters respect of other people’s difference and a more thoughtful approach to cultural frameworks, needs and the validity of others’ viewpoints even if they contradict our own.

Consequently, as servants, *“let’s... strive to be interior [women]... We belong to Him and not to ourselves”* (cf. Conference of December 6, 1658, CCD XII, 82).

A recommendation to help interiority develop harmoniously in ourselves is a patient learning of inner silence to quiet worries, calm agitation a little and limit unnecessary rushing about.

Interiority prepares us for discernment.

When we hear Jesus say that the person (you and I) *“brings forth good out of a store of goodness”* (Mt 12:35), we usually immediately ask ourselves, “Does goodness dwell in me? If

not, from where am I going to bring forth good, the best that is in me?” Quickly, many possible answers come to mind. However, the answers are not as important as their development. Discernment is essential as a natural attitude that my vocational process permanently “established” in me because my choices for good depend on it. Therefore, learning to choose what is good is discernment (recalling that for Christians, discernment is choosing between the good and the better). For a servant of those who are poor, choosing good is an essential part of her mission. In other words, we cannot do otherwise than to always opt for what is good.

Discernment allows us to:

- recognize where we have placed our heart;
- see how we live our faith, how we find the presence of God, what is His plan or His will;
- ask ourselves the essential question, “What would Jesus do?” when faced with difficulties;
- determine what motivates us each day. In other words, are we aware of the motivation that moves our hearts to decide?
- recognize where we have placed our interests;
- accept a life in which we can integrate tensions without their throwing us off balance, aware that difficulties are opportunities for development;
- welcome obstacles (like fear, insecurity, laziness, distraction) as an opportunity that allows us to opt for decisions that lead to good;
- determine where we are most needed and then freely make ourselves available.

I would make two recommendations to facilitate everyday discernment.

- We should respect and appreciate times for reviewing our lives.
- We should also emphasize ongoing formation and spiritual discernment (on a personal and communal level).

VI. WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU? (Mk 10:51)

I am sure that all of us here hold in the depths of our heart the question that Jesus asked Bartimaeus, as well as this man's response from the darkness of his blindness. "*Master, I want to see.*" This single request springs from his heart. Bartimaeus knows that if his eyes open, everything will change. The account concludes saying that the blind man received his sight and "*followed Him on the way*" (Mk 10:52).

Now, I would like us to let Jesus ask us this same question, not in the singular, but rather in community, the community that we form here in the session. "*What do you want me to do for you?*" Our answer could be, "Help us to live the everyday virtues, those that make us servants."

I repeat the expression: *everyday virtues*. The Latin root for the word virtue means strength. Without a doubt, they are a strength for our vocation. To paraphrase Saint Vincent who was speaking of the Rules, I would dare say that the virtues also serve us **as wings to fly to God and to fly toward others**. We are invited to be a Company that goes forth, and faced with 'invitations' like this, I would like to take the time to see what God might be asking of us, what His will is... because it is not a matter of going forth for the sake of going forth, nor of going forth any old way. We must discern the "how". This reminds me that "*Charity is the soul of holiness*" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 826), "*all are called to holiness*" (*CCC*, n. 2013) and, to paraphrase Mother Guillemin, the holiness of the Company depends on the holiness of each one of us.

Where am I going with this? Simply, since charity is the soul of holiness, our going forth toward others must stem from the strength of charity, simplicity and "*the humility of a servant that makes us kneel down before those whom we serve*" (cf. Sister Lucie Rogé).

CHOOSE CHARITY

“*In the heart... resides charity;*” the heart is the seat of charity (CCC, n. 1853). Each moment of our lives should be at the mercy of grace, open to grace so that it softens our hearts of stone and transform them into hearts where charity can dwell. This is the spiritual struggle of our entire life, the process of human and spiritual maturity.

Choose to act with charity

Motivated by a sense of deep compassion that allows me to accept others as part of this world, even when they act differently than I would want: *this is discovering the dignity of difference.*

- Be close, accessible to all thanks to our kindness; we do not have the right to cause fear.
- Be free from judgment and harshness, remembering that the poor person is, in his visible suffering and poverty, what man (each one of us) is in the secret of his being.
- Appreciate people for who they are, regardless of what they do, care for their weaknesses, offer them trust without asking anything in return, which would undermine the unconditional nature of our gift of self.
- Develop compassion. Saint Vincent told us that it is an effect of charity and that “by it, we can’t see someone suffering without suffering along with him” (CCD XII, 221). In practical terms, nothing could justify our indifference before someone else’s suffering.
- Always seek “justice that is the primary way of charity” (Caritas in veritate, 6).
- Be open to a formation of the heart to listen to those who are poor in order to grasp the creative intuition that dwells in them and respect it.

Attitude of Servant

Take courage! *“The path of charity open before us is almost infinite” (Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to all consecrated people, II, 3).*

Choose to act with simplicity

- Go deeper into the truth, which makes inner freedom, transparency and honesty possible.
- Generously share all that I am and all that I have, surrendering myself and leaving my “comfort zones” to go out to meet others and journey with them.
- Recognize that what evangelizes is not the things that we give but the quality and warmth of our relationship and presence.
- Experience the joy of being at the service of all, of those who are poor, of our Sisters, etc. We do not choose with whom we will collaborate as servants. Such selection would be a sign of a certain inner dissonance. Our deepest happiness is in serving! We have all experienced this!
- Foresee the possibility of falling into activism characterized by rushing and imposing our own will, which jeopardizes gratuitousness, the foundation of our vocation, causing tiredness and indifference. In the long term, we would settle into mediocrity.
- Infuse necessary routines with meaning so that we do not become apathetic.
- Use technology and the means of communication appropriately, without becoming slaves to them.
- Reduce our needs rather than increasing them, making those who are poor our reference point, and have the integrity of conscience regarding the money we handle because it all belongs to those who are poor (a modest lifestyle).
- Believe in the strength of life that the humble have and offer an attractive and evangelizing witness with our consistency – credibility. Perhaps this is the best vocation ministry that we can “be and do.”

Take courage! Simplicity allows us to live with “an open heart” (cf. *Spiritual Writings*, A. 91b, p. 756-757).

Choose to act with humility

- Be aware that we are limited creatures, totally dependent on God.
- Grow in gratuity because unconditional gift of self is a breath of fresh air for some of the places where we must go and serve in which the spirit of competition and the over-valuing of efficiency, prestige and appearances prevail.
- Allow those who are poor to be our “lords and masters”, opening ourselves and really learning from them, overcoming any temptation to repeat this phrase as a slogan to attract or conquer.
- Be dependent on those who request and need our services. Do not impose ourselves.
- Identify the “obsession with immediate results” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 82), which does not accept contradictions, failures, criticism or hope in difficulties; ultimately, it rejects the cross.
- Serve without pretention of efficiency and without seeking the spotlight, free from any quest for power.
- Recognize when we fall into the trap of doing too much and have difficulty managing our time and energy. We should honestly ask ourselves, “What are the implications of the pace of life that we have adopted?”
- Mature in the spirit that should drive collaboration, a spirit of freedom, able to give up controlling everything, possessing and dominating, and simply try to contribute the talents that we have received.

Take courage! Let us choose humility. It is important to make sure that our virtues and values direct our life as Daughters of Charity.

VII – OPEN OURSELVES TO HOPE

“For a tree there is hope; if it is cut down, it will sprout again, its tender shoots will not cease” (Job 14:7).

As servants of those who are poor, can we be those tender shoots that do not cease and support the hope of persons who are poor? I humbly believe that we can. All it takes is for us to “let God work” in us and trust Him. God is able to act with our great weakness, giving us His Spirit without measure. All we have to do is “*not receive the grace of God in vain*” (2 Cor 6:1) and not sit back with our arms crossed... You are very young!

I invite you to welcome three suggestions that could be reasons for hope for those who are poor.

1. ***“Sharpen our focus each day in order to notice those who are truly poor”*** (IAD, p. 14), and once we have noticed them, draw near to their reality. Father Gustavo Gutiérrez always said to Latin American religious, *“History, where God makes Himself known and we announce Him, must be read from the poor; from the accursed of the earth.”*

I believe firmly in the truth of this statement. There is no doubt that the world and life are seen very differently from flimsy rafts that cross the sea without a fixed course than from where we are, safe on solid ground. You do not see or experience life in the same way when you are twenty-two years old and in a hospital bed or a migrant struggling for survival, as when you are in a university classroom.

I allow myself to insist that once we have met those who are most poor, we should put ourselves in their shoes. Only then will we know what they feel and what they might need; only then will we live compassion, suffer with them...

2. ***“Rekindle our passion for persons who are poor”*** (IAD, p.15) so we will be able to give a free response with availability and mobility that resists any “settling in”. There are many people waiting for us, and availability makes the vocation effective. Let us be generous!
3. ***“Practice justice and take a stance against everything that undermines human life, rights and dignity”*** (IAD, p. 16), receiving a formation that creates solid criteria in us in *“the way that is marked out by love”* (cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, n. 204). Then, we will not fall into the temptation to live comfortably like everyone else without paying attention to the only thing that Jesus sought: *“the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Mt 6:33). *“Thus the needy have hope, and iniquity closes its mouth”* (Job 5:16).

VIII. CONCLUSION

Pope Francis tells us, *“I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world”* (EG, 273). We know what our mission and vocation are. Living them is everything.

The Virgin Mary was happy because God looked upon her in her lowliness. Let us entrust to her motherly heart our identity as servants of those who are poor. She, our spiritual model and teacher, shows us the path of true, solid holiness, which for our Founders consists in *“doing well what you do, in conformity with your vocation”* (CCD X, 284).

In conclusion, *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!”* (Phil 4:4) God desires this joy, as do those who are poor.

Sister Iliana SUAREZ PEREZ
Daughter of Charity

Provinces of Chelmno-Poznan, Krakow
and Slovakia

Assistance in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) Zone in Ukraine

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*News
from the
Provinces*

Some background

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine began in April 2014. After the president of the pro-Russian party was deposed and another government installed, the Russian army and pro-Russian separatists controlled by Russia opposed the Ukrainian government with military force and in reprisal called for the independence of Donetsk and Lougansk. On May 11, 2014, two “popular referendums” took place, establishing the people’s republics of Donetsk and of Lougansk, which were immediately placed on the list of terrorist organizations. On May 22, 2014, these two republics decided to unite to form the Federated States of New Russia.

In response to this situation, the Ukrainian armed forces began anti-terrorist operations (ATO) to defeat separatist armed groups and eliminate these two self-declared pro-Russian republics.

This war has lasted five years, forcing many residents of eastern Ukraine to leave their homes and migrant to other areas of the country. Others went to Russia

or other countries. However, the poorest residents remained in these border regions, and the humanitarian situation worsens day after day. The cities and villages are constantly under fire from pro-Russian separatist artillery. In many places, there is no food, electricity or drinking water. This armed conflict has already killed numerous people and seriously wounded many others. Houses are in ruins, and families remain without their belongings. Children are the most vulnerable.

In the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) Zone, which is nearly 40 km² extending from the regions of Donetsk and Louhansk, there are three types of territories, each with its particular characteristics:

- territory controlled by the Ukrainian government
- temporarily occupied territories
- the “grey zone”, territory located on the Russian-Ukrainian border where most of the poor families, children and elderly live.

The ATO Zone is very dangerous, even for humanitarian organizations. Christian Rescue Services (CHSR), an ecumenical Catholic organization founded in 2015, brings together volunteers to assist all people who need material and spiritual support in eastern Ukraine on the Russian-Ukrainian border. Christian Rescue Services provides psychological, humanitarian and educational assistance not only to civilians in the ATO Zone but also to soldiers. Times of prayer and evangelization supplement all these activities.

In 2018, the Conference of Major Women Superiors of Ukraine asked all religious congregations in Ukraine to collaborate with CHSR.

The involvement of the Daughters of Charity of the Provinces of Slovakia, Krakow and Chelmno-Poznan

Sisters' Testimonies

In response to this call from the Conference of Major Women Superiors of Ukraine, several Sisters from the Province of Slovakia and of Krakow made themselves available for temporary service to residents of the ATO Zone. In early 2019, about 30 Sisters from the Province of Chelmno-Poznan agreed to serve in this difficult and dangerous mission. The Sisters are a continuous presence for the residents, setting off in twos for six-week rotations. All the Sisters of these Provinces support this risky albeit temporary mission with their prayers.

The Sisters primarily serve the residents of the village of Pionierske, located on the Azov Sea, 6 kilometers from the front lines. Most of the population works at the port of Marioupol. The Ark Center, directed by a Catholic couple, Vladimir and Oksana, collaborates with volunteers, youth, priests, religious sisters and lay people. Its purpose is to offer Christian activities to children and youth aged 6 to 17. In the past, children's camps took place in the village of Pionierske. However, after the conflict broke out, the buildings were transformed into refugee camps and unfortunately have since sustained heavy damage. Nonetheless, a portion of the buildings remains. It serves as an outpatient clinic for Doctors without Borders, who come once a week and offer residents free medical care. Another space is set aside for the children, a chapel and a storeroom for humanitarian assistance.

The people of this region live very poorly but are very friendly. Their food comes principally from the gardens around their homes and some farm animals. Due to damaged water pipes, they have to go a distance for water. Shots ring out every day from the other side of the hill; the villagers are used to the presence of soldiers and their military tactics. They know that their life depends on God and that it is a gift. Because they had no spiritual accompaniment for a long time and there are no churches in the area, they have a deep spiritual thirst and are receptive to Christian values. They pray intensely that peace will be restored in their country and in their hearts because they know its importance from experience.

Testimonies of Sisters from the Provinces of Slovakia and Krakow

“We helped the villagers of Pionierske on the banks of the Azov Sea near the city of Marioupol in southeastern Ukraine. We had to go through military checkpoints, around fields with landmines and past warning signs reading, “Warning: bomb!” when it was forbidden to stop the car or get out of it.”

“The Ark Center was open every day from morning to evening and met the different needs of the local population. In addition to daily activities connected to the normal operation of the Center (cooking, laundry, cleaning, gardening, etc.), we cared for the children who came daily from the surrounding area.”

“Our main duty was to help the children make it through this difficult time with the help of God by offering them spiritual formation. Our only desire was to open the children’s hearts to the love of God, His presence and His protection in order to overcome their legitimate fears since we were only five kilometers from the front lines. During our time there, five children were baptized and three women received the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Communion for the first time.”

“We organized regular gatherings in the spaces of the nearby former “Pioneers” [Soviet youth group] camp for the groups of youth who came from the surrounding areas. The activities were educational, catechetical, Biblical and pedagogical; we also taught them English. We also held a week-long spiritual camp for them and prepared several buildings to allow them once again to enjoy summer camps, planned for after our departure.”

“We visited the elderly poor to bring them food and medicine and talk with them. From time to time, we cared for the sick of the village, and we regularly visited families to pray together, read Holy Scripture and share on it.”

Sisters' Testimonies

“Other volunteers went to the village of Talakivka to offer people humanitarian assistance (clothes, hygiene products, etc.) as part of the “Holy Father for Ukraine” project. We had the opportunity to catechize two groups of approximately twenty people. After time for reflection and prayer, we had time for fellowship over a cup of tea, each person sharing what he or she had. Everyone, including the Orthodox and Protestants, accepted the Miraculous Medals that we gave them. They all expressed their gratitude for these visits. It was a human, cultural and spiritual experience for them.”

“Each day in the village of Pionierske was different. The schedule changed frequently. Usually, we would begin the morning with Eucharist (if a priest was present) or prayer and sharing on the Word of God; then, we would go visit a mother and her mentally disabled daughter. Both of them spent their days sorting trash. They lived in a dilapidated house: plastic replaced the windows, and they suffered greatly from the winter cold.

We also went to see an elderly woman who lived alone in her worn-down house because her daughter had died very young and her sons lived in Kiev. She wanted to remain in her home so as not to be a burden for her children. She eagerly awaited us each day, overjoyed to be able to speak with someone...

We also met Mr. Pietia, who was paralyzed on one side. His wife cared for him well, but he was depressed and hoped for a miracle pill that would enable him to walk again. We gave him a Miraculous Medal to ask the Virgin Mary to help him peacefully accept his situation... Lena also suffered from paralysis; she waited all day for her daughter to return from work. She was so happy when we spoke to her in Russian. We also helped several families with their material needs such as clothes, shoes and school supplies. We went once a week to the kindergarten in the neighboring village of Vinohradné. “At home”, our yard was always full of children. They knew that they could come to play, eat and pray with us. They also really liked to help us prepare the vegetables,

wash the car, do the housekeeping, etc. We taught them to care for their younger brothers and sisters and to help each other. Often, their parents were separated, and some lived with their grandparents. Many parents and older brothers and sisters had left to look for work.

In the afternoon or evening, it was time for catechesis. We met with families to pray with them and share on the Word of God together. All were very receptive and thankful; they wanted not only to hear the Word of God but to understand it better.”

“These people who experienced bombings lived in constant fear and worried about the future. Each day, they heard gunfire, and the young children were able to determine the risk and act accordingly, either continuing to play or taking shelter in the house or the Center.”

“The soldiers on the front lines also came to the Center. They were called “angels” because they came to get provisions for other soldiers at the risk of their own lives.”

“The day of our departure, someone asked us to visit a sick person who was in the area where there was shooting. We went by car to the house of Mr. Vasil. He was very grateful that we had come to visit him! Like the Roman centurion in the Gospel, he exclaimed that he did not deserve our visit. We gave him the medications that he needed, and he asked us to pray with him. This man’s humility and faith touched us deeply.”

“The mission in the ATO Zone was a precious time for us: to be able to live among these abandoned people and be there for them. Our presence was a witness for them that God had not abandoned them. In reality, we received much more than we gave. We also discovered how much faith can bring people together because we are all children of God.”

Testimony of Sisters from the Province of Chelmno-Poznan

“As part of the Province’s cooperation with Christian Rescue Services (CHSR), we served in the ATO Zone as volunteers for six weeks, in Pionierskie and neighboring villages. This new experience was a time of special grace for each one of us. We realized the importance of peace, both in countries and in our hearts. We served with other volunteers of the Ark Center. Oksana and Vladimir, Catholic spouses and true disciples of Christ - witnesses of faith, peace and courage - directed this Center. We were struck by the fact that the daily noise of explosions and shots in no way disturbed the serenity that reigned in the Center. Prayer experienced in common each day fortified us and gave us the strength to serve.

One day, Vladimir shared his life story with us in all simplicity. When he married Oksana, he thought he would satisfy his deepest longings by purchasing a fancy car, but after a while, he realized that this was not enough. He felt the desire to buy a nice apartment. He bought one in Kiev, but his heart was still not fulfilled. He then bought some land to build a house, but he once again felt inner emptiness. They then converted to Catholicism. After their conversion, they joined the pastoral service, but this was still not the treasure that they sought. After hearing about volunteer missions in the conflict zone in eastern Ukraine, they decided to go there. By putting themselves at the service of soldiers, children, adolescents, suffering families, elderly and sick people there, all suffering greatly because of the war, they found the meaning of their lives.

After their arrival in the ATO Zone, they began to visit families and evangelize them. They prayed and meditated on the Word of God to see how to survive this nightmare around them. Of course, it took some time for the families to trust them, but the genuineness of their witness quickly convinced them. The hope that God had not forgotten them was reborn in the people’s hearts. Then, Oksana and Vladimir fixed up a building to make it into

a chapel and invited a priest from Marioupole to come to the village of Pionierskie, which he did once a week. This Catholic couple's deep faith, devotion, enthusiasm, commitment, openness, simplicity and sensitivity were a great "faith lesson" for us, Daughters of Charity.

During the week, we continued the mission of evangelization begun by Oksana and Vladimir. We went to several villages for prayer meetings, Bible studies, catechesis and preparation for the sacraments. On the weekend, we held gatherings for adults. Children came daily to the Ark Center. We prepared their meals and provided assistance with their homework, English classes and thematic and hands-on activities. Times with the children and older adolescents (16-17 years old) were opportunities for us to practice patience, kindness and understanding. Living in constant tension and generally without the support of their parents, the youth were often depressed. Only accompaniment imbued with kindness could help them to open up a little bit.

In addition to our service at the Ark Center, we went to two schools and a kindergarten to offer food and educational activities.

During vacation periods, outings allowed the children and youth to spend some time away from the nightmare of the war and thus restore their mental equilibrium and strength.

Another unforgettable experience was going out to bring humanitarian assistance to border villages. The very grateful people said to us, "Thank you for the assistance that we receive, but thank you even more for not forgetting us; thanks to you, we are no longer alone... It would seem the war was necessary for us to be able to hear about God."

The people live in deep poverty. With the volunteers, we bring meals to the sick and elderly people living alone who cannot or do not want to leave their homes because their pensions are too small and expenses too high. They cannot heat their apartments

Sisters' Testimonies

in winter because of the high price of gas. They use a little wood, which only produces minimal heat. They also eat very meager meals. Christian Rescue Services (CHSR) helps them as much as possible with distribution of food supplies and visits to support them and give them a little hope because they suffer above all from being cut off from their loved ones who live on the other side of the border in Russia. Their families live over there and do not know what is happening here. Tamara, whose husband went to Russia, leaving her alone with their two children, said, "The year 2015 was the worst. I was afraid seeing the tanks, and the shots were hard to put up with. I spent long hours with my two daughters sitting on the floor of the basement. One day, I asked a commander what I should do during explosions, and he answered, 'Put your icons on the windows and pray.' Still today, I remember and thank God for keeping us alive."

The Ark Center is also a haven of peace for the soldiers. At any time of day, they can come there to rest, eat, bathe, do a little laundry and find spiritual assistance from the volunteer priests. During Christmas time, we went with the children to see the soldiers and sing Christmas carols. We received a warm welcome; in exchange, the soldiers offered the children boxes of cookies. The soldiers then went to confession and participated in the Eucharist. Silent tears flowed from their eyes. We will long remember these meals eaten with them, recalling the words of this Russian song, "Home is not walls, a table and chairs; home is where someone waits for us, where people understand us, where all suffering is forgotten."

Blessed be the Lord...

Thank you, Lord, for this time of service spent in the village of Pionierski in the ATO Zone.

Thank you for all the people met, the events experienced and the joy of serving.

Thank you, Lord, for your presence acting in the heart and life of all the volunteers who committed to serve these children, adults, elderly and sick people, soldiers... Their example of dedication, zeal, peace in sacrifice and trust evangelized us.

Thank you, Lord, for the times of prayer in common that gave us the strength to serve.

Thank you for the warm atmosphere during meals eaten together and for the hospitality offered to those who came to the Center.

Thank you for the possibility to share our faith and bread so simply day in and day out.

Thank you for the chance to meet children, young and older ones, which was for me a “test” of my patience, understanding and kindness.

Thank you for the gatherings around the Bible and the participants’ humble and authentic listening to the Word of God.

Thank you for the encounters with the villagers, who continue to live still today under gunfire and hope for the victory of good over evil and for a peaceful future...

Thank you for the soldiers who, in the midst of the hell of fighting, recognize the presence of the Lord in prayer but also in the solitude of the continual threat of death... Thank you for their courage, not only in battle, but also in their profession of faith... Blessed be the Lord! Watch over all the people whom you allowed us to meet.

Sisters who served in the ATO Zone

Province of Madagascar

*“Every person is a sacred story,
in God’s image”*

In the Fianarantsoa region of Madagascar (the eastern side of the island), natural disasters are practically the daily bread of the population. The uncertainty of the chronically unstable political situation of the country further aggravates the situation. Due to poverty and lack of security, people living in precarious situations go off in search of a better life.

Families with a modest income who lose their work, their home and especially their livestock, so coveted for export, find themselves in abject poverty. Exodus to cities to flee the atrocities carried out by organized gangs supported by some very wealthy people is the only solution that remains for these country-dwellers. There, they quickly use up their meager savings, and their last refuge is the streets. They then set up a shelter with bits of plastic gathered from the city’s trashcans, but they are soon forcibly expelled. During these expulsions, they lose everything, including their identity cards, becoming “undocumented”.

The first consequence is the loss of their rights and, even worse, the loss of their dignity. People living in the streets give themselves over to alcohol, drugs and prostitution with all of its accompanying ills: syphilis, tuberculosis, AIDS...

Everyone seeing this situation is well aware that homeless people need help from individuals, government organizations, non-profit organizations and religious congregations. They receive material assistance for holidays, but unfortunately, this is only sporadic.

Some go so far as to catechize them in the streets! Alas, unable to make it out of their situation, they end up contenting themselves with this assistance without seeking anything more; they gradually slide into abject poverty and eat only what they find in the dump.

This region of Fianarantsoa is often struck by hurricanes and flooding. In the past ten years, forty-five hurricanes and tropical storms have struck Madagascar. In 2018, Hurricane Ava seriously impacted the region of Fianarantsoa. Houses collapsed, wounding many people, with more than 50 dead and 20 missing. Fifty-four thousand people had to flee their homes, and the number of “4 MI” quadrupled overnight. “4 MI” means “Mifoka” (smoke), “Misotro” (drink alcohol), “Migoka” (drink greedily) and “Miloka” (gamble with the little one has earned).

These men thus gradually become incapable of holding down a stable job, so they make do with odd jobs: taking in laundry, emptying city trashcans or unloading merchandise for small businesses. As soon as they earn a little money, they spend it on alcohol without thinking of their families... As for the children, they are left to fend for themselves. They survive by begging or helping women carry their purchases... This is how they earn their food because they no longer can rely on their parents. The number of children in the streets increases constantly. Family life turns into “every man for himself”!

Pope Francis’ call to “go out to the peripheries” and our Superiors’ recommendations, communicated in letters for liturgical seasons or Vincentian feasts, invite us to make ourselves close to homeless people: “*I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*” This led us to conduct a revision of works.

We first asked ourselves, “How can we help these homeless people?”

When delinquent children from our center had finished their formation and returned to their families, we decided to house some

Sisters' Testimonies

homeless families whom we knew within the center, which was then free. In addition, it is located on a large arable plot.

1 – The first thing to do was to present them to the elected authorities of the neighborhood. Then, in collaboration with them, we were able to begin the administrative procedures to obtain new identity cards for them, which they had lost in the city “clean-up”. To help them integrate into the communal organizational system of the neighborhood, which requires a certain discipline for the common good, we informed the local people and raised their awareness.

2 – The second step involved educating the hosted families to maintain their housing and, in addition to their usual economic activities, cultivate a plot of land. A Sister assists them in planting vegetables, sweet potatoes and cassava.

3 – To get their new life and work started, each family received a small capital fund.

4 – The men must try to free themselves from alcoholism gradually. Despite “falling off the wagon” repeated times, this requirement remains constant.

5 – The children must go to school every day. A Sister makes sure that they are all present.

6 – Thanks to the collaboration of a Sister nurse, a doctor from the diocesan center, to which we send persons who are poor, monitors the health of these families.

7 – Young Vincentians in formation, who live near the center, provide catechesis (corporal and spiritual service).

8 – These families meet monthly to share their experience of the past month: farming of their plot of land, personal health, children’s studies, etc. It is a time of fellowship, especially when a

new family arrives.

We become increasingly aware that:

* Much patience and understanding are necessary for their integration, awareness of their responsibility for their children, personal planning, etc.

* This service requires both firmness and abundant mercy.

* This service reveals to us our own spiritual poverty... and the greatness of God's mercy with regard to our limitations and sins. We accompany them in their relapses, knowing that it is a long-term process. When one of them does not follow the rules (for example, not returning to the family for two or three weeks, which is grounds for dismissal from the center), he asks forgiveness of the group and tries to start over yet again. This is just like each one of us, whom God accompanies and pardons in the Sacrament of Reconciliation so that we gradually become better through His grace.

Clearly, work plays an essential role in helping them get beyond the failures in their lives. Given their overall state so weakened by past difficulties, they have trouble making sustained physical effort and cultivating enough land to provide for the needs of their entire family. For mutual support, one day each week they work in common on the land of each family in turn in order to increase their produce.

What strikes us is their sense of solidarity. Despite their irresponsibility for the family, when one of them suffers illness or mourning or has a happy event like a Baptism, they all gather to share in the event. Two days ago, David, a recovering alcoholic, received his new identity card. He exclaimed, "Finally, I will be able to vote in the next parliamentary elections! I had lost my rights as a citizen for ten years."

Sisters' Testimonies

The words of a song by John Littleton constantly echo in our ears. *“I seek the face, the face of the Lord, I seek His image in the depths of your hearts... When I see my children rejected, tortured, embittered, oppressed, abused, forgotten... what did you do about it?”* Yes, one day, God will see His image restored in His disfigured, rejected children who wallow in poverty.

Sister Francine RAZAFINDRABODO

Daughter of Charity

Sister Gabriella (Teresa) Borgarino
Daughter of Charity (1880 – 1949)

Servant of God
A Life for the Mission

On January 1, 1949, Sister Gabriella Borgarino died in Luserna (Province of Turin). Her death, which touched many people's hearts, made evident the scope of the influence of her full life. More than one thousand letters from Italy, France, Switzerland, Spain, the United States, Brazil, Madagascar, etc., received between 1960 and 2018, prove that people continue to invoke her intercession and especially that devotion to the Sacred Heart and recitation of the "little chaplet" of Divine Providence have spread to a surprising extent thanks to her. Something in Sister Borgarino touches hearts and helps people discover a message that speaks directly to each one of them. Her life was very simple, an ordinary holiness made extraordinary by her great faith, love and humility.

HER CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Teresa Borgarino, her baptismal name, was born on September 2, 1880; her parents, Lorenzo and Maria Cerato, lived in a small house in Boves (Piedmont). Essentially an agricultural region until the 19th century, hundreds of people then found work in silk and hemp thread spinning mills, brick factories and marble, slate and limestone quarries. Her father



*History
of the
Company*

Sister Gabriella Borgarino

had a plot of land that he cultivated as a vegetable garden, but he worked along with his sons in the surrounding mines while the girls went to work at the spinning mills as soon as they were able. The exemplary clergy engaged actively in instructing the youth of the close-knit village.

Rich in faith and love for those who are poor, her parents raised their ten children well. Sister Borgarino recalled, “*We were poor, but when Mother made bread, she called my sister and me while it was still warm and told us, ‘Take the first loaf; it is for the Lord, so take it to such-and-such a poor person, but do so quietly since that is how we should give alms.’*”¹

Teresa received the sacrament of Confirmation around seven years of age, and she made her First Communion at 9 ½ years old. She said that her supernatural experiences began at this time.

She grew up in the healthy country atmosphere and received her education in the primary school in the village once she reached the age at which schooling became obligatory. Although her schooling was relatively short, Teresa learned to express her thoughts well despite some difficulties with spelling and grammar. When she was about eleven years old, she began to work at the thread-spinning mill. She spent her childhood and adolescence in this context of poverty, work and simplicity, as well as the serenity of a united and deeply Christian family setting.

This family and religious background contributed to her balanced personality and her determined and perseverant character. Faith influenced her behavior towards all; the Word of God guided her choices in her relationships with others and gave meaning to her submission and obedience.

1. Sister Maltecca Pia, *Notes on Sister Gabriella Borgarino, Sister Borgarino File*, Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Turin.

HER VOCATION TO THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

The first time that Teresa considered consecrating herself to God was the day of her First Communion. She would say, *“I heard Christ tell me, ‘You will become a Sister!’”*

She knew the Daughters of Charity in Boves, who worked not only at the hospital but also at the primary school and the youth club for girls. She decided at age nineteen to become a Daughter of Charity despite a concern that she would admit later. *“I thought I would not be able to enter the Daughters of Charity due to my poverty and ignorance, which seemed a real obstacle to me since I thought all the Sisters were at least primary school teachers...”*

In 1899, Teresa entered Postulancy and then the Seminary in Turin. However, she fell ill and had to return to her family home. Once she recovered her health, she was readmitted to the Seminary on June 30, 1901, where she would offer her companions a model of piety, recollection and availability even to the point of sacrifice. In 1902, Sister Borgarino was sent on mission to Angera (Lombardy) to cook. In 1906, she would be missioned to Lugano (Switzerland) at the “Luogo Pio Rezzonico”.

Mystical experiences that would deeply influence her life marked the following years... We can distinguish two periods:

* The first period, from 1919 to 1928, with three apparitions of the Sacred Heart:

- The first in Lugano, in the Church of the Madonnetta (little Virgin) on June 25, 1919,
- The second in Grugliasco (Turin) at Saint Joseph House on June 25, 1920,
- Finally, the third, again in Grugliasco (Turin) at Saint Joseph House in 1928.

* The second period, from 1936 to 1937, in Luserna in the House of the Immaculate (Turin) with the fourth apparition.

APPARITIONS AND MISSIONS

1906 - 1919: LUGANO

The apparitions of the Sacred Heart began on June 25, 1919, in Lugano in the Church of the Madonetta. Sister Borgarino would only tell her spiritual director, Monsignor Emilio Poretti, the ordinary confessor for the Daughters of Charity of the “Luogo Pio Rezzonico”. He ordered her to keep them secret. Only much later would she recount these supernatural events to her Superiors. They asked her to write them down in detail, which she did.

She wrote, “... *I was with our Sisters at Holy Mass at the Madonetta, and I was making my thanksgiving after Communion when I suddenly no longer saw anything. A sort of large sheet came toward me with a very beautiful flesh-colored heart in the middle. Instead of the crown of thorns, I saw red roses separated by five white roses... An inner voice suggested an ejaculatory prayer: “O Jesus, my dear treasure, give me your beautiful heart,”² asked me to entrust ‘unfaithful priests and free masons’ to the prayers of the Double Family of Saint Vincent³ and requested that the 25th of each month be dedicated to prayer for the Pope.*”⁴

Sister Borgarino could not even imagine that unfaithful priests might exist; as for free masons, she only knew that they were bad but that Jesus loved them dearly, which was why He called them to conversion. Prayer for the Holy Father would be a constant in all Sister Borgarino’s mystical experiences, but the messages would most frequently refer to the mission of the prayer and sacrifices to offer for unfaithful priests and free masons. An image of the Sacred Heart and the recitation of a short chaplet derive from this vision.

2. Letter of Sister Gabriella Borgarino to Msgr. Emilio Poretti in Lugano, dated March 1921, Diocesan Archives.

3. Letter of Sister Gabriella Borgarino to the Superioress General, Mother Chaplain, dated May 1938, Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Paris.

4. Report by Sister Gabriella Borgarino to the Provincial Director, Father Domenico Borgna, dated December 27, 1933, Archives of the Congregation of the Mission in Turin.

In 1928, Sister Borgarino received a message from the Holy Office through the Superior General, Father François Verdier, and the Superioress General, Mother Marie Lebrun, that forbade distribution of the image of the Sacred Heart as well as the little chaplet, as a matter of discretion. It was advisable not to promote practices that could lead to controversy among unbelievers. Sister Gabriella responded to this ban with perfect obedience, silence and prayer.

1919 - 1931: SAINT JOSEPH HOUSE IN GRUGLIASCO

At Saint Joseph House in Grugliasco, Sister Borgarino, who had received the new name of Gabriella, enjoyed a second and third apparition. The Sacred Heart made her understand that obedience is a response of love to God and that He loves ordinary, even trivial, acts of charity. She wrote,

“During my meditation, I was tasting the happiness of paradise when a Sister came to call me to serve three Sisters who had arrived from Turin. I immediately said to Jesus, ‘I’m going, my dear Jesus.’ What joy I had when, returning to the chapel, I saw Jesus on the side where the Holy Gospel is proclaimed, tall like a young man and extraordinarily handsome, graciously saying to me, ‘Because you left out of obedience, I waited for you out of love.’”⁵

“While I was making my thanksgiving after Communion, I saw before me three magnificent roses and heard the voice of Jesus saying to me, ‘These are the three acts of charity that you did this morning; I greatly appreciated them.’”⁶

5. Letter of Mother Chaplain, Superioress General, to Sister Gabriella Borgarino, dated November 20, 1938, Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Paris.

6. Report by Sister Gabriella Borgarino to the Provincial Director, Father Domenico Borgna, dated December 27, 1933, Archives of the Congregation of the Mission in Turin.

In 1931, the Daughters of Charity who lived in Saint Joseph House in Grugliasco moved into a larger house in Luserna, more appropriate for the sick Sisters because of the healthier air there. Sister Gabriella was favored with another apparition of the Sacred Heart. The Lord Jesus asked her to make known His Divine Providence and taught her an ejaculatory prayer: “**Divine Providence of the heart of Jesus, watch over us.**”

She wrote, “*On September 27 (1936?), Jesus appeared to me with the Divine Heart and said, ‘My heart is so full of graces to give to my creatures that it is like an overflowing stream. Make my Divine Providence known to my creatures and appreciated by them...’ He taught me, “Divine Providence of the Heart of Jesus, watch over us.” The first times, I wrote these words on some images I had, and when I could, I taught them to our good Sisters, but Jesus knows how poor I am... One day, I was in the chapel for meditation... I saw Jesus coming down the steps of the altar, resplendent with light and majesty, approaching my pew. When He was close, I no longer saw His luminous person, just His arm, and He showed me a page in His hand on which was written the precious invocation “Divine Providence of the Heart of Jesus, watch over us.” He told me to write it down, have it blessed and underline “Divine” so that everyone would understand that it was His.*”⁷

Sister Gabriella organized the distribution and spoke about the love of a God who wants people to trust in Him. She wrote the invocation on small sheets of paper and taught reciting it 33 times with a small chaplet.

By 1938, many Christians knew and used the ejaculatory prayer, “Divine Providence of the Heart of Jesus, watch over us.” It would seem that this prayer was right for the times when the Second World War was breaking out with its share of sufferings.

The ejaculatory prayer spread quickly and spontaneously, so

7. Sister Gabriella Borgarino, *Notebook written in her handwriting, Sister Borgarino File*, Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Turin.

much so that Monsignor Angelo Jelmini, Bishop of Lugano, and Cardinal Maurilio Fossati, Archbishop of Turin, approved it and attached indulgences to it.

Engaged in the most humble services, Sister Gabriella led a “hidden” life in the house of Luserna, but many people wrote her. Sisters, Superiors, priests and simple people wrote her to ask for her insight and advice for their often-difficult problems. They asked her to pray for people’s health and for spiritual and material problems. Sister Gabriella’s heart always made room to welcome all those who were in need. She listened, said, *“I’ll speak about it with Jesus,”* and answered everyone with a stunning and irresistible supernatural simplicity. *“Jesus tells me... Jesus is not happy... Jesus does want this...”* She did not impose but suggested, writing, *“If you believe.”*

This humble Sister with limited knowledge, poor spelling and clumsy syntax thus became a “master of spirituality”. With her fingers crippled by arthritis and her poor pen, she wrote profound words that always called recipients to trust and awakened their desire to share those words with as many others as possible. Her simple and stark language was Gospel-based and spoke to the heart. Educated people enjoyed her closeness while the simplest people had no difficulty understanding her. For everyone, she was one of their own in the light of the words of the Gospel, *“Be simple as doves.”*

“A HIDDEN ROOT”

Sister Gabriella Borgarino called herself *“a hidden root”*. *“I am just the root of this large tree, and I must remain well hidden in humility.”*⁸ Her life was a silent one consisting of prayer and humility. In the different local communities where she lived, she always worked in humble and hidden services: kitchen, food procurement, laundry, vegetable garden, but also at the service

8. Letter of Sister Gabriella Borgarino to Canon Annibale Lafranchi, dated August 4, 1932, in L. Chierotti, *Suor Gabriella Borgarino*, Chieri-Torino, 1967, p. 140-141.

Sister Gabriella Borgarino

of the elderly and sick Sisters and of employees. Fully aware that she had received a special mission, Sister Gabriella did not want recognition; she only wanted Christ's desire to be fulfilled.

WRITINGS OF SISTER GABRIELLA BORGARINO

In order to understand her life well, we must recognize that Sister Borgarino firmly believed in Christ's great love for all people. This is what impelled her to embrace God's will fully and to respond with the total gift of self.

“I wanted to be an angel to go out to the whole world and speak of Jesus' goodness toward His creatures, and I also wanted to be the root of plants that, the more they descend into the earth, the more they bear fruit. I hide myself in the beautiful heart of Jesus, and I trust fully in Him. Should I need to give my life and blood for Jesus, I think that I would be very happy to be able to give Jesus this supreme witness of my love.”⁹

This experience of faith in Jesus was Sister Gabriella's criterion for interpreting her everyday life, in both minor and major events. It allowed her to give others hope and courage. Thanks to her gift for touching each person's heart, Sister Gabriella always wrote comforting letters. Caring and attentive to all, she asked for news about each person and assured him or her of her prayer.

She wrote to the Seminary Directress about a young Sister who feared for the salvation of her recently deceased father, *“Tell this young Seminary Sister, for her great consolation, that Jesus, in His infinite mercy, saved him and that she should promise Him, with His grace, always to be faithful to her holy vocation.”*

Sister Borgarino is above all known for the ejaculatory prayer, *“Divine Providence of the Heart of Jesus, watch over us.”* She constantly told everyone to have great confidence in the Divine

9. Letter of Sister Gabriella Borgarino to Msgr. Poretti, Lugano, dated February 26, 1926, Diocesan Archives.

Providence of the Heart of Jesus, insisting that Providence is the inexhaustible love of Christ. Jesus wants us to surrender ourselves to Him in trust.

*“Jesus assured me that in any necessity – moral, spiritual or material – He would come to our assistance because His Divine Heart is a treasure... He takes care of everything... it is like an overflowing stream. For those lacking in some virtues, we can thus ask Jesus: provide them with humility, gentleness, detachment from the things of this earth... because Jesus provides for everything.”*¹⁰

At the end of her life, she spent her time writing this prayer, *“Divine Providence of the Heart of Jesus, watch over us,”* and teaching others to pray the little chaplet.

She tirelessly encouraged people to lay down all their concerns in the heart of Christ. *“Christ wants us to throw everything in His heart, with loving trust... Our trust pleases Him. If Divine Providence allows us to experience difficult things, we can always offer these sufferings and inconveniences, invisible roses that nonetheless have real merit for our blessed eternity and that of souls. Jesus wants us to make known His great desire to be known and loved in His paternal Divine Providence.”*¹¹

She contemplated Christ’s infinite love in the image of the Sacred Heart, surrendering totally to Him and certain that Providence does everything for the salvation of all. Finally, she invited her correspondents to teach everyone this prayer to Divine Providence. The Heart of Christ grants many graces to those who pray to Him with this invocation, so everyone should know it and have great confidence in it.

10. Sister Gabriella Borgarino, *Notebook written in her handwriting, Sister Borgarino File*, Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Turin.

11. Sister Gabriella Borgarino, *Notebook written in her handwriting, Sister Borgarino File*, Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Turin.

Sister Gabriella Borgarino

The Eucharist was at the center of Sister Gabriella's spiritual life. Recognizing Eucharistic Communion as the summit of the encounter with Christ, Sister Gabriella made Adoration, even by simply turning her thoughts to the Tabernacle, a constant in her life. She had a depth of reflection only possible in an interiorly inspired person.

*“In the Tabernacle, Jesus leads the same life that He led on earth, that is, He listens, teaches and comforts.” “We speak of the Body of Christ, but in reality, we find the Most Holy Trinity.”*¹²

Sister Borgarino invited those with difficulties and sufferings to look at the Tabernacle, source of consolation. *“There, God is present; there, everything is present; there, the Trinity is present.”* Amid difficulties, Christ present in the Eucharist was her comfort and support.

*“This earth would be a burden for me, but when I have some suffering, I immediately tell Jesus about it, spend a moment close to the Tabernacle and recount everything as I would to my Good Father.”*¹³

An intense devotion to the Virgin Mary, of whom Sister Gabriella asked for the grace to grow in the practice of all the virtues, also sustained her spirituality. *“I expect everything from the Most Holy Virgin: humility, holiness, charity, gentleness and the grace always to be able to hold my tongue with a gentle smile.”*¹⁴

In her correspondence, she always invited others to “a little life of charity” because Christ asks this life of everyone. This little life of charity consists in witnessing to the love of Christ to others, in the thousand and one daily opportunities, through attention and kindness.

“The only thing that Jesus wishes to find in us is charitable kindness towards all. This is all the law and our happiness; we really have the ability to express it.” “Being good with all people is

12. Idem.

13. Idem.

14. Idem.

the real means to do good and thus to save souls... I learned to speak about Jesus to souls and to Jesus about souls."¹⁵

We are witnesses and evangelizers if we live out the charity of Christ with all people and in all things, in community and in our service.

"Kindness draws souls and sooner or later bears precious results; on the contrary, harshness closes hearts, even towards God."

Charity towards all led Sister Gabriella to seek the salvation of souls. Charity impelled her to write and spread the invocation of Divine Providence and help those who doubted.

*"He told me that He chose our community as a center of Charity... He desires many acts of charity, even small ones, in the community... Jesus tells me that He loves our Company very much, but He wants us to perfect ourselves more in charity, that is, gentle, prudent and simple charity, which seeks Him alone... He is happy with us but wants more charity."*¹⁶

Sister Gabriella was the first to live out this charity. If someone did not accept her way of acting and mortifying herself, she would intensify her consideration and kindness toward her. She excused everyone, especially those not present to defend themselves, and encouraged forgiveness and a vision of events more governed by a spirit of faith.

"I should practice great gentleness and never make excuses for myself; it is better to keep silent to obtain many graces for souls and for the community from the Divine Heart of Jesus. Jesus tells me never to scold others but to remain quiet and gentle. I will try always to please Jesus by pleasing my neighbor. I will remain closely united to Jesus because I should seek Him alone. I will seek my consolation in the Tabernacle; created

15. Letter of Sister Gabriella Borgarino to Sister Lucia Borgarino, *Sister Borgarino File*, Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Turin.

16. Report by Sister Gabriella Borgarino to the Provincial Director, Father Domenico Borgna, dated December 27, 1933, Archives of the Congregation of the Mission in Turin.

Sister Gabriella Borgarino

beings cannot give me it. I will always try to have a smile on my lips even if I have some suffering in my heart. I will try to kill off my touchiness that causes me so much suffering and makes others suffer."¹⁷

Her life and her death were an example for all. On January 5, 1949, Sister Giuseppina Pesenti, Sister Servant of the community in Luserna, wrote to a friend, "... *she left us with an edifying death to go to paradise where she surely is enjoying Jesus whom she so loved. She died on January 1 at 11:45pm after edifying all the Sisters with her patience and serenity amid the sharpest pains; she no longer could speak, but her virtue was more eloquent than any words.*"

About a year after Sister Gabriella Borgarino's death,¹⁸ Sister Pesenti, writing Father Pietro Musso, brought out the virtues of the Servant of God, revealing her conviction that she practiced them to a much higher degree than average. "*Her life was truly holy, consisting of exemplary regularity, simple and deep humility, perfect obedience, consistency and caring charity towards all.*" At the time of her death, in the record book for burials of the municipality of Luserna, the employee noted his observation informed by public sentiment: "*Holy Sister*".

We read in the letter that Canon Annibale Lanfranchi of Lugano sent to Sister Onorina Luzzani, Daughter of Charity, on January 18, 1949, "*You knew her, so you can say if I am right to recall that Sister Teresa Borgarino leaves behind the memory of a holy soul, even of a great saint.*"¹⁹

17. Sister Gabriella Borgarino, *Notebook written in her handwriting, Sister Borgarino File*, Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Turin.

18. Letter of Sister Pesenti, Christmas 1950, *Sister Borgarino File*, Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Turin.

19. In *Sister Borgarino File*, Archives of the Daughters of Charity in Turin.

CONCLUSION

Sister Borgarino leaves us a single message: a boundless love of Christ that does everything so that the plan of salvation is accomplished in us and in all. Christ is “all” and “most important”. Sister Gabriella can also have meaning for our contemporary world thirsting for religion while hardened by indifference and selfishness. She presents a God whose heart overflows with love for humanity, enabling an experience of mercy. Sister Gabriella is an example of ordinary holiness, accessible to all, made up of a multitude of little acts of love. She reminds all people, but especially Daughters of Charity, of the importance of a “little life of charity”. In a complex world often preoccupied with appearances, Sister Gabriella brings out how Christ works in the heart of the humble and that a simple heart obtains everything from God.

The many letters written by our contemporaries from all over the world, either to learn about Sister Gabriella or to testify to her influence and protection, reveal the extent to which her message remains timely. The prayer, “*Divine Providence of the Heart of Jesus, watch over us,*” born of her faith and exceptional spiritual experience, spread throughout Italy to accompany and support many people on the way of trust in God.

During this one hundredth anniversary of the first apparition (1919) and seventieth anniversary of her death (1949), numerous members of the people of God who desire her beatification continue trustingly and profitably to invoke this Servant of God.

Sister Adele BOLLATI
Daughter of Charity

Message of Pope Francis
3rd World Day of the Poor

**THE HOPE OF THE POOR SHALL NOT
PERISH FOR EVER**

**In the eyes of the world,
it seems illogical to think
that poverty and need can possess
saving power...**

**Looking at things from a human standpoint,
we fail to see this saving power,
but with the eyes of faith,
we see it at work
and experience it personally.**

**In the heart of the pilgrim People of God
there beats that saving power which excludes no one
and involves everyone
in a real pilgrimage of conversion,
to recognize the poor and to love them.**

Pope Francis, November 17, 2019

