



8 December 2010

My dear Sisters,

Christmas is fast approaching and the Advent liturgy ushers us into the mystery of the new life offered to us: life everlasting, life with Christ, life in the Spirit.

Christmas, in all cultures, is a special time for gatherings, fraternal greetings as well as gifts. Through these signs, we indicate our desire and prayer for God's grace, his blessings and his Peace for everyone we greet. It is thus that the Lord himself taught Moses how to invoke his blessings upon the children of Israel.

*"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."*¹

Grace is nothing else but the gentle and abounding love of God. It is a love which translates itself into action - through Christ, in the Spirit- in the ordinary and extraordinary events of our life and our apostolic activities. For God can only love with a dynamic, creative and sanctifying love.

Grace - a word frequently used by St Paul - means an all-benevolent, gratuitous divine force, which he himself had experienced in his life. This is the same force of grace that completely changed him after his Damascus road encounter with the Lord. It was a decisive experience that changed him into a totally new person, an experience that made him discover this absolute gratuitous love which transformed him entirely and opened up a new life for him. *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."*²

Moreover, we are all the objects of that love which is always preferential and freely given. *"God chose us before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ..."*³ By his own choice, God destined us to participate in his life which is essentially loving. St Paul emphasizes the aspect of a free favor from the Father in the gift of Christ and of the Spirit as manifestations of his compassionate love. *"For by grace you have been saved."*⁴

Grace is extolled as a strength coming from God, a divine help sent in the face of human limitations most especially in activities for the Gospel and for God's Kingdom. It is this grace that keeps us steadfast, that sustains and spurs us on, giving us back our dignity as children of God despite our faults, despite the setbacks and trials that could assail us. We can only depend on the power of grace.

¹ Numbers 6:24-26

² Galatians 2:20; BL #4

³ Ephesians 1 :5

⁴ Ephesians 2:8

St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians strongly develop this theme: "*By the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me; My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*"⁵

What is the best manner for us to receive this gift of grace in our lives? As we have mentioned previously, all of God's gifts are unreservedly given, even as God respects our own personal freedom. It is when we open ourselves up to God that we receive his grace. The result of grace is not passivity but rather a dynamism which is at work right at the very heart of our weakness. "*We entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain...*"⁶

We should then do everything within our power to ever deepen and renew daily our relationship with the Lord whose grace can transform us and gradually transfigure us into his own image. For what is grace if not the presence of "*Christ in you, our hope of glory.*"⁷ All these come from the Spirit who is at work in us "*No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit*"; "*Because the Spirit has been given us, we are witnesses and prophets, seeing the finger of God in all events.*"⁸

We are all in touch with grace, each one according to the approach and moment deemed to be most conducive and helpful. For some, it may be through a mental representation; for others, a word of God or someone's good example. In each case, it is a journey back to the source, a rekindling of the fire. Thus Paul invited Timothy his disciple: "*I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you.*"⁹

God is love. There is but one love – God's *Agape* – that we ought to spread out in the world. How? By loving one another as Christ taught us. "*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. .. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.*"¹⁰ Christ's words invite us to love one another, not *for* the love of God but to love *with* God's love. We are invited to love, not for the motive of imitating, but to a loving which is a real participation in the divine life that will never pass away.

As Sisters of the same Religious family, abiding in the love of Christ who has loved us means accepting to live together and to participate in His divine life in one Community of Love. Abiding in the love of Christ means establishing a loving relationship with our Sisters, a relationship marked by forgiveness and mutual appreciation- freely given. As St. Paul affirms, God cannot but love "*... nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"¹¹ This is the principal message of all evangelization.

If such is God's love for us, then Christian life and religious life must primarily be a "thanksgiving," an awareness of being constantly under the loving gaze of God and allowing oneself to fully become a child of God. According to St. Paul, "*You did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship that makes us cry out : Abba, Father.*"¹² Knowing that one is loved

⁵ 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor 12:9

⁶ 2 Cor. 6:1; BL# 42,44

⁷ Col. 1:27

⁸ 1 Cor. 12:3; BL # 42

⁹ 2 Tim. 1:6; BL Ch.7 (pp 58-65) Life of Prayer

¹⁰ Jn. 15 : 12 ; 15 :9 ; BL Ch 6 (pp 50-56) Fraternal Life

¹¹ Rom. 8 :39

¹² Rom. 8:15

without conditions is a revitalizing experience that radically changes the meaning of our life in its simplicity.

We must admit that oftentimes, we tend to be absorbed in the struggles and difficulties of our daily life and do not always have hearts that are disposed to give thanks to God. Yet, thanksgiving is an essential element of Christian spirituality. What is thanksgiving? It is expressing thanks to God for all his graces. All that we are and have are gifts of God. *“What have you that you have not received?”*¹³ Giving thanks implies a capacity to be amazed at all that the Lord does; but most all, it means to marvel at the discovery that He is a merciful God who wants to give of Himself to us freely and generously through grace and out of pure love. In giving thanks to the Lord, we **render Him the grace for the gracious gift of Himself in Christ Jesus.**

The Holy Eucharist is first and foremost a sacrifice of thanksgiving. We come to mass to say give thanks. United to the Son, as a Church, we thank the Father for his work of salvation. “It is truly right and just to give thanks to you, always and everywhere...” thus begins the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer.

Thanksgiving is an attitude that comes naturally for St. Paul when he starts his letters. It will be good for us to follow his recommendations and the path he points out to us so that our communities become a reflection of the Trinitarian life. *“Be thankful.” “ Rejoice always, pray constantly; give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*¹⁴

All of the above are simply a recall of all that we have read and meditated on at one point or another in our religious life. They are realities of our faith life that we find and rediscover in the Word of God. Are we deeply convinced of this? What impact have these thoughts had in our life? Do they simply remain as beautiful ideas that we like to read and meditate? Or have we started to integrate them, such that they inspire and transform our life daily? Let us have no fear of crying out to the Lord for help, as the father of the epileptic in the Gospel did: *“I believe. Help my unbelief!”* Consequently, our life can become one great song of thanksgiving moving us to sing with Mary, *“she who believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled.”*¹⁵

In Jesus, God became Emmanuel – God with us. May the grace of Christmas reconcile us in His love and increase our desire to abide in his love, in thanksgiving for the graces received.

Our Sisters Assistants, Secretary and Treasurer join me in greeting you a Merry Christmas and a Holy, blessed and happy year 2011. We assure you of our prayers and affection.



Superior General

¹³ 1 Cor 4-7

¹⁴ CA 2007; Col 3:15; 1 Thess. 5: 16-18

¹⁵ Mark 9 :24 ; Luke 1 :45