



September 8, 2018

Dear Sisters,

As we celebrate the birthday of our Lady, we turn to her as our model and teacher of the way to holiness. Mary is rightly called “the saint among the saints, blessed above all others,”¹ because she was faithful to God and to His Word.

Luke presents Mary as a model of fidelity. She believed in God’s word that she would become the Mother of the Messiah and trusted that God would make it possible for her to carry out her mission. In the account of the Visitation (cf Lk1:39-56), Elizabeth acclaims Mary’s greatness in terms of her fidelity: “*Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.*” Fidelity is an urgent call for us today as well. At every moment of our life and in every circumstance, we are urged to listen again to God’s word spoken to us in the depths of our hearts when He first called us: “You are precious to me...I am counting on you,” and to trust that God will make all possible means for us to fulfill our vocation and mission.

In *Gaudete et Exsultate* the Holy Father stressed that: “We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.”² As religious, we are likewise called to be holy by living our commitment to God and to His Word with joy and

¹ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 176.

² *Ibid.*, 14.

fidelity and to give witness to the centrality of God in our everyday, ordinary lives.

One path to holiness for us is through our fidelity to the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. By faithfully living our vows, we manifest our definitive commitment “to belong to God and to live for God.”³ In Him we find our true joy and freedom. Our response to the call of love requires us to stay with Christ, “to share our lives, our choices, the obedience of faith, the happiness of poverty, the radicality of love.”⁴

Mary’s example of pointing always to Jesus is our model for chastity. Pope Benedict writes beautifully, that “the whole programme of Mary’s life was not to set herself at the center, but leaving space for God, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbor.”⁵ She keeps a hidden place in her immaculate heart for the love of God, a love which overflows and expands to all people. By our vow of chastity, we become holy when we “abandon ourselves totally to God in prayer and interior silence,”⁶ when we are loving and compassionate, non-discriminating, welcoming the poor, the ignorant, and the marginalized, journeying with people in their pain and vulnerability, and YET remaining detached from them, but securely attached to Christ who remains our one and only Love.

In the hidden life at Nazareth, Mary gives us an example of poverty. The Holy Family lived in material poverty, as the Scriptures tell us. But more, Mary practiced poverty of heart. She was humble and self-effacing. Her only desire was to be the handmaid of the Lord (*cf.* Lk 1:38, 48). Like Mary, through our vow of poverty, we live material poverty that is detached from created goods, as well as the poverty of heart that is detached from self. We become holy by our vow of poverty when we use the created goods (money, laptops, cellphones and other gadgets, cars, travels, studies, etc.) responsibly, not for our own personal benefits, but for the service of God’s people, especially the poor and the weak. We become holy when we care for creation by avoiding waste in all forms, by striving to live a simple and austere life, having only what is necessary to help us live our life of consecration to the full, because we have Christ as our only treasure.

At the Annunciation, Mary was a model of obedience. She wholeheartedly embraced God’s will for her. The *Magnificat* – a portrait, so to

³ Book of Life, 11.

⁴ CICLESAL, *Rejoice*, 4.

⁵ Pope Benedict, *Deus Caritas Est*, 41.

⁶ Book of Life and Statutes, 18

speaking, of her soul—is entirely woven from threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how Mary “speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God.”⁷ Her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, her will is one with the will of God.

We become holy by our vow of obedience when we surrender to God our “right to lead an independent life,”⁸ when we do not choose our own assignments, when we dialogue in faith, and humbly entrust ourselves to our Superiors confident that they can help us discern God’s will for us. We are on the path to holiness when we use our distinctive gifts and become the best instrument in God’s hands for His mission. By our vow of obedience, we let go of our right to plan our lives to our only Master, Jesus Christ. Often, it is easier to give up material things, rather than our own wills. As St. Gregory said: “to forsake what one has is a small thing, to forsake what one is, that is the supreme gift.” Like Mary, and with her help, let us make this supreme gift of ourselves to God. Let us be attuned to God’s ways and recognize His will in all that happens in our lives. This can only be possible if we are constantly aware of His presence and are rooted in His Word.

Another aspect of Mary’s holiness is her being a woman of celebration. She sang her *Magnificat* at every special event in her life. Jubilee celebrations are milestones in our life that move us to sing our own *Magnificat* and to renew our fidelity to God. They are occasions to acknowledge the unfailing love and fidelity of our God who continues to journey with us. This year, we rejoice and thank God with our Sisters who celebrate the jubilee of the foundation of their Provinces: Hongkong 170 years, Japan 140 years, Korea 130 years and Thailand 120 years.

We likewise, rejoice and thank God for the young Aspirants who generously and courageously joined our different communities in order to share our life and mission. Let us remember them in our prayers as we intensify our personal and communal witnessing. I also commend to your prayers our new community in Scotland, Galloway Diocese and for Indonesia which will be elevated from a District to a Province this coming October 2, their foundation day.

As we look forward to our 48th General Chapter in September 2019, I enjoin you to enter this preparatory year with openness and enthusiasm in the spirit of prayer and discernment.

⁷ *Deus Caritas Est*, 41.

⁸ Book of Life and Statutes, 31.

Together with the whole Church preparing for the Synod of Bishops this coming October, let us allow ourselves to be truly touched by Mary's example and to contemplate her caring, dynamic and concrete love. "A love full of boldness and focused completely on the gift of self, a charity which urges us to love God above all else and above ourselves. To love those with whom we share our daily life, those who may seem hardly lovable in themselves. It is a love that is service and dedication, above all towards the weakest and poorest, love that transforms our faces and fills us with joy."⁹

I wish you all a joyful and blessed feast of our Lady!

Affectionately in our Lady,

S. Maria Goretti Lee



⁹ Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Thirty-third World Youth Day, 2018.