

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE  
December 25, 2011

Thank you, dear Sisters, for your prayers. I have regained back my strength after being down under the weather for some time. Though physically I have experienced discomforts - the body deprived of vigor and well-being - yet, the spirit remains steadfast and strong. Suffering is a blessing. It purifies and sanctifies the body and the soul.

Advent is the season in the liturgical year, which is a preparation for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, and I say, truly it is. For me, it has an added dimension. It is a transforming preparation, not only in terms of being docile to God's will but in being one with Him in His pains and solitude. Who says Passion can't happen in Advent? But I could truly, truly say that never have I experienced the absence of God's presence and love when I was sick. He manifested Himself strongly in

moments of weakness and more so in pain. I could say then that Christmas this year is something different. It has taken on a new meaning, a new value, a message full of mercy, thanksgiving, and hope. Now I understand what some authors had said, "That Christmas can only be understood as the introduction to the Paschal Mystery because Bethlehem is the first step on the road to Calvary."

My dear Sisters, as we welcome Christmas this year, let our hearts be filled with gratitude for this all - enduring gift of all gifts, a gift meant for all of us. It is a gift that can never be exhausted for it is meant to be shared. Jesus Christ is the gift that keeps on giving.

Christmas is a time of joy for God has entered into our world to draw us into His presence. Let us share this joy with our Sisters, with our families and friends. Let us rejoice, "For the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone... For a Child is born to us,

a Son is given us.....He will be the Messiah: Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.”

Christmas is a time of Hope... Emmanuel has come into our midst. God is with us! Even in the midst of stark realities, of unending disasters ravaging our country and turmoil within, brought about by too much politics and thirst for power, still we have all the reasons to keep on hoping because God is faithful. As the Holy Father, the late Pope John Paul II had said, “Hope has a face, a name: Jesus Christ, ‘God with us’.”

My dear Sisters, let this Christmas be a time for Jesus to be born anew in our hearts. Let us ask for a heart that is pure, a heart that reaches out to forgive, a heart that is full of compassion, a heart that is joyful, a heart that has patience in waiting, a heart that can withstand suffering, like Mary, who always remain pure, undefiled, obedient to God’s will and who suffered in the silence of her heart. Because of the commitment of Mary, declaring her fiat, her “yes,” Christmas happened.

Let us pray for peace, peace in the world, in war-torn countries, and especially for peace here our country, the beloved Philippines. Let peace ring in our hearts, the peace which the Angels sung, “Peace on earth goodwill to all mankind.”

Let us also continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in Mindanao and the Visayas, especially in Cagayan de Oro, Iligan, Dumaguete, etc, who were victims of the recent typhoon *Sendong*. It was a devastation, and no matter what help we give could never commensurate the lives and properties that were lost and damaged. As a Province, we are consolidating all our efforts and are collaborating with the Church, the civil authorities, and non-governmental groups, to address the needs of our needy brothers and sisters. Maria Reyna Xavier University Hospital is the center of operations for Relief, Medical Services and Critical Incidence Stress Debriefing (CISD).

I wish to thank our Sisters from all over the Philippines who have volunteered to assist our Sisters in Maria Reyna Xavier University Hospital, in various capacities, and also those who have

generously contributed in cash or in kind. I am also grateful in a special way to the Sisters who are in the helm of the Province's Disaster Risk Reduction Management for their commitment and leadership. Thank you, dear Sisters for your generosity and self-sacrifice.

May this Christmas season be the best and the holiest for each one of you. With the Provincial Administration, I wish you a blessed Christmas and a peaceful New Year!