

Mary, “Mother of the Word of God” and “Mother of Faith”¹



My dear Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. God sent the angel Gabriel who greeted her thus: *“Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you.”*²

Mary, a model of faith, is one of the principal figures of Advent and Christmas by her attentive listening, her docility to the Word of God, by the quality of the waiting and welcome that she accorded to the Lord in her own life.

Mary’s response is an act of faith: she believed in the Word and made herself available for God’s service: *“I am the servant of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.”*³ She truly believed that *“nothing is impossible to God.”*⁴

Some time later, after the Angel’s annunciation, Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth who received her in her house with these words: *“Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.”*⁵ In Mary we find the model of a deep faith and an complete trust.”⁶

Like Mary, blessed indeed are we who have heard Christ’s call and have followed him without knowing where this adventure would lead us. Society as a whole, the Church and Religious life in general are going through very difficult times at present. Do we feel spurred on by a passion for Christ with a similar zeal to make him known through the proclamation of his Gospel?

Our faith is often put to the test by our own experiences of hardships and darkness that the world is actually going through. Sometimes they make us turn away from Him who alone could give us life: Jesus Christ. It is impossible for us to remain in religious life, or to be Christians or to remain in the Church without an attachment to Christ, he who is the Word of God and who has given us divine life; he who transfigures the face of the earth and makes all things new (Rev. 21:5). Those who have faith have already possessed life.

Through his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, the Church has the mission to sustain the faith of the faithful and to proclaim God’s word. The Holy Father invites us to go back to what

¹ Verbum Domini,27

² Lk 1:28.

³ Lk 1:38

⁴ Lk 1: 37

⁵ Lk 1: 45

⁶ B.L. # 5

is essential: Faith in Christ - and he announced to the pilgrims gathered at St Peter's Square on October 16, 2011 that the "Year of Faith" will be launched on October 11, 2012.

*"I consider that it is appropriate to recall the beauty and centrality of the faith, the need to reinforce it and to deepen it at the personal and the community level and to do so in a perspective that is not so much celebratory as missionary, with a view precisely to the mission ad gentes and the New Evangelization."*⁷ This is such a beautiful task to be undertaken, while giving rise to questions and responses from within us:

Each one of us is invited to begin reading attentively the Apostolic Letter "Porta Fidei" *The Door of Faith*, to prepare ourselves to live fervently this year of grace. This letter is addressed to all the faithful. May its announcement stir a very special impact in the hearts of consecrated persons.

Who could best journey with us in this spiritual experience if not the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Paul? Both could guide us and give us the courage of faith, the fortitude and the trust that could overcome all obstacles from within and around us.

- ***The Holy Father calls our attention to the beauty and the centrality of faith.***

The "Door of Faith", says the Holy Father, is a lifetime path; it is meant to give a renewed impetus to the mission by leading men and women to a life of relationship with Christ. What then is faith? For Christians, it is a gift of God that we receive at baptism, a gift of an encounter with Jesus Christ as a living person, a heart to heart meeting in prayer. The Christian faith is above all a spiritual experience under the action of the Holy Spirit as Jesus declared to Peter after the latter's profession of Faith: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Jesus told him, *"Blessed are you, Simon, son of John. It was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven."*⁸ St. Paul himself says: *"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit."*⁹

Faith is not only a very personal encounter with God, it is also the gift to recognize his visitations through the events in our life or through the signs that he gives us. The God we believe in is the God who revealed himself in history, starting from Abraham – a man justified by faith- and who continues to reveal himself in his Church. The Christ who makes known his presence during our intimate moments of prayer, is truly the very same Jesus Christ who was born in Bethlehem; who died in Jerusalem and who, for several times, manifested himself to his apostles after his resurrection. The Christian faith therefore is a belief, a commitment to a Person who entered in our human history. *"It is a treasure which already gives us an experience of the plenitude, the twofold experience of Easter and Pentecost though still obscure."*¹⁰

God manifests himself in every person's life. For Mary, it was during her hidden life in Nazareth. For Saul's vocation, it happened on the road to Damascus where he was struck down by a light from heaven and heard Christ's voice: *"Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus whom you persecute."*¹¹

From then on, Paul's life would be transformed by this encounter with the Risen Christ. His life would find its foundation in Christ and the aim of his teachings was the faith in Christ, the justification of the Christian soul. In his heart, he will always hear *"I am Jesus..."*, the same Risen Christ who appeared to him and he *"runs the race in order to win the prize for he himself had been seized by Christ."*¹² And nothing held him back. He became the indefatigable voyager, creating new communities. Nothing stopped him, neither persecutions

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI . Message after the Angelus Prayer, 16 October 2011.

⁸ Mt 16 : 16-17

⁹ 1 Cor : 12,3

¹⁰ Capitular Acts 2007 page 19

¹¹ Acts 9:1-20

¹² Phil 3:12

nor dangers, nor even death “for the love of Christ impels us.” (2 Cor 5:14) “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.”¹³

- **Pope Benedict XVI reminds us of the necessity to strengthen our faith.**

The Church is holy, but within, it is made up of sinners. Thus it is called to purify itself, to constantly follow the slow and gradual path of penance and conversion.¹⁴ The year of faith is an invitation to authentic conversion and renewal in the Lord. According to the degree of one’s free and voluntary sense of responsibility, the person’s thoughts, feelings, mentality and behavior are gradually purified and transformed along the path that is never totally finished in this life.¹⁵

An intense reflection on faith is necessary to allow us to help those who believe in Christ to renew their firm belief in the Gospel most especially during this particular moment of changes in society that we experience now.¹⁶

For us, consecrated persons, a direct contact with the Word of God is fundamentally important. The frequent reading of the Gospels is indispensable in knowing Jesus Christ, the Word through whom God speaks to us in the Gospels. Ignorance of the Gospel is ignorance of Jesus Christ: St Paul forcefully reminds us in the letter to the Philippians, “I consider everything as loss because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”¹⁷

It is from the gospels that we draw the indispensable nourishment for our spiritual life daily. When we open ourselves to receive the Word of God, we make ourselves disposed to its message of conversion.¹⁸

Faith draws its strength and vigor in finding God’s love in the ordinariness of daily life. The experience of this love that is received and communicated as grace and joy, makes the faith grow. Therefore faith grows and becomes strong with each act of faith. In this continuous process, one needs to entrust oneself completely into the hands of love that becomes ever greater because it comes from God.¹⁹

- **The Holy Father invites us as well to deepen our faith on the personal and community level in the perspective of evangelization.**

The year of Faith is also a favorable time to receive the breath of the Holy Spirit so as to give a renewed momentum to the mission of Christ in the Church for an improved proclamation of the Good News.

According to the Holy Father, the Mission has not changed and consequently, there should be no change in the enthusiasm and the courage that inspired the Apostles and the first disciples. The Holy Spirit who moved them to open wide the doors of the cenacle and established them as evangelizers is the same Spirit that moves the Church toward a **renewed proclamation of hope to the peoples of our time.**

Today, having been inwardly stirred by the spiritual experience of encountering the Risen Christ, we the Sisters of St. Paul, are called upon by the Lord to continue walking in his footsteps along the Gospel road. Today, Christ is once again sending us to evangelize our brothers and sisters...let us therefore renew our missionary horizons.²⁰

“With steadfast faith and firm hope, the apostle goes ahead in spite of obstacles and never tires of announcing Jesus Christ.”²¹

¹³ 1 Cor. 9:16

¹⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, 2011. Apostolic Letter *The Door of Faith* n°6

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, 2011. Apostolic Letter *The Door of Faith* n°8

¹⁷ Phil. 3: 8

¹⁸ cf BL # 45

¹⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, 2011. Apostolic Letter *The Door of Faith* n° 7

²⁰ Cf Capitular Acts 2007 pages 3 , 11

²¹ BL # 52 ; 2 Cor 6: 4-10

Pope Benedict XVI points out that “*secularization had left a heavy mark even in the countries which were formerly of old Christian traditions*”. It is manifested as a “*crisis of Christian life*” and calls for a new evangelization as a response, a gospel proclamation making use of new approaches.”

This crisis is characterized by an exclusion of God in the lives of persons, with a total indifference to the faith and even an attempt to marginalize it in public life. In the face of this crisis, Pope Benedict XVI insists on an adequate formation for the new generations and invites to a “*style of life*” which gives a witness of authentic credibility to believers. Moreover, the Holy Father reminds us that the Church could not evangelize unless its witness remains faithful to Jesus Christ, that is, a witnessing accompanied by poverty, detachment and freedom in the face of world authorities.

As persons consecrated to Christ, how do these reminders of the Pope regarding the credible announcement of the Word of God concern us and challenge us personally? In his Apostolic Exhortation “*Verbum Domini*”, Pope Benedict XVI reaffirms the “*need in our day for a decisive commitment to the Mission, with missionary outreach being a clear sign of the maturity of an ecclesial community.*”²²

How would you define “*a decisive commitment to the Mission*”? What is your reaction to what the Letter of the Pope says about the need for “*Mission ad gentes*”?

Dear Sisters, God is calling our attention. Through this Apostolic Exhortation, it is God who speaks to us with a Word of love, his living Word that gives us new life. He is the Way the Truth and the Life. Let us listen to him as we entrust our supplication to Mary.

O Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of humankind, you were given to us as our Model and our Mother, and you keep watch over our Congregation since its humble foundation in Levesville. You who have believed that nothing is impossible with God, obtain for us a deep faith and a complete trust that made you the Mother of Him who is God’s “Yes”. Teach us to be like you, to be attentive to the Word of God; and grant that through the signs of the times we will know how to recognize Christ Jesus the Savior, receive him in our life and announce him to our brothers and Sisters.

Our Sisters Assistants, our Sisters Secretary and Bursar join me in greeting you all

A
Merry Christmas,
A Good and Happy Year 2012,
with Peace and Joy
in the service of the Lord !

My dear Sisters, please be assured of my prayer and fraternal affection.

Sr. Myriam Kitcharain.

Superior General

²² Pope Benedict XVI. 2011. Apostolic Exhortation: *Verbum Domini* N° 95