

*E*choes of the Company



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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

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End of year retreat *Jesus, I trust in you.*

Introduction

In his Advent letter, Father Tomaž invited us to compose an “**Ode to Providence**”. He encouraged us to place ourselves in the hands of Jesus. “*Providence will be effective in our lives according to the depth of our trust in Jesus.*”¹

S

*Spiritual
Life*

On this retreat day, I would like to reflect with you on Providence, from the Latin *providere*: provide for, make provision for. It is how God in His wisdom guides all His creatures towards the perfection to which He has called them.

A new liturgical year begins on the First Sunday of Advent. In this Year A, the Church offers us the Gospel according to Saint Matthew. Matthew’s Gospel portrays Jesus Christ as the Teacher who comes to inaugurate the new world of the Kingdom. He offers those who follow Him the teaching that they need in order to become in turn witnesses for others. In Chapter 6, in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us, “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil.*”²

1. Father Tomaž Mavrič, 2019 Advent letter
2. Matthew 6:33-34

Jesus, I trust in you.

1. JESUS CALLS US TO FOLLOW HIM ON THE PATH OF TRUST IN GOD

To begin this reflection on Providence, I chose the account of the calming of the storm from Matthew's Gospel.

“Jesus got into a boat and His disciples followed him. Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves; but He was asleep. They came and woke Him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’ He said to them, ‘Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?’ Then He got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. The men were amazed and said, ‘What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?’”³

The Sea of Galilee is aptly named. Indeed, this vast landlocked sea in the north of the country is not at all a calm lake. When you are on one bank, you do not see the other shore, and once you have left the coast for the high sea, when you risk going to the other side as Jesus invites His disciples to do, you no longer see any land at all.

You are in the middle of the sea, a particularly volatile and sometimes tempestuous sea. When it is calm, all is well, but storms are unpredictable there, and when they come, they are violent. Recalling, moreover, that the sea is associated with the forces of evil, we understand why the disciples are afraid when they see the tumultuous sea.

In this account, Jesus explicitly connects faith with the Divine Providence that watches over us day after day. Believing in Jesus is not an intellectual matter; it is believing that we can go through life feeling secure since His person is Providence for humankind. This faith chases away fright. Not fear, which is a natural feeling in the presence of God, but fright that paralyzes because it reminds us of our inadequacies and our finitude and keeps us from moving beyond them.

3. Matthew 8:23-27

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Crossing the Sea of Galilee symbolizes crossing through life. The sea represents our world, our community, our very heart: little seas, but those in which, as we well know, major storms can unexpectedly arise. Who has not known one of these storms when everything grows dark, the little boat of our life begins to leak on all sides and God seems absent or asleep?

What can we do? To what can we tie up our boat, on which side can we put down our anchor? Jesus does not give us a magic potion for avoiding all the storms of our lives. He did not promise to spare us from all difficulties; however, He did promise us the strength to overcome them if we ask Him for it. Trust in God: this is the Gospel message.

2. PROVIDENCE, A LIFE EXPERIENCE⁴

Jean Vanier liked to say that l'Arche was “*a work of God*” that was totally beyond him. “*I didn't do anything aside from listen to reality and humbly follow the avenues that opened before me,*” he added. Saint Louise and Saint Vincent had the same experience. Is there a better description of Providence? It is not the action of an extraordinary man or woman but truly the action of God working through people who humbly and knowingly accept to follow Him.

Indeed, trusting, entrusting oneself to Providence is not a form of weakness. This surrender is not the prerogative of great mystics. It is a simple way, accessible to all, to identify God's will in everyday life. Recognizing God's will means glimpsing Him in His unfathomable mystery, including in the most puzzling events. Life, this beautiful and worrying unknown, holds so many surprises for those who surrender, not blissfully to its course, but with the intimate conviction that, whatever happens, they are guided, protected and loved. Providence is not commanded, not explained, not the object of major speeches nor a dogma; it is lived and experienced in everyday life.

4. Descouvemont, Pierre. *Peut-on croire à la Providence ? [Is it possible to believe in Providence?]* Editions Emmanuel (2007).

Jesus, I trust in you.

In the midst of the trials, pain, suffering and misfortunes of our times, a question arises: could God forget us? We face this fundamental question. The People of God on its journey was confronted with this question all throughout its history.

During the humiliating experience of exile, the People of God questioned God's presence. Where is the God of our fathers? Where is the God who brought us out of Egypt? How can we understand that the suffering through which we are living, while not necessarily the work of God, could be part of His providential plan?

Confronted with these questions, the faith of the exiled people began to dim. God is absent. He did not keep His promises. The temptation to deny God began to take hold, and the temptation of idolatry, in the sense of adoration of a false image of God, was not only possible but became blatant.

The words of the prophet Isaiah emerge precisely in these testing times of anxiety and uncertainty. *“Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.”*⁵ In Biblical tradition, a mother's love for the child of her womb was one of the highest expressions of love. This love is so strong that even should a child die, the memory of the child remains forever etched in the mother's most intimate depths.

According to Isaiah, God's love is stronger than maternal love because, while it could almost unimaginably happen that a mother's love fails, that of God remains unchanged. God is thus present in the middle of His People's suffering. The prophet's intention is to assert that the people is truly present in God's memory in this apparent absence.

It is impossible for God to forget because forgetting His People would amount to denying Himself. Apparent absence is not the sign of forgetting. Divine silence can sometimes appear incom-

5. Isaiah 49:15

prehensible, but this silence paradoxically can be a sign of His presence. God acts, but, as the prophet Isaiah also says, “*My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways – oracle of the Lord.*”⁶

How, though, can we open ourselves to this active silence of God who in His mercy directs all things according to His Providence? Responding to this question means welcoming the Good News that Jesus offers us in Matthew’s Gospel. This Good News can be expressed in this way: in total trust, learn to contemplate God who in His Providence silently acts in the different elements that make up the present moment of our lives.

“Look at the birds in the sky,” Jesus tells us. *“They do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them... Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them.”*⁷

Welcoming God’s silent action involves learning to look around us. *“Learn from the way the wild flowers grow.”* While we know that in Jesus’ time the growth of plants was a surprising phenomenon, we must admit that it no longer holds any secrets for science.

Jesus invites us to look, to observe creation. While it is true that we know the mechanism of how things evolve or grow, we must acknowledge the astonishing mystery of their very presence around us. All those who place themselves at the school of observation and contemplation of beauty understand that behind each marvel there is a silent hand that works without calling attention to itself.

God’s nature is to act in secret. Jesus does not intend to give a proof of God’s existence. Jesus’ intention is to help us understand that, come what may, God’s Providence is evident in concrete situations of our lives.

6. Isaiah 55:8

7. Matthew 6:26-29

Jesus, I trust in you.

In times of joy and difficulties, recognizing this Providence that never forgets us means above all seeking the kingdom of God and working for that kingdom. “*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.*”⁸ Being aware of the presence of God who does not forget humanity and who silently works in the heart of our world is living out the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is nothing other than the expression of His love. A preferential option for God’s love should thus govern all the interior and exterior reactions that direct our lives. Once love becomes the center of what causes our happiness, then everything else is organized based on love. All becomes grace, in joy as in crucifixion. It is perhaps in this way that we should understand Jesus’ invitation not to worry about tomorrow and let tomorrow take care of itself.

Of course, we should not remain passive but work while remaining very conscious that God’s action precedes our labor. It is not logical to speak of “the fruit of our work” because it is primarily a blessing from God. What do we have that we have not received? All is gift! Welcoming the events of our life as gifts does not mean putting up with them but recognizing the providential hand of God who acts in us; it means learning to thank Him in all situations; it means learning to offer the results of our efforts back to Him from whom all things come.

From then on, the barometer of our life is no longer failure or success, for God sees the depths of things. He knows that what humanly speaking we call failure or success is only the starting point for something new.

The gift of God and His Providence are therefore not restricted by the human categories of success or failure. They are freedom, strength and love. They help us to believe that God is always there. He is faithful. He speaks even when everything is quiet. He does not forget us in our circumstances.

8. Matthew 6:33

3. WITH SAINT LOUISE, LET US ADOPT GOD'S PLAN⁹

Louise de Marillac always deeply felt the desire to fulfill God's plan. The response of Father de Champigny when she asked to enter the Capuchins remained engraved in her heart: "*God has some other plan for you.*"

For many long years and with a certain anxiety, Louise sought her vocation according to God's will for her. When Vincent de Paul involved her in the Confraternities of Charity, Louise de Marillac recognized that God was calling her to participate in His great plan of love for humanity.

Indeed, the goal of the service undertaken by the Confraternities was to bring life and happiness to those who are poor despite the illness, suffering or death that they might be experiencing. This service, in fact, was a means to establish a relationship of solidarity between rich and poor persons and lead them to communion with God.

Louise's retreat resolution in 1632 shows her desire for openness to God's plan. "*...the will of God for me will be accomplished, provided I allow myself to be led by Him.*"¹⁰

Louise de Marillac was well aware of the greatness of a vocation received from God, which exceeds mere human possibilities. This is why she invited the Sisters to make Jesus Christ, "*the living source of all holiness,*"¹¹ their rule of life.

Let us adopt for our lives these words from Louise. "*It is only reasonable that those whom God has called to follow His Son should strive to become holy as He is holy and to make their lives a continuation of His. What a blessing that will be for all Eternity!*"

9. Charpy, Sister Elisabeth. Notes on Saint Louise

10. *Spiritual Writings*, A. 5, p. 716

11. *Spiritual Writings*, L. 165, p. 184

Jesus, I trust in you.

The merits of Jesus Crucified have earned this grace for us."¹²

Louise de Marillac led the Servants of the Poor down the path of fidelity to the charism received from God. To accomplish God's plan, Daughters of Charity are called to shine forth the true image of the God of love, that of His Son who became man among men. They are invited to follow the same road as the Lord Jesus, proclaim the human dignity revealed in Jesus Christ and live in love following the example of Jesus who loved us and died for us. Listen to these words from Saint Louise.

"O Holy Providence, You are the source of all these graces! Grant, I beseech You, that I may confide my soul to You forevermore. It is by the loving gaze of Jesus upon me that I shall obtain this grace. However, this gaze comes from above. Therefore, with the help of His holy grace, I shall detach myself from the earth and attach myself closely to God. By the practice of His Holy Presence, this gentle gaze will inflame me with His holy love.

As the deer seeks water, so my soul seeks God. I shall prepare myself by a great desire to be united to Him so that, as food shares its properties with the human body which consumes it, so the union of my soul with God may render it conformable to Him, and the reception of the Precious Blood of my Savior may lead me to imitate His most holy life."¹³

For the Community Triduum in November, Sister Kathleen invited us to admire "*St. Catherine's unwavering confidence in the Blessed Virgin and humble service to the most abandoned at Reully, and St. Vincent and St. Louise's bold decision to gather together women whose hearts were on fire with the desire to serve those who were poor. These holy people were determined to share and spread the love of God through their humanity illuminated by His grace. Our*

12. *Spiritual Writings*, L. 328 (September 22, 1651, to Sister Jeanne Lepintre), p. 372

13. *Spiritual Writings*, A. 42 (On the multiplication of the loaves in the desert), p. 778

reflection should help us become more appreciative of the precious treasures embedded in our history.

*In this time when each of us is striving to welcome the call to Ephata and break through the gate in order to go toward and encounter, let us risk witnessing the presence of God to others, grounded in Him and relying on Mary's intercession... Encouraged by this advice from Pope Francis: '... we are asked to open our eyes and take a moment to experience fully and with gratitude every one of life's little gifts' (Christus vivit, 146)."*¹⁴

The mystery of Providence opens for us a horizon where the boldness of charity becomes inventive even to infinity!

Conclusion

Let us conclude with a prayer from Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890), canonized on Sunday, October 13, 2019. He was a theologian, novelist, poet and philosopher, a national hero and a true gentleman who developed the art of friendship better than most anyone. Cardinal Newman always managed to attract like a magnet and influence many people seeking meaning.

Newman fully deserves recognition as a model for holiness as much for his life as for the exemplarity of his thinking. In the homily for his canonization, Pope Francis noted three verbs that could encourage us to more fully surrender to the mystery of Providence: **cry out, walk and give thanks**. Cry out in prayer, walk in action and give thanks in praise.

On this retreat day, *"let us ask to be 'kindly lights' amid the encircling gloom. Jesus, 'stay with me, and then I shall begin to shine as you do: so to shine as to be a light to others.'"*¹⁵

14. Sister Kathleen Appler, Letter of November 27, 2019

15. Pope Francis, Homily of October 13, 2019

Jesus, I trust in you.

With Saint John Henry Newman, let us pray:

Dear Lord... flood my soul with your spirit and life.

*Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly
that all my life may only be a radiance of yours.*

*Shine through me, and be so in me
that every soul I come in contact with may feel your presence in
my soul.*

Let them look up and see no longer me but only you, O Lord!

*Stay with me, and then I shall begin to shine as you do;
so to shine as to be a light to others.
The light, O Lord, will be all from you; none of it will be mine.*

It will be you shining on others through me.

*Let me thus praise you
in the way which you love best,
by shining on those around me.*

*...by the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to you.
Amen.¹⁶*

Father Bernard SCHOEPFER
Director General

16. <https://www.daily-prayers.org/angels-and-saints/prayers-of-saint-john-henry-newman/>

Letter of January 1, 2020

Dear Sisters,

*“And Mary kept all these things,
reflecting on them in her heart.”*

(Luke 2:19)

Happy Feast of Mary, the Mother of God! Recalling, as we read in today’s Gospel, that Mary *“kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart,”* may her example transform us during this new year – a year honoring Saint Genevieve, whose virtues Saint Vincent put forward for us to imitate, on the 1600th anniversary of her birth.

Allow me to begin by extending my deep gratitude for your communications these past weeks. I treasure what you have shared and thank you for your promise of prayers and Mass offerings for my needs and those of the Company. Both the joys and the struggles that you recounted speak to me of your unconditional love of God and your firm resolve to be faithful to your vocation.

Your messages reveal your acute awareness of how much our world needs people who can offer hope, especially to those who are poor, whose lives are clouded by uncertainty, political crises, corruption, the specter of war, and inaction on environmental issues. Your efforts to be present among those who are poor, OPEN to their needs, and to find ways to BREAK THROUGH THE GATE, GO TOWARDS, and ENCOUNTER convince me of the richness of your exploration of the Assemblies’ theme. What you describe is “EPHATA!”: that is, local community encounters characterized by a climate of faith and mutual listening. In my mind’s eye, I picture your honest and simple discussions to discern the path the

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Lord wants you, His servants, to follow. I see you heeding God's call to "*go forth, to courageously give up your routines, comfort zones and ways of centering upon yourselves, your local communities and your Provinces in order to see beyond all borders,*" to "*review how you live the Gospel, sent into the world in order to commit more or differently,*" and to "*live fraternal love in order to strengthen the spirit of communion and respond to the missionary challenges of our time*" (cf. Work Document for the Domestic Assembly, p. 8).

For all this, I give thanks to God. It is evident that the Little Company is very much alive. Moreover, I believe that we desire that it be even more so! Our collective energy, wisdom, and dedication offer the potential of going deeper in our responses to those who are poor and one another in community. Empowered by this vitality, let us then enter fully into situations that present themselves. Let us be confident and not turn away from the challenges.

Indeed, Assemblies are a faith event demanding a strong and authentic faith, that gracious gift given to us at our Baptism. As Mother Guillemin wrote, it is not "*inert and incapable of development.*" Through our conscious efforts and openness accompanied by God's grace, we must allow it to "*enlighten our spirit, conquer our heart and dominate every aspect of our life*" (cf. Letter of January 1, 1968). Faith is a gift, but without our collaboration, it remains barren. Let us learn from our Holy Founders, Saint Genevieve, and our first Sisters how to live it boldly and with calm confidence.

In our present age, it may seem countercultural to strive to live by faith, but we realize the importance of placing this theological virtue at the foundation of all of our decisions and actions, permeated by confidence in Divine Providence, so cherished by St. Vincent. Our total trust in Jesus and abandonment to His will help us to discover or rediscover the sacred possibility contained within every commitment to those who are poor and to one another that derives from our dialogue. Yes, "*the Daughters of Charity want*

to advance in their Gospel-inspired way of being and acting: to live out the Gospel in 'holy and missionary' local communities (Gaudete et Exsultate, 142) in order to, together, relearn to follow Christ and continue to make bold commitments with those who are most poor" (Work Document for the Domestic Assembly, p. 8). When the theme "*permeates discussions, facilitates dialogue and opens our hearts to the Spirit*" in a spirit of faith and trust in Divine Providence, "*renewed fidelity to the insights of our Founders*" (cf. p. 3) becomes reality, now and for the future. EPHATA! May the Holy Spirit always inspire us and help us keep the climate of openness alive.

Wishing the same unifying and transformative force that we experience in our Assemblies for the entire Vincentian Family, I again invite you to pray for its upcoming meetings. I would note in particular the Vincentian Family Leadership Meeting January 8-12 in Rome, the International Assembly of the AIC March 17-21 in Bogota, and the General Assembly of the Vincentian Marian Youth July 17-21 in Bydgoszcz, Poland.

Finally, Sisters, I humbly ask for your continued prayers for my health. As you are aware, I responded well to the treatment offered me in 2019. The doctors are now recommending that I pursue chemotherapy in 2020. I remain confident in their expertise and very thankful for your spiritual support.

In closing, allow me to echo the words of Pope Francis. "*May Mary, Mother of the Prince of Peace and Mother of all peoples of the earth, accompany and sustain us at every step of our journey*" (Message for the World Day of Peace 2020). Guided by her practice of "*reflecting on [all these things] in her heart,*" let us continue our Vincentian journey together.

Affectionately united with you in prayer,

Sister Kathleen APPLER
Daughter of Charity

15

Letter of February 2, 2020

Dear Sisters,

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

On this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, I offer my special greetings to each and every one of you. Let us pause for a moment to place ourselves in the Gospel scene and consider once again Simeon's and Anna's insights and praise in their encounter with Joseph and Mary, who presented the child Jesus in the temple. With serenity and joy, Simeon predicted that this infant would be light for the Israelites and a light for the Gentiles:

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”

Anna, in turn, broadly proclaimed a message of hope and thanksgiving:

“And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.”
(Lk 2:29-32, 38)

These vibrant testimonies stemming from their encounter with the Lord mirror the purpose of the Company “to honor Our Lord Jesus Christ” (Common Rules I, 1) and our call to “present” Him

to others with words and especially by the witness of our lives (cf. C. 24b). What better way to honor Him than by drawing near to Him, contemplating Him, and making Him known to others by the means of our fidelity to the evangelical counsels and our commitment to serve those who are poor? What better way to be faithful than to once again, formally yet simply, ask for the permission to renew the vows of service of the poor, chastity, poverty, and obedience?

The multiple graces enjoyed during my reflection culminated today when I met with our Superior General, Father Tomaž Mavrič, and had the privilege of humbly presenting to him our request for Renovation on the Feast of the Annunciation. In addition to the joys and sorrows of the past year, I shared with Fr. Tomaž your concern for those who are poor made evident through your direct service of them and your continuous prayer and attention to their needs. I highlighted your heartfelt desire to give yourselves completely to the Lord and to serve Him in the person of those who are poor as well as creative and courageous decisions that reflect progressive internalization of *EPHATA* in order to *BREAK THROUGH THE GATE – GO TOWARDS – ENCOUNTER*. Mindful of the times that we, as a Company or as individuals, have hesitated to give of ourselves fully, I asked his pardon. Father Tomaž expressed his joy at our initiatives and his gratitude for our meaningful presence among those who are poor. He compassionately acknowledged our failings but centered on our aspiration to give ourselves ever more fully. He grants us permission to renew our vows on March 25, 2020, and assures us of his continued prayer and support.

The Assemblies constantly returned to my thoughts during my preparation of this letter. I am touched by how consciously you are seeking to be open to the Holy Spirit, who is stirring your hearts and uncovering necessary conversions in community life and service with and for those who are poor. Profound conversations with Jesus in preparation for the sessions of speaking and listening are what allow you to advance and go deeper with great

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confidence in God’s infinite love. Jesus Himself truly wants this. He knows that intimate moments with Him will free us from all the attachments, including past hurts, that hold us back and will thus enable us to be effective servants of His cherished people.

We have the gift of our vows to guide us along this path of conversion, liberty, and deeper commitment. They ratify our total gift of self to God. Our Constitutions state, “*The annual renewal of vows permits the Sisters to strengthen their determination to be faithful to their vocation, while it assures the stability of their service of Christ in the Company*” (C. 28d). Since the Assembly process has a similar purpose of promoting fidelity to the charism and apostolic vitality (cf. C. 84a), the theme serves as an excellent backdrop for our reflection on the new passion, zeal, and creativity to which this year’s Renovation invites us. May the creating Spirit work in us and give us His wisdom and fortitude during these weeks preceding the Solemnity of the Annunciation.

Allow me to begin with the vow of service of Christ in those who are poor, which gives a firm foundation to the other three vows. This vow gives us the strength and energy to be servants of our sisters and brothers who are poor. It challenges us to *be opened*, that is, to give ourselves entirely to others in the complexity of their reality and thus strive to accompany them in holistic development. We can then break through the gate that may have separated us from those in need, go towards them, and encounter them in a personal way. Humbly, simply, and in charity, we experience the joy – but perhaps also at times the exhaustion – of offering ourselves to those who are most vulnerable and most deprived. Loving and serving with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength takes everything. Nothing is “left over”. We are called to surrender all to God, confident in the promise reiterated by Pope Francis: “*The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created*” (*Gaudete et exsultate*, 1).

This vow also demands that we take up our ministry with others and carry out common tasks together. Community life offers significant insights into what it means to serve and care for others. It brings out the importance of joy and sharing as well as forgiveness and responsible decision making. Our ministry is enriched by the virtues and values that we “practice” in our local community. Communities that form for a particular service – pastoral teams, associations, groups of employees or collaborators – should correspond to Saint Paul’s appeal: “... *complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus...*” (Phil 2:2-5).

If we sincerely believe that those who are poor are our “lords and masters”, this identification will have a profound influence on how we render our service and how we think of ourselves. Our service will communicate Jesus because it is carried out by a servant, and listening, obedience, and respect will be our guiding values. Saint Louise asserted, “*Gentleness, cordiality and forbearance must be the practices of the Daughters of Charity just as humility, simplicity and the love of the holy humanity of Jesus Christ, who is perfect charity, is their spirit*” (SW, L. 377, p. 406). Are we willing to develop these as our identifying traits in 2020 and beyond? May we never cease praying with the psalmist, “*I am your servant; give me discernment that I may know your decrees*” (Ps 119:125).

The vow of chastity calls for a free and complete gift for the sake of the Kingdom. It is an outward sign of our covenant with God. Truly, it is a response of love to a call of Love (cf. C. 29). This vow can only be lived authentically if we allow Jesus’ example and accompaniment to transform chastity into an “Ephata” experience in which we open ourselves to fruitfulness rather than close ourselves in sterility. We will be challenged to renew our

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intimate union with Christ. He will help us to *break through the gate* of our self-centeredness that looks to personally fulfilling experiences, our “reserve” that excessively defends our private spaces, and our tendency to save our energy for our personal interests. Pope Francis invites us, “*Look at Jesus. His deep compassion reached out to others. It did not make him hesitant, timid or self-conscious, as often happens with us... We are weak, yet we hold a treasure that can enlarge us and make those who receive it better and happier*” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 131).

Jesus wants us to go towards others armed with the sole power of God’s love in order to reach out to others with a heart open to welcoming His graces. The treasure that we have discovered must not remain buried. He longs for us to *encounter* Him in all relationships and share the love that He weaves among us in our daily interactions. Our local communities, our ministries, and our parishes will then become attractive witnesses of genuine charity, capable of being for the world a sign that passes on the values all too often lacking in it. We owe this in a particular way to young people. In a letter to the Sisters in Chantilly, Saint Louise stressed the importance of the Gospel message that a local community offers to the people of the area. “*I praise God with all my heart for the grace His goodness has granted you to be a source of edification where He has seen fit to place you. However, be sure to thank Him for it through the practice of the virtues He asks of you, especially great cordiality and mutual understanding among you. Am I not wrong in recommending this virtue to you, my dear Sisters, because without it you would be unable to be not only good Daughters of Charity, but even good Christians?*” (SW, L. 276, p. 314)

This year, what opening is the Lord asking of us for a more mature and profound practice of this vow? He will surely reveal the answer to us if we allow Him to fulfill His word in us: “*I will betroth you to me forever: I will betroth you to me with justice and with judgment, with loyalty and with compassion; I will betroth you to me with fidelity, and you shall know the Lord*” (Hos 2:21-22).

The spirit of abandonment to the Father, following the example of Jesus Himself, is necessary to live the vow of poverty in its fullness. We strive to live in a way that demonstrates that God is our only treasure and to commit ourselves to total dependence on Him in all things. Despite the temptations against confidence in Divine Providence, we must *break through the gate* of our fear that we might not have “enough” and might not have enough control. We should express in concrete ways that our quality of life comes not from the quantity of possessions or our “superiority”, but from our trust that God will always be with us and will take care of us. Saint Louise defined “*holy poverty and confidence in God*” as “*the two pillars of the Company of the Daughters of Charity*” (SW, L. 489, p. 518). Establishing our life on them will further help us adopt a healthier and more responsible attitude toward the resources of the earth, letting go of a sense of entitlement and caring for the planet with a view to future generations. As the Pope has insisted, “*Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit*” (Laudato Si’, 159).

If we go towards more authentic communal poverty, it will be a positive stimulus for transforming our missions and services. Let us take advantage of this opportunity to evaluate our way of doing things and, if necessary, revise our missions, our services, our daily living, etc. When the vow of poverty reinforces the value of sharing, mutual assistance, collaboration, and communion, it will help us *encounter* God, our Sisters, and those who are poor. Indeed, the poor of heart are open to receiving from and sharing with others. This attitude of dependence is a prerequisite for being evangelized by persons who are poor.

Are we capable of letting go of our need to feel secure and independent and truly share all with our Sisters and those who are

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poor? Our material and spiritual treasure is not made for storage units but to be received from the Father to return to Him and share freely, for “*where your treasure is, there also will your heart be*” (Mt 6:21).

In its purest form, the vow of obedience makes us offer our unconditional availability for doing the will of God and carrying out His plan for the Little Company. It always involves a free choice of following God’s will in our lives as mediated through legitimate authority. Obedience makes us *break through the gate* of individualism in favor of community unity that enables us to work together in an atmosphere of trust and dialogue for the realization of the kingdom and the glory of God. Indeed, a spiritual perspective on our life in community does not intend simply to make us feel good together but serve Him who has called and assembled us. This requires “*common discernment and the apostolate of listening,*” Pope Francis has stated, continuing with this question: “*If you don’t know how to listen to your brother or sister who is near you, how are you going to listen to God who is not directly in front of you?*” (*The Strength of a Vocation*, p. 74).

Obedience demands that in faith, we *go towards* the common good in order to commit ourselves without reserve for the sake of a project beyond ourselves, God’s plan. It takes concrete form through communication with Superiors, mutual sharing of information, responding to consultations, asking permissions, and conscientious rendering of accounts. This vow is a radical act of self-emptying, and its practice is the virtue of the strong, not of the weak. Saint Louise said as much when she wrote to the Sisters in Angers, “*This, my dear Sisters, is what it means to be true Daughters of Charity, for the mark of charity in a soul is, among all other virtues, this ability to put up with everything. Also, show great esteem for what God says to you through the person who holds the place of your Sister Superior, whoever she may be at one time or another*” (SW, L. 104b, p. 114). Obedience leads us to *encounter* those people whom God wants us to

meet in order to proclaim the Good News to those who are poor so that they might enter into the joy of friendship with God.

Will we develop our spiritual and human maturity, availability, and sense of co-responsibility for the good of the mission that God has entrusted to us? Let us echo the psalmist, “*In the written scroll it is prescribed for me; to do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart*” (Ps 40:8-9).

Following the example of our Holy Founders, we can live the four vows in such a way that we participate in an incredible *Ephata* experience, freed from whatever holds us back from fuller union with God. If we do commit to giving ourselves radically, I believe that that the vows provide us with the energy as well as the framework to *break through the gate* in order to *go towards* and *encounter*. Each one of us must ask: Am I ready to live the vows radically in order to open myself to the transforming Spirit, grow closer to Christ, and place myself securely in God’s hands so as to do His holy will?

We are blessed to have the Mother of God as our model and teacher. Our Constitutions remind us that Mary is “*the Virgin who heeds and welcomes the Word of God, the Virgin who prays, the Virgin who offers*” (C. 23). She is a perfect guide. She heard the powerful testimonies of Simeon and Anna in the temple and received joy, comfort, hope, and confidence from them despite the prediction of a sword that would pierce her heart. May we never cease developing our relationship with her and imploring her, who is full of grace, to direct us in the ways of simplicity and unwavering trust in God’s loving plan for us.

In your name, I take this opportunity to assure of our prayers and thank those whom Divine Providence, according to Saint Louise’s expressed wish, have given us: Father Tomaž Mavrič, Father Bernard Schoepfer, Father Robert Maloney, Father Gregory Gay, Father Javier Alvarez, and Father Patrick Griffin. Their wisdom and brotherly interest are great supports for our vocation.

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I also offer the promise of our prayers for Sister Juana Elizondo and Sister Evelyne Franc, in thanksgiving for their faithful and competent leadership in the past and their daily prayer for the Company. Through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, may the Lord bless them with the graces they need at this time.

Sisters, let us support each other in our preparation for Renovation through our prayer, simple sharing of what the Lord communicates to us, and good example for a greater fidelity to our vocation today. I ask Saint Vincent's intercession to bestow once again God's blessing upon us, borrowing his words from July 5, 1640, at the end of a conference on the vocation of a Daughter of Charity.

"May God be blessed for the good resolutions you've just taken to serve Him! They'll help you to grow more exemplary in the vocation to which He has called you. I beg the Divine Goodness to give you the graces necessary to keep them and to unite yourselves ever more perfectly in His holy love. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen" (CCD IX, 16).

Affectionately united with you in prayer,

Sister Kathleen APPLER
Daughter of Charity

Lenten Letter 2020

“The transforming power of prayer”

Dear sisters and brothers in Saint Vincent,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

In this Lenten season, we continue to reflect on the foundations of Saint Vincent de Paul’s spirituality. What made Saint Vincent a Mystic of Charity is the fact that prayer was at the center of his life. How do I understand prayer? What does prayer mean to me?

Depending on the answer, on the one hand, prayer can become a burden to be carried out day after day. It can be a collection of texts, formulas, body positions, and rules that I am required to follow. In that case, prayer eventually becomes useless, something that does not speak to me personally or to the reality of my life. However, as Saint Vincent said, *“One cannot hope for much from someone who does not continually converse with God. Further, if someone does not serve the Lord as they should, it is because they are not attached enough to God, and have not asked for his grace with perfect confidence.”*¹

On the other hand, if prayer becomes indispensable for my life, something that cannot be detached from my person, from what I think, say, and do, then it takes on a transforming power. Prayer is a state of being, a continuous relationship with Jesus, and a source

1. Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul* (Books 1-3), edited by John E. Rybolt, CM; translated by William Quinn, FSC; notes by Edward R. Udovic, CM and John E. Rybolt, CM; New City Press, New Rochelle, New York, 1993; book III, chapter six, page 56.

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of meaning. In it, I find my life focus, my vocation, my mission, and responses for questions in my life. Because prayer originates in God, its transforming power within me continually makes “all things new.” Transformative communication is God’s nature.

When God wants to communicate himself, He does it effortlessly, in a perceptible, very pleasant, gentle, loving way; so, let’s ask Him often and with great confidence for this gift of meditation. On His part, God asks for nothing better; let’s pray to Him, but let’s do it with great confidence, and be assured that, in His great mercy, He’ll grant it to us in the end.²

Prayer is the place where I meet Jesus, talk to Jesus, listen to Jesus, and share with Jesus. It is where I put questions to Jesus, where I confidently put myself into His hands. When I approach everything I think, say, and do as part of a personal relationship with Jesus, all my thoughts, words, and actions become prayer. I am in front of Someone. I am with Someone. I am talking, listening, and sharing with Someone who is the “Love” of my life and whom I long to resemble. Such a relationship requires humility in order to open myself to Him and give Him the right to pilot my life.

Take my word for it, my dear confreres, take my word for it, it’s an infallible maxim of Jesus Christ, which I’ve often proclaimed to you on His behalf, that, as soon as a heart is empty of self, God fills it. God remains and acts in it; and it’s the desire for shame that empties us of ourselves; that’s hu-

2. *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XI, p. 208; conference 129, “Repetition of Prayer,” 4 August 1655. Future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials *CCD*, followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, *CCD XI, 208*.

mility, holy humility. Then it won't be ourselves acting but God acting in us, and all will go well.³

During the day, as well as at night, whether I am awake or asleep, I thus remain in constant contact with Jesus, in constant prayer. This is the meaning of Saint Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians, "pray without ceasing"⁴ or Saint Vincent's appeal to the Daughters of Charity, "...if you can, pray every hour, or even never stop praying at all, for meditation is so excellent that we can never make it too much."⁵ All becomes prayer, and all becomes Love when my primary concern is this divine relationship.

Christ said: *Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things which you need will be given to you as well.* That is the basis for each of us having the following set of priorities: matters involving our relationship with God are more important than temporal affairs; spiritual health is more important than physical; God's glory is more important than human approval.⁶

Indeed, prayer transforms my hierarchy of values and my relationship to people, objects, places, and time. My priorities become different from those of the world even as I live in it. The so-called letter to Diognetus offers a description of early Christians that should apply to me as well:

Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Their teaching is not based upon reveries

3. CCD XI, 281; conference 141, "The Ecclesiastical State" [September 1655].

4. 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

5. CCD IX, 325; conference 37, "Mental Prayer," 31 May 1648.

6. CCD XIIIa, 433; document 117a, "Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission," Chapter II, 2 (17 May 1658).

inspired by the curiosity of men. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not expose them. They share their meals, but not their wives. They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law.

Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything. They suffer dishonor, but that is their glory. They are defamed, but vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult. For the good they do they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then they, rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life.⁷

7. Office of Readings for Wednesday of the fifth week of Easter, Chapter 5, "The Christian in the World."

The Christians described above never could have survived, remained faithful, overcame incredible sufferings and persecutions, and witnessed through it all – even to death – if their prayer life were not a deep relationship with the Love of their life. Jesus was their all and thus guided all their choices. This entails knowing Him and “entering into His spirit,” according to the advice Saint Vincent gave his confreres:

When the occasions arise, we may ask ourselves. ‘How did Our Lord judge such or such a thing? How did He act in such or such a circumstance? What did He say and do regarding certain matters?’ and thus we may adapt our whole way of acting in accord with His maxims and examples. So then, let’s take this resolution, Messieurs, and walk confidently along this royal road on which Jesus Christ will be our leader and guide, remembering that He has said that heaven and earth will pass away (cf. Matthew 24:35), but His words will never pass away. Let’s bless Our Lord, brothers, strive to think and judge as He did, and do what He recommended by His words and examples. Let’s enter into His Spirit to adopt His ways of acting; for doing good isn’t everything; it must be done well, in imitation of Our Lord, of whom it is said. *Bene omnia fecit*: He has done all things well (cf. Mark 7:37). No, it’s not enough to fast, to observe the Rules, to carry out the ministries of the Mission; but we must do this in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that is, with perfection, for the purpose, and in the way He did them.⁸

One example of Jesus that I should adopt concerns His prayer. Jesus often prayed by going to a place of solitude where He could remain alone with God the Father. Over the course of history and still today, many saints and other Christians took and take

8. CCD XI, 43; conference 35, “Prudence.”

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time away from their regular duties and ministries to go into the “desert” to be alone with Jesus.

Besides the prayer, in community or alone, that I already practice on a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly basis, can I find any other ways of going into the “desert” to deepen my intimate relationship with Jesus? The desert can be a place to which I go physically or a state of mind not linked to a concrete place. Where can I find that desert? How often can I go to the desert? How long can I stay in the desert?

May our prayer become a gift for each other. Let us be witnesses of the “transforming power of prayer.”

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Father Tomaž MAVRIČ, CM
Superior General

Province of Belo Horizonte

Vincentian formation session in Brazil

During the Visitatrixes' meeting in May 2018 at the Motherhouse (Paris), the Holy Spirit inspired us to offer Sisters in our large country a session to revitalize love of Jesus Christ in the person of the poor, the sense of belonging to the Company as well our responsibility for tending to our Vincentian roots. This project was born from the heart of God.

There was a year of study and reflection in preparation for this session, which consisted of reading and going more deeply into the documents of the Founders, those of the Company, the Constitutions and Statutes, the writings of Superiors, the Guides (Initial Formation, Sister Servant and Provincial Treasurer) as well as the documents of the Church, the Brazilian Conference of Bishops and others. The process involved personal study and then group study in order to present documents to the local community. It was a beautiful, rich experience for the entire community.

Finally, the session took place from July 1 to August 3, 2019. The session began with a Eucharistic celebration in which Father Bernard Schoepfer, Director General of the Company, Sister Corina Bastos, General Councillor, the Visitatrixes and Provincial



*News from
the Provinces*

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Directors of Brazil and Portugal and 64 Sisters from the six Provinces of Brazil - Amazonia, Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Fortaleza, Recife and Rio de Janeiro - participated.

How bold and prophetic of the Company to increase the desire to set off at the service of life, the Kingdom of God and fidelity to the charism beyond borders. We felt this boldness through the message of Sister Kathleen Appler: *“Sisters, be well aware of the mystery and sacredness of these weeks. May the new insights that will arise in the days to come encourage and support you. May you discover that those who are poor invite you to an intimate relationship with Christ and with all those whom He most loves.”* Sister Corina Bastos then introduced the session by inviting us to *“experience a revolution of tenderness”* throughout this privileged time. Father Bernard Schoepfer helped us to reflect more deeply on the *prayer life of the Daughters of Charity*.

Each presenter made a special contribution and encouraged us to deepen our understanding of the Word of God and the documents of the Company and the Church by receiving them as a priceless treasure, a freely received inheritance.

We need to be guided and to adapt to the reality of today. We picked out as fruits of this session the calls to which we should respond with acts; we brought these together in an action plan. In the Province of Belo Horizonte, this plan was presented to the Provincial Council and to the Sisters Servants. Guidelines soon will be sent to each local community, which should implement them over three years (2020-2023). This initiative leads us to pray more with people's lives and everyday events and to be on guard against becoming too comfortable and neglecting details. It helps us to truly enter into the history of local populations. We are grateful for this method that the Company offered us to help us adopt this posture.

Here are some testimonies from Sisters who experienced the richness of this privileged time:

-Thanks to this session and an intense prayer life, I drank at the source of the Founders and nourished my vocation “at the Teacher’s feet”.

-This session helped me to go more deeply into the writings of the Company, to revitalize the charism in me and to strengthen my identity as a Daughter of Charity. Thanks to the good atmosphere that reigned among us and the witness of simplicity and of the desire to progress in one’s vocation, this time helped me to review and evaluate life at every moment.

-The entire session led me to rethink, pray and review my vocational call and the response I gave nearly fifty years ago. Everything was prepared and carried out with much love and over time. There was no improvisation apparent. The presenters were excellent, and the coordinating committee was well organized. What a richness of cultural and regional differences. Placing them in common created a beautiful harmony, depth in liturgies and complementarity in discussions and group work. The coordinating committee directed this excellent “orchestra” calmly and skillfully, which produced a beautiful symphony of thanksgiving and a courageous revival of the experience of the Vincentian vocation.

-This session helped me to strengthen my sense of belonging to the Company, deepen my knowledge of the writings of the Founders and intensify my prayer life and community life. It helped me to have a more contemplative perspective on my mission and undergo a process of conversion by allowing God to lead me. I returned to the source!

-The session gave me the opportunity to strengthen my experience of the Vincentian charism and my sense of belonging to the Company. Through my studies, it contributed to reinforcing

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my identity as a Daughter of Charity and my commitment, understanding my responsibility and desire to pass on this experience with the Sisters of my Province. It gave me the strength to understand what a life energized by apostolic service, rooted in Jesus Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit is, offering the love of God through good works and community life. I become aware that by respecting differences and living human and humanizing relationships, I become a faithful servant after the example of Mary. "May I belong to God in order to serve my brothers and sisters, for such is my vocation."

This session was an opportunity for a personal and community evaluation, the establishment of solid bonds, human and spiritual enrichment. We experienced a "new Pentecost" in our lives and listened to the "groanings of the Spirit". Our times call for competence, discernment, boldness, courage and creativity. We should further open ourselves to the Holy Spirit in order to live the "here and now", look to the future with prophetic, bold and Vincentian eyes and allow ourselves to be evangelized by those who are poor and learn from them. This is the essential condition for a total gift of self.

The final word is one of gratitude towards all those who offered us this time of spiritual, community, Provincial and Interprovincial growth as well as the opportunity for quality formation based on the values of the Gospel and of the Company.

Praise the Lord for it all!

Sister Márcia Helena Silva CRUZ
Daughter of Charity

Province of Nuestra Señora de la Mision-America Sur

Conversions in Bolivian prisons and graces received through prisoners

Bolivian prisons

Generally speaking, a country's prisons reflect the government's thinking. Without denying the rights of victims, we can say that prisons are a world of exclusion, violation of human dignity, powerlessness, fear and injustice that transforms human beings into victims of a society's punitive power. In our country, the majority of prisoners are poor persons who are left to suffer this fate because penitential policies fail to respect human rights. There are, moreover, few exceptions on this count among Latin American countries.

Here is a brief overview of the reality of prisons in Cochabamba, Bolivia. In this department, there are six penitential facilities with approximately 2,800 detainees who are paying for their crimes. Most of them are youth who did not have the opportunity for human and intellectual formation. Deprived of a family, these young people spent their childhood on the streets and grew up amid violence, theft and vices of all sorts. No one ever loved them or took care of them. In these penitential facilities, there are also elderly people and people with tuberculosis and AIDS, chronic illnesses. An atmosphere of violence and corruption reigns there, and we encounter many interrelated problems. Detention conditions are inadequate: run-down buildings, overcrowding, non-existent hygiene standards, little space for walking, resting or talking...

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However, amid all this suffering, sometimes there are expressions of humanity. Some prisoners acknowledge the wrong that they have done; others silently bear their abandonment, violence against them or abuse of power by their guards; still others are even capable of thanking God for “having lifted the veil over their eyes” that kept them from seeing themselves as they were. Prison then becomes for them a “place” of encounter with the love of God and His mercy.

Can prison produce a real rehabilitation for some prisoners?

From the beginnings of Christianity, the Church has made every effort to address injustices and conditions that lead people to commit crimes. With the conviction that God dwells in the heart of every person, we see these people called “delinquent” as human beings with rights and duties. We attend to their well-being without regard for the crimes they may have committed. For the prison ministry staff, not a single human person is excluded from the love of God. All crimes should face human justice but also forgiveness.

In Bolivia, the role of prison ministry developed as a result of efforts over several years on issues concerning criminal justice and human rights. Its mission is the fruit of a collaboration with many people and organizations seeking alternatives: prevention of violations of rights and of the destruction of families, improvement of interpersonal relationships and reduction of violence within the prison to the extent possible. Denying these rights and passively ignoring violation of human dignity equates to contributing to an increasingly flawed society.

The objective of prison ministry in the department of Cochabamba

Our prison ministry has the goal of “humanizing the prison world by developing all the dimensions of the human person, defending and fighting for prisoners’ human rights, demanding respect of their human condition and avoiding any personal or moral harm.” In line with the priorities of prison ministry, we make known the activities done in favor of prisoners and their families.

In the spiritual domain, we offer catechetical and Biblical formation, share on the Word of God and celebrate the sacraments. *In the health domain*, some patients’ care is covered when the government does not do so. Preventative health care plans are developed in conjunction with competent authorities. *In the legal domain*, we give advice and follow up on legal procedures. *In the social domain*, development programs are implemented for young children who live in prison with their parents. We also have sporting and recreational activities for them outside the penitentiary facility. To improve the adults’ professional skills, there are materials and training workshops in different trades.

The Inter-Institutional Commission, consisting of the Departmental Criminal Tribunal, the Public Ministry, the Public Defense Department, the Public Defendant, the Governor of prisons, the Penitentiary System and delegates representing prisoners, asked the prison ministry staff to collaborate with these different public authorities. It is a body for reflection and discussion that seeks solutions to problems existing in prisons, makes decisions and makes commitments.

These government entities greatly appreciate the fact that the prison ministry staff serves free of charge.

Visiting prisoners, an encounter with Jesus Christ

For prisons to become a place of encounter with Jesus Christ requires ongoing conversion. Of course, we could receive acclaim for the work we do like NGO members that work in prisons. The only difference is that we try to be on a path of conversion

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in each of the visits that we make to prisons because we believe that Jesus acts in those who are poor. This is why it is important for us to return constantly to the Jesus of the Gospel, incarnate in the poorest of the poor.

If we are not centered or “rooted” in Jesus Christ, if compassion is not at the heart of our service of evangelization or our everyday work and if those who are poor and excluded do not have priority in our lives, consecrated life is not a source of salvation nor a building up of the Kingdom of God. It is thus urgently necessary to return to the Gospel roots, to what Jesus lived and what Saint Vincent left us as a spiritual inheritance.

We readily say that persons who are poor evangelize us. However, this requires our conversion, that is, our concern for the happiness of others and our ability to welcome those who suffer, listen to them and accompany them. Those who are poor easily recognize if someone is a friend of sinners and simple people and if someone is fraternal, good, humble, charitable, able to share their questions, their difficulties, their joys, their misfortunes and to spend their life in the service of those who are most poor. Prisoners' suffering and that of their families gives us the opportunity to experience this conversion in order to live out God's mercy in Jesus Christ. This is why we need to deepen conversion in our lives. It is not an easy task because we live in a time of unprecedented socio-cultural change, so it is also necessary to enter into an unprecedented process of conversion. We need a new heart to engender faith in Jesus Christ in a new way. We should not fear facing our sin because all of us are responsible to a greater or lesser extent for the misfortune of those who are poor through omission, passivity and/or mediocrity, as Pope Francis so often reminds us.

What does this demand of us?

This demands seeking a better quality relationship with Jesus, not fearing to confess Him explicitly and contemplating Jesus the “prophet” who proclaims the Kingdom and denounces all forms

of hypocrisy. Jesus attracts by His love; He calls and touches hearts. This requires us to listen more attentively to His Word that shows us His way of being, living and loving. It means we should have concern for human beings, relieve their sufferings and always trust more in God. This effort to learn to think, feel, love and live like Jesus should be at the heart of our lives and be a reality in our service in order to better live out the grace of evangelical conversion, granted through persons who are poor. When we say discover the new calls and paths of evangelization and that we know the past work of the Church in prisons, this makes us go more deeply into the reality of mutuality reflected by positive expressions of people who live in deep poverty: hunger, exclusion and misery. We cannot be satisfied with calculating statistics on poverty in prisons; we should do our best to fight to put an end to it. This is the strength of the call to conversion inspired by mutuality.

I can say with my faith convictions that poor persons break through barriers of power, wealth and pride. Those who are poor unmask us; ultimately, they reveal Jesus Christ to us. They make it possible for those who come to help them to discover their own poverty and vulnerability; they also allow them to discover their capacity to love, the power of love in their heart. Those who are poor have a mysterious power. In their fragility, they are able to touch hardened hearts and to renew the ‘springs of living water’ hidden within us. Those who are poor free us.

Those who are poor evangelize us, and they are the treasures of the Church, as long as conversion is present in our apostolic life and if we do bring Jesus into the lives of prisoners, it is because our faith motivation in service is not rooted in Jesus Christ. Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, she bore Jesus within her, there was mutuality in the greeting that comes through in positive feelings (Lk 1:19-56). This generates joy, solidarity, trust, mercy, unconditional service, peace and love.

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God does not want something forced from us. He simply wants to see us live a more human and happier life. Let us give meaning to our converted lives based on our faith in Jesus Christ. May this life of faith give meaning to the life of those around us, preferentially the poorest of the poor, and may it help them to regain their dignity as persons.

Sister María Ángeles GONZÁLEZ
Daughter of Charity

Region of Albania

“Baptized and sent”

“Those who are reborn by water and by the Holy Spirit — the baptized — are called to go out of themselves and be open to others, to live the closeness, the way of living together, which transforms every interpersonal relationship into an experience of fraternity” (Audience of Pope Francis, October 16, 2019). In this time when the Church has proclaimed a new missionary springtime, the two of us were sent to spend the Extraordinary Missionary Month in southern Albania, a region where the Gospel is little known.

The first week, we reached out to three small Christian communities; one in Berat, another in Kuçova, and the third in Uznova. We visited poor families and sick people; we met several individuals who requested Baptism and others who wanted to know God better. The first day of the mission began in Uznova with the celebration of the Eucharist. At the end of Mass, each baptized Christian - and thus the two of us - received a cross and was sent on mission. We visited families who were Muslim by tradition but had expressed the desire to receive Baptism in the Catholic Church. We explained to them the meaning of the sign of the cross, then we shared on two verses from John’s Gospel (Jn 3:16-18), presenting Jesus the Savior who offers salvation to all people. We continued with a time of prayer for the families and their needs. To conclude, we offered them a Miraculous Medal, explaining the message of Mary Immaculate and her maternal protection. The following Sunday, World Mission Day, we went from Berat to Vlora. At the end of the Mass, four people received

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a cross to take to others. Then, the families gathered, and a couple from Shkodra testified to their faith to encourage and support those just beginning to live the Christian faith. In addition to these gatherings, we visited other people, either from the Muslim tradition or the Orthodox religion, all of whom were open and wished to know the God of Jesus Christ better.

In the village of Memaliaj, one and a half hours from Vlora, we met Dionis, a nineteen-year-old boy, who had recently been diagnosed with a rare condition, muscular dystrophy. Dionis' path to the Church was quite amazing: coming from a Muslim family, he knew nothing about the Catholic Church, but after visiting the website of the Church in Vlora, he sent his mother there, convinced that he would find consolation with the members of the Church. His mother managed to speak with the bishop, and, after several preparatory sessions, Dionis requested Baptism. He repeatedly said that Baptism would be a real gift for him because he would then be able to proclaim the Gospel to others. His youngest sister, who had secretly read the Bible, had insistently prayed to the Lord for her brother's salvation. Since the day of his Baptism, Dionis constantly announces Christ, both on social networks and with his friends. His house has become like a small chapel. Many people want to come to know Dionis' Jesus. Given the steady increase in the number of members of this Christian community, the bishop rented a space formerly housing a bar in order to reach out each week to these new Christians, teach them the catechism and celebrate their faith in Jesus Christ with them. We were blessed to be present for the inauguration of the space. We prayed together, and, after the proclamation of the Word of God, we explained how we came to know the Lord. Their words were very moving. *"We knew that there was a God, but no one had ever spoken about Him as you do with us today."* Despite the pain that caused Dionis great suffering, he remained with us. Immobilized and deformed, he did not want to draw attention to himself but rather to keep the focus on Jesus, the prince of peace. He continues to write daily on the web, saying that he unites his

sufferings to those of Christ crucified and that he offers them for various intentions.

To conclude the Extraordinary Missionary Month, a solemn Mass was held at the Sports Complex in Vlora. Early in the morning, people from all over Albania came to participate in the celebration with the Albanian bishops and all the missionaries who work here. There was a rich program before Mass: songs, testimonies on faith life and conversion and the sending on mission of an Albanian family to Vlora. Many young Christians participated in this Mass, a sign of a living Church. This filled us with hope: yes, the Church in Albania is full of energy and life.

This experience was a great grace for us that allowed us to experience something of the primitive Church of the Apostles. We thank the Lord for the wonders that He continues to work day after day.

Sister Tone DEDAJ and Sister Aferdita KOLIQI
Daughters of Charity

Quasi-Province

Five glimmers of light along my path

By God's pure mercy, I have been a Daughter of Charity for twenty-four years; otherwise, my many weaknesses would have led me down very different paths.

I have entitled my presentation "glimmers of light along my path" because I find, along the path of my life, certain glimmers of what I wish to live deeply and that, one day, I hope to experience fully in God. I will share five of the many glimmers of light that enlightened my vocation and that helped me to see the meaning of my life more clearly.

When Saint Vincent told the first Sisters, "Those who are poor will be your masters," he was in fact sharing his own experience. The glimmers of light that I am going to share are lessons received from people whom God placed on my path, migrants or people who are homeless. Their names, which I hold dearly in my heart, have been changed for this presentation.

My first experience took place in my hometown, well before my entrance in the Company. It involved an attitude and an action of my mother, who helped me to understand that, indeed, "love is inventive even to infinity." In my village, there was a woman named Maria-Antonia who lived alone in great austerity due to insufficient financial means. The neighbor women often gossiped about her, especially her uncleanliness. Listening to them, my mother wanted to do something but did not know how to help

her. One day, she had the idea to say to her, “*Maria-Antonia, last night, I dreamt that I was washing your laundry. By chance, would it be because you would need that?*” The woman very humbly accepted my mother’s offer. Then, the question was how to do this quietly. My mother asked me (I was 14 years old) to visit her once a week. In that way, I could take her dirty laundry and the next week bring it back to her, clean and ironed. This visits influenced me greatly; each week, Maria-Antonia eagerly awaited my visit. Yes, love makes us creative.

During my first stay in Paris, from 2000 to 2007, I better understood the importance of affection and respect for each person’s pace in opening hearts and minds. Sister Catalina, who initiated me in the service of prison visitation and whom I accompanied on her visits to Spanish-speaking elderly and sick people, had come to know Maria, a Spaniard who had immigrated to Paris at a young age and had found a job as a telephone operator for calls to Latin America. When Sister Catalina learned that Maria had been confined to a mental hospital, she brought me to visit her.

At the end of her treatment, the staff recommended that Maria return home if we would agree to accompany her. What we found in her home was unimaginable and distressing. Maria suffered from Diogenes syndrome, and everything had so much value and meaning for her that she could not throw anything away. The trash bags that a friend had prepared to throw away were still there, and Maria would not allow us to dispose of them. I had to repack them one by one to find precious treasures like locks of her hair that she didn’t want someone to use for witchcraft on her, etc.; alas, the list would be too long to recount... It is impossible for me to say how many days and hours I spent with her. Then, Maria was re-hospitalized because of her neighbors’ complaints. Before the date of her scheduled discharge from the hospital and with her permission, we were able to clean her home thoroughly. Much affection, patience and time convinced Maria to return to Spain. We were able to get her a place in a retirement home run by our Sisters. This retirement home was close to my hometown,

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so my mother was able to visit Maria until her death. At each visit, Maria expressed her gratitude for the patience and affection with which the Sisters had treated her.

It was also in Paris that I received my third lesson, but this time in prison visitation. “Loving differently, loving in freedom like Jesus is possible!” At the Prison “de la Santé”, I accompanied a young Chilean man, whom we will call “Diablito rehabilitado” (reformed little devil) because that was how he signed his letters. In this service, I strengthened my conviction that living and expressing chastity is a means to help other people grow in love. I visited “Diablito rehabilitado” for two years. When I was missioned back to Spain, I went to say goodbye to him, and in our final conversation, he thanked me for having taught him that it was possible to love women in another way than what he had thought. Thus, it is worthwhile to live chastely and dare to speak about chastity with simplicity.

Another lesson, which is harder for social workers to accept, is to defer to the decisions of the people whom we accompany, especially when we know that these decisions will not lead them to an improvement and even sometimes will lead them to their ultimate encounter with the Lord. This is the case of my dear “Adam”, and I use the word “dear” in the strongest sense, for the Lord allowed us to love each other dearly. He was a good man but weakened and alienated from his family because of alcohol. I accompanied him to the hospital several times; in the end, after a night of drunkenness and fighting between buddies on the streets, I was not able to convince him to go to the hospital for medical care. A few days later, his friend, who slept in the same ATM lobby as he did, awoke to find him dead. Tired of struggling, he needed a definitive embrace that would completely heal his aching body and his battered soul. God alone could offer him this embrace. A few weeks earlier, he had come to see me, very happy because a woman from the parish had given him a Bible in his native language, and a Sister had given him a protective covering for it. This Bible had become his companion and consolation.

Accompanying people who are homeless extends to death and a dignified religious farewell. When someone who had come to our day center in Madrid died, we celebrated a Eucharist in which all his or her companions in suffering and friends could participate and thus go through the mourning process.

Before concluding, I would like to share this conviction that the ways of God often are not our ways, but openness always leads us on the ways of God. One of the reasons that led me to the Company and not to one of the other religious congregations in my village or that I met during my studies was the diversity of services provided by the Daughters of Charity. However, in these varied services, I did not feel capable of being a teacher. Then, one day, I was asked to take on a service with African migrants in Albacete. This service required me not only to teach Spanish but also to educate for everyday life: organization of the house, administrative procedures, accompaniment in illness, etc. All this was interrupted by seasonal jobs that they might obtain. Eighteen men from several African countries were housed in three apartments. When I was missioned to serve at the Motherhouse, Jawara said at our last meeting, “I would like to have a heart like yours.” I blessed God and rejoiced that my presence was able to awaken a desire to be good and to have a big, generous and patient heart.

All along my path, a phrase from “Divine Impatience” (a play about Saint Francis Xavier) resonated in me: “*The most eminent virtue is to simply do what must be done.*” Saint Vincent would have said, “*The most eminent virtue is to do well what must be done.*” In order to do that, let us “*remain faithful to the Lord in firmness of heart*” (Acts 11:23).

Sister Maria del Carmen BRIONES
Daughter of Charity

Quasi-Province

My experience as an Apostolic Commissioner

Several years ago, I received a call from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to be an “apostolic visitor” of an Institute of Pontifical Right. After speaking with my Visitatrix, reflecting and praying, I accepted this service. The Dicastery sent me the official appointment, explaining my mission: “*to organize a visitation of all the local communities of this Institute and of its Superioress General and her Council.*” This is thus what I did, and I sent my report to the Dicastery. A little while later, the Dicastery re-contacted me and asked me to be the Apostolic Commissioner of this Institute. After praying, reflecting and asking advice anew, I again said, “yes”. Soon afterwards, I received the decree appointing me as Commissioner, signed by the prefect and approved by the Pope.

What is an Apostolic Commissioner?

When there are serious difficulties in an Institute, a Religious Congregation or a Society of Apostolic Life, the Dicastery decides to withdraw the mandate of the Superior General and his or her Council, and give authority over all the members and goods of the Institute, wherever it is present, to an Apostolic Commissioner.

The Dicastery indicated to me two points on which to work: unity among the members and financial problems, for employees were

demanding that their rights be respected. If I wished, I could turn to lay assistants, and every six months I should make a report on the situation. I thus began with an initial meeting in their Motherhouse with the deposed Superioress General, her Council and all the members who wished to participate. I proposed the new path to pursue together and began to learn their charism through their Founder, their Constitutions, their Directory and especially by listening individually to members. The first two years, I worked with the assistance of two well-formed lay people. The third year, after consultation with me, the Dicastery gave me two advisors, a religious sister and a diocesan priest, both of whom had previous contacts with this Institute.

What I did

I met with all of the local communities of this Institute several times in order to get to know them, listen to their personal difficulties and those of their community and Institute and call forth their collaboration by accepting changes, some closures of houses, etc.

Most of the members embraced this collaboration, even if it was a great suffering; some accepted it better than others. I asked a small group of Sisters who longed for clarity to work with me to seek the truth, even if it might be painful, and to get to the bottom of issues...

After two years of work, I welcomed the two advisors from the Dicastery and gave thanks.

What we did

We worked to help the Sisters to rediscover their vocation as those called to follow Christ in order to become disciples day after day and called to community life, to re-learn to accept each member, to be reconciled with each one even after major

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ruptures, significant suffering and misunderstanding, to seek the truth together... We did all this through spiritual exercises which we led, well-prepared times together, circular letters, visitations, changes of local community, etc.

Concerning the lay staff, we followed these three rules: transparency, justice and legality. Previously, the administration had been placed entirely in the hands of a lay man called a director, and the members of the Institute knew nothing about the administration. They only knew that there were some financial problems: significant debts, sale or closure of some houses, unpaid salaries to employees for several months, non-payment of the services cooperative, etc. Some members had clearly seen this, but they were not heeded and even were marginalized, resulting in division among the members. A large property of the Institute was closed because of poor administration... now it has reopened.

In December 2018, we had a meeting in their Motherhouse with the Prefect, his secretary, other members of the Dicastery and all the local community superiors in order to review what had been done. Then, the Prefect reappointed me their Apostolic Commissioner. However, Sister Kathleen Appler asked me to stop this mission to come to the Motherhouse at the service of the International Missionary Center. The Dicastery accepted my resignation and appointed another Apostolic Commissioner.

This mission was a great faith experience. The Lord alone gave me the strength to resist pressures and to go all the way in the quest for truth and justice, welcoming each Sister and looking only for what was in each one's interest and the common interest... most understood that. I continue to pray for each and every one of them.

This made me appreciate even more the richness of the Company and its solid foundations, particularly in what concerns the formation that we receive beginning in Postulancy and throughout our

life. I am also grateful for how we use and account for money at all levels, even if I think that today we should continue to deepen our understanding of the Dicastery's document *Economy at the Service of the Charism and Mission* and strive to put it into practice at all levels: personal, communal and Provincial. No one should manage goods all alone, but always in communion with others. Those in authority, on a local level as on a Provincial one, are invited to really exercise it as a service and to share their responsibility in concrete ways in order to help the other members grow and prepare to take on responsibilities. We must not concentrate everything in their person and in their hands. I understood well the role of lay people, the importance of selecting them carefully and their professional training. They should advise us, but it is the authority figure of the Company with her Council who should decide; never give anyone broad power of attorney.

I greatly appreciated the support of my local community that welcomed me home on the weekend so that I could again breathe in the "air" of our community. Now, I am grateful for everything and very happy to be at the Motherhouse in the International Missionary Center, under the protection of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

Sister Rosa Maria NAPOLITANO
Daughter of Charity

Quasi-Province

My life as a servant in India

After my nursing studies, I received the mission to work at a hospital that was mainly at the service of persons suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis. Around 200 patients would come to our hospital daily for treatment, most of whom were Hindus and Muslims from poor families.

At that time, we were only four Sisters working in the hospital, and there were few nurse aides to help us. Those who were admitted to the tuberculosis ward were in very serious condition and needed so much care and attention. Day or night as needed, we were always available for their service. The doctor came from outside. In any emergency situation, I had to phone the doctor to describe the condition of the patient. If a patient was critical at night, they would call me, so I had to get up for their service. I used to remember the words of St Vincent, “Leave God for God, and there you find Christ.”

Once during my annual retreat, the preacher told us to evangelize the poor whom we serve; that struck me so much. I thought, “I am only doing corporal service for them, nothing spiritual.” The patients who were admitted to the tuberculosis ward would remain two or three months in the hospital; after that, they continued their treatment for six months to a year. After returning from my retreat, I would gather them together in the evening. I would read a Biblical passage, especially the miracles of Jesus and expressions of God’s love for mankind.

Hindus believe in many gods, so it was easy to accept that there was one they did not know. However, Hindus believe that gods are frightful. Once, a young man was very sick, almost at the point of death. I told him, "Pray to Jesus; He will cure your sickness." He was cured. In the same ward, another young man was very sick. The man who was cured told him, "I prayed to Jesus and I was cured; you also pray to Jesus and you will be cured." He also got well. Another man was very sick, and he asked me to pray over him. I prayed for him and had just I left the room when his wife came running to me, telling me that he was in a very serious condition. When I approached him, he told me, "Jesus is calling," and he closed his eyes and died.

These patients were all Hindus. When they are discharged from the tuberculosis ward, they buy new clothes and sweets. They called us for prayer in front of the statue of Our Lady and distributed sweets. It was custom there. They used to ask me for a Miraculous Medal when they were admitted in the ward.

I was later transferred to another community. There we serve persons suffering from leprosy. We have a hostel for lepers' children who are not infected. We keep them until they finish their studies at a government school. We have two colonies for lepers with around a thousand families. For me, it was a totally different experience. Because of their sickness, they are completely disfigured. Some of their faces are very horrible to see; others have no fingers or toes. Their wounds never heal because they do not take care of their wounds and have the habit of going out to beg. Most of them take drugs to relieve their pain. No one would approach them. As they don't have sensation in their body, insects bite them, but they are not aware; it's only when the bite starts bleeding that they realize it. It was very pitiful. I worked in the dispensary giving them medicines and bandaging their wounds.

It was custom there before opening the dispensary to read a passage from the Gospel, make a short prayer, and then start the service. I could see that the patients were very unhappy, ungrateful,

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aggressive and demanding. If their demands were not met, they would come to fight with me. I listened to them and remained silent in order to calm the situation. It taught me how to be patient. In the beginning, I found it very difficult to serve them.

I used to remember the words of St Vincent: “*the poor are our lords and masters.*” I slowly started to win their confidence. In the evening, I visited their families and asked them about their lives. Each one has his or her own painful story to tell. When they got the sickness, they were rejected by their own families. They were forced to leave their own homes because of social prejudices. Then I started to show more love and compassion.

One man shared with me that he was an English professor at a university. When he was diagnosed with leprosy, he lost his job. One night, he ran away from his family home in order to prevent others from knowing and thus protect the name of his family. He came to stay in the colony. He received a pension, and with that money, he helped lepers' children pay for their studies. He was totally blind. When he died, his wife could not even approach his dead body out of fear that she would contract the disease.

Another man also shared his experience with me. He was a police officer. When he got the sickness, the family did not allow him to enter his house. He stayed for a month on the veranda of his house. He escaped from the family and came to our home to stay. Every morning, the Sister in charge of the home would read the Bible and explain to them about Christ. He was attracted to Christ and carried a Bible and a diary with him. He would read the Bible, and if he had any doubt, he would come to ask us for clarification. Toward the end of his life, he asked for Baptism. Because of the situation in the country, we could not baptize him. As his friend was Baptist, he became Baptist. He was kleptomaniac, with the impulse for collecting things, especially gauze, bandages and ointment. Before his death, he detached himself from everything, asked pardon and asked for Holy Communion; then, he had a very peaceful death.

Another man was very sick. He was an alcoholic and a drug addict. He was really very sick and had a bad open wound in the stomach. Nobody would approach him. I would dress his wounds, but after drinking, he would come to me in the dispensary and give me trouble. Nonetheless, when he was going to die, he asked for Baptism and he had a very peaceful death.

When anybody in the village was near death, they used to call me for prayer. Once one man mocked me, saying, “Unless you pray, he will not die.” Near our house, there is a government hospital only for lepers. The patients used to tell me that the nurses there never touched them; when they gave them injections, they wore gloves. Through our service, the lepers came to know Christ because they knew that only Christians could do this kind of service.

In 2008, there was a persecution of Christians in the state of Orissa. The Hindu fanatics started to destroy all Christian institutions and churches. The priests and religious ran away from that area. Only our two communities remained. We were afraid, so we went to ask for police protection. The police asked us, “*Are there any conversions?*” That meant, “*Are you converting anybody to Christianity?*” We told them that we were only serving the lepers, so he told us, “*As you are serving the rejected people, nobody will come to attack you. Go in peace.*” I thought that the poor are our protection. I thanked the Lord for the gift of my vocation and giving me the chance to serve such unfortunate people.

Sister Mary KATTIKARAM
Daughter of Charity

Quasi-Province

Missionary in the Province of Cameroon

When we speak about a life event, we often cannot find the right words to express what we experienced, but I will nonetheless try to share some of my discoveries with you.

When I left for the missions, I had my suitcase full of all my preparation and formation, for which I am grateful (I have always thanked those who accompanied me, the Company, the Sister's prayer and my family's generosity). Once I arrived, I understood that I did not need this suitcase because I first had to learn from the Sisters of my local community, the native population, situations and the living conditions of sick persons, etc. I filled my suitcase with the country's culture, its way of seeing life, its faith, its sufferings and its joys visible in the faces of children, with the sense of celebration during Eucharist, dance, nature... Later, little by little, I opened my first suitcase to give myself with what I was to those who are poor.

I discovered the faith and hope of families in situations of suffering and death, especially those of children very ill with malnutrition for whom there was nothing left to do or those of youth after a motorcycle accident. Without realizing it, they nonetheless bore witness in their everyday life to an interior and exterior joy, which made me truly happy. I met courageous children, always ready before going to school to help their mother to carry the wood or water and care for younger brothers and sisters. The mothers are strong women who work hard to feed their many children; fathers work in the fields all day long even when they are sick and look for food to bring home. This taught me to serve without complaining when there was too much work. Each patient for whom I cared helped

me to touch God. It was easy to find God in them; their faith taught me another way of praying to God. The celebrations of the Mass were genuine celebrations, and I experienced them intensely. I also discovered that it was possible to live alongside people who are very poor and to share life in simplicity, without desiring anything else... by giving myself to God. I received riches from persons who are poor. They gave me permission to enter into their lives to accompany them; they communicated to me and proclaimed the Gospel through their lives. Those who are poor evangelized me. All these experiences of unconditional gift led me to give myself without counting the cost, to share freely what I had received. I will never forget all that I learned from those who are poor, from sharing their joys and difficulties, all that I saw and heard, and that is what allows me to be happy today in my missionary vocation.

Despite serious problems and difficult situations, the joy of children and adults assured me that I was in the right place in their midst.

I also came to know other Churches: Orthodox, Evangelical, as well as Islam, respecting traditions and in solidarity and sharing.

One day, a Cameroonian Bishop, Jean Damay, spoke to missionaries about the need to inculturate in order to live fraternity and communion. “We want you to accompany us on the road. You should not walk ahead of us, nor behind us, but alongside us. Then, we will be able to advance together towards God.”

The Virgin Mary set off... With her, let us never tire of setting off towards those who are most poor.

To conclude, I would say that I consider the mission *Ad gentes* a double joy: that of laughing children and the joy of the vocation, of living in God. It is also the sadness of seeing so much suffering and illness and my powerlessness in not being able to help everyone.

Sister Asunción CABEZA

Daughter of Charity

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**Sister Barbara Stanislawa
Samulowska
(1865-1950)
Daughter of Charity**

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BARBARA'S CHILDHOOD

*History of
the Company*

Barbara Samulowska was born on **January 21, 1865**, in Woryty, a small village located in northeastern Poland, two kilometers from Gietrzwałd. Her parents, Jozef and Karolina, were very pious poor farmers. They already had two sons, Jozef and Jan, and were happy to have a little girl. Barbara was baptized the day after her birth in her parish church in Gietrzwałd. She was a simple and free-spirited girl; nothing, including conventions, stood in her way. She would run like a doe and would rarely walk calmly. Someone said, "*Barbara does not walk, she constantly leaps; if you try to stop her, she scarcely turns around or listens. She frees herself and runs away. She is the image of unrestricted freedom and simplicity, a typical village girl.*"¹ Her eyes were black and lively, and she had tanned skin. Barbara was an energetic, resourceful and determined child.

Her parents *were upright, and her mother was particularly humble and eager to serve God.*² Barbara's sincere piety, which she developed by participating in the life of the parish of Gietrzwałd, came from her

1. Jan Oblack, *The Apparitions of the Virgin Mary*, p. 10

2. *The Apparitions in Gietrzwałd according to the Documents* (Diocesan booklet), Braniewo 1883, vol. I, p. 73-74

family. The mother said of her daughter, “*She was always gentle, respectful and polite. When we prayed and said novenas for diverse intentions (the Holy Father, the parish priest, the sick, etc.), Barbara always prayed fervently. At age ten, she made her first Holy Communion. She was a good student and quick learner.*”³

HISTORY OF GIETRZWALD AND THE APPARITIONS

Painful events that ravaged the little village of Gietrzwałd several times punctuate its history. In 1877, Russia, Prussia and Austria divided up Poland. The region around Gietrzwałd fell under Prussian domination, and the German Chancellor Bismark imposed a total Germanization, forbidding use of the Polish language in favor of German. He also enacted anti-clerical laws leading to persecution of the Church.

On June 27, 1877, Justyna Szafrynska, 13 years old, was preparing for her First Communion. Returning home after meeting with the parish priest, she suddenly saw a beautiful lady surrounded by a bright light seated on a throne and an angel beside her. The adolescent immediately prayed the Hail Mary. After this prayer, the lady rose from her throne and ascended into heaven with the angel. This was the beginning of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Gietrzwałd, which occurred numerous times before ending on September 16 of the same year. On June 30, the Virgin Mary also appeared to Barbara Samulowska, 12 years old, who had gone to the site with Justyna. In response to their question, “*What do you want?*” she said, “*I want you to recite the rosary every day.*” On July 1, at the request of the parish priest, they asked, “*Who are you?*” The lady responded, “*I am the Most Holy Immaculate Virgin Mary.*”

Many people came along to the site with the two girls. Among the diverse questions that the girls asked at their request, some concerned the health and eternal salvation of different people, and others were about imprisoned priests, those who had disappeared

3. *The Apparitions of the Virgin Mary*, p. 28

Sister Barbara Stanisława Samulowska

and the liberation of Poland. The Blessed Virgin answered the questions and repeated like a refrain, “*Pray the rosary.*” She also emphasized the importance of the Eucharist in the life of Christians. In the final apparitions, the Blessed Virgin blessed a spring and left her maternal promise, saying, “*Do not be sad because I will always be close to you.*”

The Bishop of the diocese appointed a commission to investigate the events while the apparitions were still taking place. One hundred years later, the Bishop of the diocese solemnly confirmed the authenticity of the apparitions.

After the apparitions, government authorities harassed the two girls. Their parish priest, Augustyn Weichsel, sent the girls threatened with arrest to the Daughters of Charity in Lidzbark Warminski. However, the Prussian authorities continued their persecution of the Church, priests and religious congregations. They forced the Sisters in Lidzbark Warminski to close their house, so the two girls were sent to the Provincial House in Chelmno and then to the school in Pelplin to finish their basic education. There, Bishop Jeschke wrote that Barbara Samulowska “*is gifted, very diligent and makes great progress.*”⁴ He also made a very positive evaluation of her behavior, moral attitude, manners, obedience and interpersonal relationships. Later, when she would become a Daughter of Charity, the Visitatrix, Sister Balbina Hanke, would speak of her in the same terms.

DAUGHTER OF CHARITY

Barbara decided to enter the Company of the Daughters of Charity. After her Postulancy at the Provincial House of Chelmno, she left for Paris and began the Seminary on January 9, 1884, at 140 rue du Bac. She would receive the name Stanisława.

11 YEARS IN THE SERVICE OF CHILDREN IN A DAY NURSERY IN PARIS

4. Acta Generalia, p. 323

On November 8, 1884, Barbara, then 19 years old, was sent on mission to serve children in a day nursery on rue de la Mare in Paris, under the guidance of Sister Mauche. On February 2, 1889, she made her vows for the first time there. In her letters, she often expressed her happiness at being a Daughter of Charity and thus her love for her vocation. In 1938, she would write, *“I am still very happy in the service of God, very grateful to the Lord Jesus and our heavenly Mother for this holy vocation as a Daughter of Charity.”*⁵ She remained at the day nursery serving the children until 1895, the date of her departure for Guatemala in Central America.

Indeed, not setting any limits to her generosity in the service of God, Sister Stanislawa offered herself for the mission *Ad gentes*. After waiting several years, she set off for Guatemala. In the summer of 1895, one of her young companions in the local community at rue de la Mare, Sister Marie Thérèse Récamier, wrote her family, *“As for spiritual commissions, I have many. I ask you to heartily recommend to Our Lady of Lourdes our house in the Belleville neighborhood and all its members, especially Sister Stanislawa. You have not come here enough to remember her, but I must have spoken to you about her since I already admired her during my Postulancy. She is a very kind Polish Sister, who worked in the day nursery. Well, she is leaving us this evening to sail off to Guatemala. You well imagine that the six weeks of travel without religious assistance nor consolation will be hard, in a country so different from ours. In any case, what is essential is doing God’s will...”*⁶

1895 – MISSION IN GUATEMALA

Sister Stanislawa arrived in Guatemala on September 11, 1895, and was assigned to the embroidery workshop in the Central House.

1896 – SEMINARY DIRECTRESS

5. Letter to her brother Jozef dated March 15, 1938

6. Notice on deceased Sisters, 1950-1951, Motherhouse, Paris, p. 111

Sister Barbara Stanisława Samulowska

One year later, on July 22, 1896, she was named Seminary Directress. She “*put all her effort and love into imbuing their hearts with devotion to the Most Holy Virgin. Her intimate conviction gave her words a special force that transformed souls: all the Sisters wanted to make the most of her instructions. When she spoke about our heavenly Mother, about her goodness and beauty, her face seemed to be a reflection of them. ‘Let us love her,’ she would say, ‘let us trust her, and she will look after us throughout our lives.’*”⁷

The young Sisters recognized her profound piety. “*Sister Stanisława was in constant prayer. She inculcated in us a spirit of prayer and a deep love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and for the Blessed Virgin. She joyfully celebrated religious feast days.*”⁸

Sister Lannes confirmed this. “*You could sense something extraordinary, supernatural in this Sister: the Divine Teacher is there.*”⁹ Later in her account, she said, “*Several times during the seven years that I lived alongside her, I tried to learn some details about her past, but she kept her secret well. I felt that she lived from God alone and that her intense love for the Blessed Virgin inspired all her actions. She thus did much good for the Seminary Sisters and all those who came in contact with her. In order to reap some advice, I strove to become close to her. ‘In my meditations,’ she confided to me very simply, ‘I speak with the Good Lord without difficulty. In the course of the day, I mentally make the Way of the Cross so I do not forget His presence and His sufferings. Frequently renewed spiritual communion gives me strength and light.’*”¹⁰

1907 – LA ANTIGUA HOSPITAL

7. Ibid., p. 112

8. Sister Gertruda Bukowska, Album: Siostra Miłosierdzia Barbara Stanisława Samulowska, wizjonerka z Gietrzwałdu, wspomnienia [Barbara Stanisława Samulowska, Daughter of Charity, seer of Gietrzwałd, memories], p. 50 and p. 61

9. Notice, p. 112

10. Ibid., p. 111-112

When her health required a change of air, Sister Stanislawa was given responsibility in April 1907 for administrating La Antigua Hospital. Poets call this city ‘the dormant city’ because of the silence that envelops it since its partial destruction. However, the hospital for which she received responsibility was not among the archaeological marvels of La Antigua: it was an extremely poor and dilapidated establishment. This sorry situation did not discourage Sister Stanislawa. As Sister Servant, she exhorted her companions, through her example even more than by her words, to have “*nothing superfluous, nothing of your own, nothing without permission!*”

She deeply loved people who were sick and poor. The only thing that made her suffer was to see them go without what they needed. “*She regretted that she could not relieve those who were poor as she would have liked. She suffered to see them deprived of necessities. Sometimes in the chapel, she would cry, begging the Lord for the bread that she could not provide them.*”¹¹

One Sister testified, “*I observed her great love for those who are poor; especially when I was at the reception desk. She often told me, ‘When a poor person arrives, come find me; don’t let him wait long; call me right away.’ It wasn’t only poor people who came to see her, but also doctors, medical students, nurses, employees, etc. When she learned someone was waiting for her, she left everything that she was doing to be helpful, especially when it was a poor person. I witnessed the material and spiritual assistance that she offered. She often said to me, ‘If a poor person is looking for me and I am not here, please go find Sister X so she can serve him because we must not let him leave without caring for him.’*”¹² She prayed for the patients, the hospital staff and the Sisters of her local community, encouraging everyone to pray the rosary. “*Never forget to pray the rosary; pray it as you walk through the hospital, and your Hail Marys will be everywhere.*” On several

11. Ibid., p. 112

12. Album, Testimonies, p. 56

Sister Barbara Stanislawa Samulowska

occasions she said, “*Love our heavenly Mother very much.*”¹³ She told the postulants, “*Love God very much, and if you love Him, your service will be better each day. Your service depends on your love. You will love your vocation. God will be your recompense if you do everything for Him.*”¹⁴

Sister Stanislawa also showed concern for her family. In her letters, she recommended them to God and Mary. “*I always pray for you that you might be as the Lord Jesus wants you to be. I entrust you to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary. I wish for you and ask the Lord that you all live in unity and peace since this greatly pleases Jesus, and He blesses families who observe His commandments. May the Lord Jesus and the Virgin Mary keep you good and pious Christians who have a big heart for all and a clean conscience by avoiding sin and being pleasing to God.*”¹⁵ In another letter, she scolded her brother for being too worried about the future. “*This is not good because we should always have great confidence in our good Father. Let us think of our eternity. Death will come quickly, so let us prepare for it by living piously and with a pure conscience.*”¹⁶ She wrote about her sick brother Jozef a few years later, “*May the Lord Jesus grant him patience; may all this suffering serve him for a wonderful heaven where we will all find each other.*”¹⁷

Sister Stanislawa collaborated very well with lay people. The hospital director quickly recognized that the new Superior’s exceptional prudence, excellent education and total devotion made her a valued collaborator. “*We won the big prize! As long as we get to keep her!*” he exclaimed, pleased with the order that reigned and the good that was being done.¹⁸ He liked to say, “*Here, we do whatever our Sister says.*” The administrators and even the doctors came to see her to ask her advice when there were difficult

13. Album, Testimonies, p. 56

14. Ibid., p. 50

15. Letter to Marie dated March 15, 1937

16. Letter to her brother Jozef dated June 29, 1924

17. Letter to Marie dated March 15, 1937

18. Notice, p. 112

questions concerning the management of the hospital. She also organized outings for the staff and enjoyed preparing meals for them.¹⁹ She knew the families of the lay staff and helped them when she could.²⁰

1913 – QUETZALTENANGO HOSPITAL

Sister Samulowska was sent to Quetzaltenango Hospital in 1913 to help the foundress and directress of the establishment, Sister Thonluc, due to her age. However, the staff, patients and benefactors, who mistakenly feared the departure of Sister Thonluc, formed a real coalition against Sister Samulowska. Calumnies, mistrust, lies and threats: they spared her nothing. Neither her patience, gentleness nor humility managed to calm them, so the Provincial Superiors, learning of her trials, decided to send her back to La Antigua.

1917 – LA ANTIGUA HOSPITAL

Expressions of joy welcomed Sister Stanislawa when she returned to La Antigua Hospital in 1917, but her physical health suffered the repercussions of her inner struggle. Weakened, she contracted typhoid fever, which endangered her life, and she had to leave for a period of convalescence.

A FEW MONTHS LATER, THE GENERAL HOSPITAL OF GUATEMALA CITY

After she recuperated, the Superiors entrusted her with the responsibility as Sister Servant and director of the General Hospital of Guatemala City. With 1500 beds, it was the largest hospital in the country. Sister Stanislawa arrived there shortly before the terrible earthquake of late 1917.

19. Ibid.

20. Album, Testimonies, p. 51

Sister Barbara Stanislawa Samulowska

A pilgrimage still tied to Sister Samulowska's name traces its origins to this disaster. Here is why. In the hospital mortuary, a poor mother kneeling beside the body of her son raised her eyes to a miraculous life-size crucifix, formerly venerated with the title "Jesus of Mercies," but totally forgotten for many years. In her prayer, the woman implored God, "My God, is it possible that I lose my two sons?" One had died, and the other was sentenced to a long prison term. When the poor woman returned home, she was astonished to find her imprisoned son, who had inexplicably recovered his freedom! News spread, and visitors came in great numbers before this crucifix to implore favors of Jesus. The flood of people continually increased such that it was decided to build a chapel within the hospital. Construction was completed in 1917, and January 1, 1918, was chosen for its blessing. Government permission was requested for a procession in the city so that "Jesus of Mercies" might go through the streets before being placed in the chapel. However, the government denied permission. Then, during the night of Christmas 1917, a terrible earthquake would destroy half the city, which the people considered punishment from heaven.

"To imagine how terrible our waking was," a Sister of the Province wrote, "You would have to have lived through a similar moment since neither an account of such a catastrophe nor the sight of these ruins can give an idea of the anguish and terror that gripped our souls. On the one hand, everything trembled, cracked and creaked around us due to a furious hurricane unleashed over our heads. On the other hand, we felt ourselves lifted up by the movement of the earth and heard a sinister roar like an impetuous torrent that rolled under our feet and seemed ready to engulf us..."

During this night of anguish, Sister Samulowska went back and forth to move the hundreds of hospital patients out of harm's way. Just one refused to leave and, unfortunately, would die under the debris. On January 3, 1918, an even stronger aftershock demolished the remaining buildings. The hospital was no longer anything but a heap of stones. Sister Samulowska quickly had barracks built

since the rainy season was approaching, necessitating a shelter less precarious than tents. She did not forget the Jesus of Mercies crucifix and had a wooden chapel built for daily celebration of Mass. After this period of disasters, so many donations came in that the miraculous crucifix found a place in a new basilica that became a pilgrimage site.

In 1919, Sister Samulowska was appointed **Provincial Assistant**. She remained Sister Servant and directed the General Hospital in Guatemala City that she had rebuilt.

*“Her virtue edified, stimulated and encouraged all those who had the good fortune to come into contact with her. Of course, her dear Sisters were the first to benefit. She encouraged them to have great love of the Community and our Superiors and absolute fidelity to our Holy Rules, which she herself observed with scrupulous precision.”*²¹

Sister Stanislawa inspired in her Sisters’ hearts a strong attachment to the Company and to Superiors. She was maternal, cordial, simple and never showed favorites, so everyone almost spontaneously came confidently to her because her attitude, serenity and smile made them trust her. *“Her ability to put up with difficult characters and her kindness made her accessible to all because everyone felt loved.”*²²

*“Her manner in the chapel inspired faith in all those who looked at her. The purity of her soul was reflected in her eyes. She felt an aversion at even the smallest errors, and she carefully fought against everything that was tainted by the spirit of the world.”*²³

She faithfully observed the Rules and called her Sisters to do the same. If she noticed some negligence in the practice of the holy vows, she was distressed. *“God cannot bless a person who*

21. Notice, p. 113

22. Ibid., p. 114

23. Ibid.

Sister Barbara Stanislawa Samulowska

scorns His holy will,” she affirmed. She would then energetically guide the Sisters down the right path.²⁴ When a Sister was late for spiritual exercises because of poor planning, she would point at her watch without saying a word, and when the Sister would ask forgiveness, she would say to her, “*You know how much I dislike lack of punctuality... Oh, not I, a miserable creature, but Our Lord. Go to the chapel and ask Him for forgiveness.*”²⁵ At the same time, she was always ready to excuse others and play down their mistakes. She formed in virtue and expected the best of each person.²⁶ “*When one of the Sisters made a mistake in my presence as I was speaking with Sister Samulowska, she took advantage of the occasion to make an excuse for the Sister, saying, ‘These are human weaknesses; this Sister is good.’ She would show me some positive aspect or say, ‘Please, forgive her; her displeasure will pass.’ I was always full of admiration for her acts.*”²⁷

Clearly, she often suffered from inner struggles. Therefore, she did not hesitate to share her experience, especially with the young Sisters. She wrote to the young Sister Salazar, “*Your happiness can and should last your entire life and even increase. As you come to know the goodness of Our Lord better, you will make progress in virtue and genuine piety. You will have days of a dark night of the soul and discouragement. God allows this to test our love, but be generous and always faithful to your devotions; in this way you will come through victorious and stronger from the fight.*”²⁸ On another occasion, she encouraged her, “*This year should be a year of generous preparation for the big day. Entrust this preparation to our heavenly Mother. She has obtained your holy vocation for you; now, may she help you to prepare your heart well for the Lord to take full possession of it. Prepare yourself for struggle as well because when the enemy sees us well disposed to walk the straight road that leads to true virtue, he places all sorts of obstacles on the path in order to distress and discourage us. In*

24. Ibid.

25. bid., p. 113

26. Ibid.

27. Album, Testimonies, p. 56

28. Letter to Sister Salazar dated July 20, 1943

*this case, be strong and very trusting of your Superiors. Try to arm yourself with these two virtues: humility and piety. With them, you will always be victorious and, moreover, always very happy. I promise my prayer for you since I very much desire that you be fully a Daughter of Charity and not just partially one. Always seek the glory of God, your sanctification and the good name of the community.”*²⁹ She also wrote, *“I hardly need to tell you that I will continue to pray Our Lord and Blessed Mother in heaven for you because I want you to be a holy Sister who consoles the heart of our beloved Jesus and who is a consolation for the community.”*³⁰

With motherly concern, she followed up with the Sisters who received a new mission. She supported them and assured them of her prayer.³¹ Many Sisters testified that she saved their vocation thanks to her kindness and understanding.³² A young sick Sister, who confided her fear that she would be obliged to leave the Company because of her health, found herself completely consoled by her encouraging words that soon came to pass. *“Trust in the Blessed Virgin. She wants you here and will keep you; true vocations endure. Let’s make a novena together to our heavenly Mother; she will heal you. This is a trial allowed by Our Lord in the early years of your vocation, as often happens. It should serve to strengthen you in the love of your holy vocation and make you very fervent.”*³³

Another Sister gives the following account. *“On October 10, 1946, I arrived at the hospital to begin Postulancy. Sister Samulowska, who was already quite old but had a young spirit, welcomed me. The warmth and gentleness with which she received me made a very good impression on me. I remained two days with the clothes that I had come wearing... On the 12th, she called for me and said, ‘I waited until today, the day when the Church honors Our Lady of the Pillar, for you to dress as a Postulant and remember*

29. Letter to Sister Salazar dated June 16, 1946

30. Letter to Sister Salazar dated July 20, 1943

31. Cf. Notice, p. 114

32. Cf. Album, Testimonies

33. Notice, p. 112-114

Sister Barbara Stanislawa Samulowska

that you should be like a pillar, firm in your vocation. You have already made your first step, the painful separation from your family... You have already put your hand to the plow; do not turn back. Whatever happens, whatever may be, be firm like a pillar. Never stop praying the rosary in your comings and goings in the hospital; thus, you will go about scattering Hail Marys. Love our heavenly Mother very much.”³⁴

Sister Samulowska suffered from not being able to return to her native country, but she offered it all to God. She wrote her family in a letter, “*How happy I would be to see you, but this is not possible due to the distance, and if the Germans learned that I was there, who knows what might happen. Remember that they have already persecuted us there, and now it will be even worse. You as much as I must offer this deprivation to God.*”³⁵

In an article entitled, “A short historical overview of the establishments of the Daughters of Charity in Central America,” Sister Geneviève Chardin recounts the following about Sister Chaverot, the Visitatrix. “*It was not easy for Sister Chaverot to adapt to Guatemala as Visitatrix. She experienced all sorts of trials. She began to build the Seminary, but after making the cement poorly, the builder asked her for a large sum of money and immediately went off to another country, leaving the work uncompleted. The Visitatrix asked the Motherhouse for beds, which arrived before Holy Week at the port of San José, but the storage area burned, and the beds were unusable. Determined to visit the local communities outside the country, she set sail (because there was no other form of transportation) for a trip that would last three or four months. The Sisters anxiously awaited her return, but during that time, Sister Samulowska, Superior of the General Hospital and Provincial Assistant, received a message from the government: ‘We do not want Sisters in Guatemala anymore, you will never return and you must leave the Central House and leave the Republic within ten days.’ Waiting to see what would happen, the Assistant told the*

34. Provincial Newsletter 1974

35. Letter to her brother Jozef dated June 27, 1909

Secretary to begin putting all the Provincial documents in a large safe. During that time, Sister Chaverot returned from her journey and landed at the port of San José. The Sisters from the Central House went to meet her in Escuintla. Delighted to see each other again, they had sat down to eat when two police officers came to bring her back to the port to get on the next steamboat leaving for Mexico. We can well imagine the disappointment of the Sisters who had to say a tearful farewell. Sister Chaverot returned to the port of San José alone. Sister Samulowska, inspired by the Holy Spirit, responded to the government that not only were the Sisters of the Central House leaving, but also those of the hospital, since their Superior could not return. This response was called the 'holy remedy'. The hospital had about thirty well-trained and dedicated Sisters teaching the staff medical care. And the nursing school, would it be abandoned as well? This deserved consideration... the order expelling Sister Chaverot was reversed and the Visitatrix ultimately returned more dead than alive."³⁶

DIRECTOR OF THE ORPHANAGE IN GUATEMALA CITY

When the decree from the Holy See appeared setting term limits for Superiors, Sister Samulowska left the General Hospital of Guatemala City **for the orphanage in the same city**. She let her tenderness overflow in the service of these little children. She said to her companions who worked closely with the children, "*Love and care for your little Jesus well. Above all, sow in their souls the knowledge and love of God because, though they may stray in life, they will return to the straight and narrow path and belong eternally to God. This depends on you.*"³⁷

1940 - THE GENERAL HOSPITAL OF GUATEMALA CITY

In 1940, Sister Stanislawka returned to the General Hospital of Guatemala City. The last ten years of her life were a long series of trials and a real martyrdom: a very painful face cancer. The

36. Provincial Newsletter 1974

37. Notice, p. 115

Sister Barbara Stanislawa Samulowska

Sisters testified that she suffered greatly but did not complain and silently offered up her suffering. She said, *“I must purify myself and repent for what I have neglected and for not calling the Sisters to high enough standards.”*³⁸ *“Those last ten years of her life after her return to the hospital were one trial after another, which she accepted with a heart peacefully submissive to God’s will.”*³⁹

*“The Most Holy Virgin, about whom she constantly spoke, helped her in her difficulties, just as she supported her during her long and dreadful illness...”*⁴⁰

On October 19, 1950, the Superioress General, Sister Marie Antoinette Blanchot, during her visit to Guatemala, went to see Sister Samulowska, who considered this visit a last sign from heaven and a great consolation. *“Her deepest desire, which was to die quickly so that she would not need any particular care, was not God’s plan. He judged her worthy to suffer longer. Her last year on earth, the Holy Year, was a real martyrdom: an incurable cancer on her face required great patience of her. When the pain was too sharp, she moaned, ‘Jesus! My little Jesus!’ and tears flowed silently.*

*Finally, on December 6, 1950, while the Sister Directress was reciting the Memorarae, thus concluding the Chaplet of the Immaculate Conception that all her companions were praying around her bed, the soul of Sister Samulowska left to contemplate in Heaven the glorious privilege of the one who had deigned to appear to her here below.”*⁴¹

Father Francisco Lagraula, hospital chaplain, wrote, *“Our dear Sister Samulowska died at 85 years old, years rich in works and virtues. ‘Sister Assistant’, as people called her because of the years she dedicated to this position in the Community and then as a term of endearment, stopped existing in her simple and silent dwelling.”*

38. Album, Testimonies, p. 60

39. Notice, p. 115

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

News of her death moved all those who knew her in Guatemala. This is highly justified because, in her indulgent, humble and gentle heart, the just and sinners found in her the initial motivation and encouragement to become more holy and find appropriate means for their own conversion.

Those who had the happiness of knowing her and spending time with her never forgot her incomparable personality, her gentle, penetrating eyes that seemed to shine with the very light of God and her words full of holy friendship and affectionate advice, communicated in a gentle, motherly voice.

Sister Maria Auxiliadora Mora Umana wrote, *“I had the good fortune to have Sister Stanislawa Samulowska as my Superior... She had penetrating eyes as if she could read our interior. She was pious, vigilant, discrete, methodical and organized. She was a living Rule, very mortified. She taught more by her example than by her words. She loved us like a mother. She was interested in the instruction of the young Sisters and found the teachers who would give us the classes that we needed. When we knocked at her door, she invited us in immediately. If she was writing something, she put down her pen and listened very attentively, as if she had nothing else to do. She invented vacations, of which we still speak today. She sent us, two by two, for one or two weeks of rest and relaxation... We were thirty-some Sisters, most of us young and others middle-aged. We were of one heart. Love and fraternity reigned among us. Thanks to the motherly care of Sister Samulowska, no one complained. When she died, we lost our loving mother.”*⁴²

Sister Teresa Sierra said about Sister Samulowska, *“Her characteristic traits were gentleness, kindness and a steady temper. In her person, you could find a perfect mother and Superior. Each of the thirty-two Sisters in this local community felt loved and even preferred by her... She was the object of admiration and encouragement for her community. She loved peace, order and*

42. Album, Testimonies, p. 60

Sister Barbara Stanislawa Samulowska

harmony, which influenced the entire house. Her presence drew people toward God; she shone.”⁴³

“You could sense that this soul lived for God alone and that her intense love for the Blessed Virgin inspired all her actions.”⁴⁴

After fifty years in Guatemala, only those who knew her very well were aware that she was born on the other side of the globe. *“How many struggles, how many hidden victories allowed for the this transformation of an inflexible, haughty character into an always cordial and humble one.”⁴⁵*

In the process of beatification

Convinced of the holiness of Barbara Samulowska, the Regular Canons of the Lateran, custodians of the Shrine of Gietrzwałd, after consent from Mother Juana Elizondo, Superioress General, asked Archbishop Edmund Piszcz, Metropolitan of Warmia, to open the process of beatification of the visionary of Gietrzwałd in January 2001. However, according to Church law, organization of the process of beatification falls to the diocese of the territory where the person died. Agreement from the Archbishop of Guatemala City, Cardinal Rodolfo Quezada Toruño, was thus necessary to transfer the process to Poland. The Archbishop of Guatemala City gave his consent on December 8, 2003.

After receiving a favorable opinion from the Bishops’ Conference of Poland, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints gave its authorization on September 23, 2004. The diocesan phase of the beatification process opened on February 2, 2005, in Gietrzwałd. Father Kazimierz Brzozowski, custodian of the Marian Shrine of Gietrzwałd, was appointed as Postulator for the process. Three Daughters of Charity of the Province of Chelmno-Poznan participated in the commissions of the Tribunal: Sister Hanna Cybula,

43. Ibid., p. 53

44. Notice, p. 112

45. Ibid., p. 114

Visitatrix, on the theological and historical commissions, Sister Anna Mamona, on the notarial commission, and Sister Krystyna Rynarzewska, on the historical commission. Sister Gertruda Bukowska, a Polish missionary in the Dominican Republic, helped with translation during questioning of witnesses in Guatemala.

The Tribunal questioned several dozen witnesses in Poland, Germany and Guatemala. The commissions studied the collected documents about the Servant of God and gave their opinion. The ecclesiastical Tribunal of Guatemala, in accord with the approval of the local Archbishop, helped to gather necessary documents demonstrating the heroic virtues of Barbara Samulowska. The documentation for the diocesan process totals about 1,500 pages. On September 8, 2006, the final diocesan session of the Tribunal of beatification took place. The new shepherd of the Archdiocese, Archbishop Wojciech Ziemba, said in his homily, *“Today we give thanks for the Servant of God, Sister Barbara Samulowska. Thanks to Mary, her heart was set on fire with love for God, giving a good life witness.”*

The next step in the process was the designation in Rome of the Postulator, the study and the verification of the assembled documents transmitted to Rome. The Holy Father would make the decision to declare the Servant of God “Blessed”.

*“Sister Samulowska was an ordinary figure, a whole life sacrificed in silence, with the sole ambition of serving God in poor and sick people far from her homeland, with her soul filled with a pure joy. Sister Samulowska today is a source of encouragement for our faith.”*⁴⁶

Sisters of the Provinces of CENTRAL AMERICA
and CHELMNO-POZNAN

46. Leaflet of remarks on Sister Samulowska, 2008 – Archives of the Province of Central America

**The Most Holy Virgin
was established**

**guardian of all the faithful
*by Jesus Christ,***

**guardian of virgins
*by the Church,***

**guardian of the Daughters of Charity
*by Mademoiselle Le Gras
and Saint Vincent.***

Conference of Father Fiat

December 8, 1881

