



EASTER 2016

My dear Sisters,

Easter invites us to contemplate in nature and in our personal lives the “newness” that the Risen Christ brings: *“Behold, I come to make all things new!”*<sup>1</sup> This fundamental experience of newness comes to us through our incorporation into the person of Jesus Christ. As St. Paul puts it: *“Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”*<sup>2</sup> The phrase “in Christ,” which St. Paul uses very often, means being incorporated into Christ so as to become one with Him. The newness of our life is not something we achieve by our efforts but it is a gift that is offered to us by the Lord. Our response is total abandonment to Jesus in order to find the meaning of our existence in Him.

However, this newness is not always something that we welcome with eagerness and enthusiasm. Sometimes, it can even be approached with skepticism or pessimism. Newness always makes us a bit fearful, because it requires that we abandon ourselves to God with complete trust, allowing the Holy Spirit to direct our lives and our every decision. We fear that God may force us to tread on new paths and leave behind our comfort zones. Yet throughout the history of salvation, whenever God reveals Himself, He brings newness and change, and claims our complete trust. Such was the experience of the women on that first Easter morning. Moved by their love for Jesus, they went to the tomb to anoint His body, but something completely new and unexpected happened before their eyes. It was something that disturbed their hearts and their plans, something which transformed their whole life: they saw the stone removed from the tomb and they did not find the Lord’s body.

In the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis asked that “the season of Lent in this Jubilee Year be lived more

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<sup>1</sup> Rev 21:5  
<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor 5:17

intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy."<sup>3</sup> As we celebrate Easter, let us look back at our Lenten journey and ask ourselves: have we allowed ourselves to be embraced by God's mercy? What was changed in our attitudes and in our way of behaving so that we can experience new life in Christ this Jubilee Year? Did we avail of the rich opportunity to be renewed in Christ and so "to overcome our existential alienation by listening to God's word and by practicing the works of mercy?"<sup>4</sup>

The recently concluded Council of Congregation held during this Jubilee Year of Mercy and at the closing of the Year of Consecrated Life, was also a graced moment for our Congregation to experience God's mercy, a time to rediscover the meaning of the mission entrusted to us by the Lord on the day of Easter: **to be a sign and an instrument of the Father's mercy**<sup>5</sup>. It was an opportunity to listen intently to the stirrings of the Spirit, to do some soul-searching and to make courageous decisions for the renewal of our consecrated life.

Your Superiors must have already given you a feedback of what transpired during the assembly, but allow me through this letter to share with you the highlights and so reinforce their sharing. I hope that you will welcome the collective reflections and decisions of the Council of Congregation with openness, enthusiasm, and dedication in order to experience the newness in our consecrated life.

Following the orientations of the Capitular Acts 2013, the Council of Congregation focused on the pillars of our life: prayer, community life, charism and mission and ongoing formation. The skeptics and pessimists among us may not see anything new or different. Perhaps, it is because the "newness" that is demanded of us is to go back to the basics, to the essentials of our life. This kind of newness can only be perceived with a heart that is simple, open, and attuned to God's ways. The newness is found in and through us who make the words alive in our lives.

Our first call is to experience the merciful love of the Father. As consecrated persons, "we are called—possibly now more than ever—to be prophets, mystics and contemplatives, to discover God's presence in everyday life."<sup>6</sup> This deep awareness of God's presence in our daily lives necessitates that we cultivate a strong sense of inner silence. The Word Incarnate can only grow in the silence of heart, and it demands the "asceticism of time and the body."<sup>7</sup> Prayer is our spine, the foundation that supports our whole life; hence, it is

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 17

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for Lent 2016*

<sup>5</sup> cf Jn 20:21-23.

<sup>6</sup> CISLSAL, *Contemplate #6*, Libreria Editrici Vaticana, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, #38

equally indispensable to review the quality of our prayer life. What is our disposition when we pray, when we go to Mass, when we do our meditation, consciousness examen or spiritual readings? Do we do them out of routine or with a burning desire to encounter God? “Newness” in our life of prayer does not imply new methods or expressions, but a deepening of our relationship with God in order to experience the total transformation into Christ and be able to say with St. Paul: “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*”<sup>8</sup>



God’s mercy transforms human hearts; it enables us, through the experience of a faithful love, to become merciful in return. The quality of our prayer life is directly related to the quality of our community life. The “newness” in our fraternal relationships demands that we pick up again the traditional virtues that mark a true SPC: fraternal correction, asking pardon, simplicity, sobriety and hospitality. Our Lord asks us to “love our neighbors” as we love ourselves. And who are our first neighbors? They are our Sisters with whom we live day to day, with whom we brush elbows, with whom we share our joys and sorrows. The Holy Father has often insisted to have a ceasefire on “gossiping,” the bomb that destroys our community. I do hope that we put an end to the terrorism of gossips and criticisms, so that our communities can truly become the spring of God’s mercy in a world that is wounded by division and hatred.

During his homily at the closing of the year of Consecrated Life, the Holy Father said that “our Founders were moved by the Spirit and were not afraid to soil their hands in daily life, with the people’s problems, going with courage to the geographic and existential fringes...They always had in their heart a healthy restlessness for the Lord, a consuming desire to take Him to others.”<sup>9</sup> Moved by the compassion of Jesus, Fr. Louis Chauvet made a courageous decision to establish our community in order to minister to the sick, the poor, the ignorant and the suffering in the periphery of Levesville. One hundred and fifty years ago, Mother Benjamin made a daring move to open the Novitiate in Saigon despite many oppositions, because of her confidence in the innate capacity and piety of the young Asian girls. Our numerous Sisters who answered the call to foreign missions proclaimed a prophetic statement that the love of Christ knows no boundary, race, color or belief. Today we too are called to make prophetic and courageous choices to go to the existential peripheries, to evangelize. This periphery may be an area in myself, in my community or in others, which needs the light of the Gospel. Let us learn from our Founder and first Sisters who dared to make a difference so as to make Christ known and loved. Let us not be contented in staying inside our convents and institutions. Rather, let us go forth

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<sup>8</sup> Gal 2:20

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis’ Homily at the Closing of Consecrated Life, February 2, 2016.

to the Levesville of today and seek out those who are lost, those who are suffering and wounded.

St. Paul says, “*Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!*”<sup>10</sup> For to evangelize, he insists, is not a cause for glory but rather an obligation that is laid on him. Jesus has invited us to share in His divine life, to abide in Him and to be His full time collaborators in the work of evangelization. Woe to us consecrated persons if we are not witnesses to what we have seen and heard! Woe to us, if we have allowed ourselves to be robbed of our missionary enthusiasm, if we have “fallen into a lifestyle which leads to an attachment to material security, or to a desire for power and human glory, rather than giving our lives to others in mission.”<sup>11</sup>

Let us not waste this season of the Holy Year of Mercy, so favorable a time for conversion! Let us renew our commitment to follow our Risen Lord, to be alive in his Word, and invite others to come to Him by the “light” of our transfigured lives.

May the Virgin Mary, who treasured all the mystical experiences in her heart,<sup>12</sup> teach us to remember all the marvels that God has done in our own lives and in the history of our world. May our Risen Lord deepen His life within us and make us His witnesses of Easter joy and hope. May He open us to the newness that transforms and enable us to feel His presence in our midst.

Together with the Sisters Assistants, Secretary and Treasurer, and all the Sisters at the Generalate, we greet you a blessed and joyful Easter!

**Let us joyfully proclaim:  
The Lord is risen!**

*S. Maria Goretti Lee*  
Superior General



<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor 9:16

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 80.

<sup>12</sup> cf Lk 2:19,51