



Message

September 8, 2017

Dear Sisters,

"My soul magnifies the Lord...for he has done wondrous things!"

(Lk 1:46; Ps 98:1)

On this joyful feast of our Lady, I pray that we may all experience the outpouring of God's goodness, and magnify Him in our life. With Mary, let us proclaim a story of God's mercy, of God's love, a love that has touched our hearts and has changed our lives.

The same song of thanksgiving echoes in the hearts of each one of us who were gathered in Chartres last July 15-28, for the ongoing formation of Major Superiors and the celebration of the 290 years of our first *missio ad gentes*. Our pilgrimages to our origins, walking and praying in the footsteps of Fr Chauvet, Marie Anne de Tilly, Barbe Foucault, Marie Micheau and Mother Benjamin...were outstanding moments that "strengthened our unity as a religious family and our common sense of belonging."¹

The celebration evoked in us deep gratitude and reverence for the heroic self-offerings of our missionaries, their sacrifices and deaths which bore fruit to more than 4000 Sisters in 40 different countries today. As we recounted their stories of God's mercy, tears welled up in our eyes and gratitude filled our hearts to the One "who has looked with favor on His lowly servants."

At the same time, we were challenged to seriously consider and respond to the present concerns of our *missio ad gentes*. As an international and missionary Congregation, we are not immune to the challenge of forging unity in the midst of our cultural and ethnic diversity. We acknowledge that "we are international and multicultural, but not yet truly intercultural."² Hence the theme of our assembly was: **"Unity in Diversity"**.

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People (2014), 1.

² Council of Congregation 2016, p.31.

I wish to point out here some highlights of my message to the Major Superiors. We have observed during our visits to your Provinces, Districts and Regions that we still have a long way to go in terms of accepting one another's cultural differences. Sad to say, discrimination still exists in many of our communities, as evidenced by the verbal and non-verbal attacks we lance at each other. We are slow to recognize the good works done by others, but are quick to judge and criticize their negative points and weaknesses. Some of us still have the air of "superiority," considering ourselves better than others. We live in the same house under the same roof, eat the same food, wear the same religious habit, pray the same prayers, celebrate the same Eucharist, but we do not care for each other deep enough. Unity does not mean that everybody is the same but that we honor our differences and work together despite our differences. Mary shows us the way to live in unity as children of God through her **humility**. She is fully aware of being chosen by God but in spite of this she clings fast to the attitude of complete humility.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI describes the words of Mary: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (*Lk 1:46*), as an expression of her whole programme of life. Mary does not set herself at the center, but leaves space for God, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbor.³ Her greatness lies in the fact that she wants to magnify God and not herself. She rejoiced in God and not in material things, honors or the opinion of others. When we pursue unity through prayer, dialogue, respect and mutual acceptance, we have to embrace the humility of Mary. Let our sole desire be like Mary, to be the "handmaid of the Lord" (*cf Lk 1:38, 48*), and not to pursue our own projects or magnify ourselves.

Whether we are in our home country or abroad we are all missionaries, by virtue of our consecration. When Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, we recognize the true meaning of being a missionary. Mary's journey is a true missionary journey . . . "one that leads her far from home, leading her into the world, in places foreign to her daily activities; it makes her reach, in a sense, to the very ends of where she can reach."⁴ Such was the experience of our first four missionaries to Cayenne. Their love for Christ impelled them to cross the ocean though they have never seen one in their whole life as peasants in the flat

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 41.

⁴ Pope Benedict, *Agenzia Fides*, May 2010.

country of Beauce. They spent their whole lives in the service of the sick, the poor, the abandoned and the marginalized.

Mary's "deep faith and complete trust in God"⁵ is another model for us and for all missionaries throughout the world. She does not only show the need for prayer, as she consistently "ponders" what she is seeing and experiencing throughout the life of her beloved Son, Jesus, but also reaches outside herself in "thoughtful, warmhearted service of others."⁶ Mary is impregnated with the Word of God, and so her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God and her will is one with the will of God. Those who truly listen to the Word cannot help but proclaim it with their whole being. How much attention and time do we give to our meditation and personal prayer? Do we allow ourselves to be soaked in God's Word so that our thoughts, words and actions reflect a heart that seeks only to glorify God?

The words: "*Let it be to me according to your word*" (Lk 1:38), show in Mary who declared herself handmaid of the Lord, a total obedience to God's will. By our obedience we are likewise called to surrender to God our right to lead an independent life, and live in union with the will of God. Concretely, this means that we "regularly submit our schedule, our practice of poverty, our participation in common life and our health problems"⁷. We also give an accounting of the resources entrusted to us in our work and apostolate. I have noticed that a common difficulty in the Provinces, Districts and Regions, spring from mismanagement of funds and inconsistency in the practice of the vows, particularly the vows of poverty and obedience. Some Sisters use and dispose the money of the community or the apostolate for their own advantage, often without permission. If ever they ask permission, they do so with a hidden agenda. Hence, if the permission is not granted, they become disgruntled and finally decide to leave the Congregation. Vocation has become a cheap commodity that one can easily give it up when she is dissatisfied with the Congregation. Sisters, let us be faithful to our commitment and manifest in our being and acting that **God is enough!**

In a world torn by infidelity, violence and division, let us turn to Mary, the model of missionary discipleship and consecrated life. May she show us the way of the heart, speak to us with words of

⁵ Book of Life, Article 5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Book of Life, Article 31.

reconciliation and peace, lead us, by her example, to receive Christ into our hearts, to share Him through our lives and to live our commitment in fidelity.

May God grant the desires of our hearts and teach us how to live together in unity!

Affectionately in our Lady,

S. Maria Goretti Lee
Superior General

