



Eastertide
April 2018

Jubilee Letter – 2018

“Love Gives Everything”

(Blessed M. Theresa Gerhardinger, writings #1)

Dear Sister Jubilarians of 2018,

With profound gratitude, I congratulate you on the anniversary of your first profession of vows some 25, 40, 50, 60, 70, 75, 80, or 85 years ago! May you experience anew God’s ever-faithful love as you celebrate this occasion.

Your jubilee is a source of hope and life for us your sisters, for our entire congregation. The gift of your lives encourages and inspires each of us on our journey in mission. We pray that God will bless you with peace and joy as you reflect on all that the years have held for you and as you look forward in hope to all that our loving God desires for you.

In writing this letter, I began by prayerfully reading each of your names and was moved to contemplate God’s love. What came to me was the awareness of 237 unique love stories, of life commitments of love giving everything.

This led me to pray with the early writing of Blessed M. Theresa, where we find her words, “love gives everything...,” and to ponder her profound encounter with Jesus. She begins to reveal her love story and life commitment that would become central to our lives and commitments. “Now I am in Jesus! Jesus may do with me what he wants; I trust in him... On him, I will build.” Theresa goes on to express her insights from this encounter and experience of love—of a love that gives everything gladly, of a love that cannot wait, of a love that leads to conversion (cf. MT, writings, #1).

Her reflection reminds me of the thoughts of St. Catherine of Siena: “People who are in love forget themselves entirely... they’re totally absorbed in the object of their love. Love has the power to make lover and beloved joined in heart and mind. What one loves, the other loves. They’re one” (*Letters*). It is no wonder that for Blessed M. Theresa the heart forms itself to what it loves, and God’s concerns became the only concern of her heart (cf. MT, #3, 895).

Love stories need to be remembered and retold. For it is in the remembering and retelling of these special moments of grace that love’s energy is rekindled in us and released into the world as new life and communion. I invite each of you, dear Sister Jubilarians, to reflect on and retell your love story and its unfolding, your profound encounter and faith journey of intimacy.

- ▲ **When did you become aware of the intimate whispers of God in your heart?**
- ▲ **What are your experiences of love’s urgings in life, toward new life?**

God's Love Story

Our love stories are rooted in and flow from God's love story. A primary way that God and God's love is revealed is through creation, because the very design of creation is love. "Creation is the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things" (*Laudato Si'*, #77). Simply, God's creating is an ongoing, unending act of God loving. Each of us, every being, even the least, is loved tenderly by God. In creation we can see, smell, taste, touch, and hear God's "I love you." As our Blessed M. Theresa wrote, "Because love is God's essence, God loves us, too, as our creation and salvation proclaim" (*Trust and Dare*, August 2, #3).

Contemplating creation is a significant way for us to open our hearts to God and to God's revelation of love. In letting our senses and imaginations become absorbed in something in creation, we create the interior space to be attentive to God's presence and to experience God's love. "The Divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet" (*Laudato Si'*, #9). May we each enjoy time to be in creation and in awe of God and God's love.

In God's love story is each of our love stories. We come to realize and appreciate that "Each person is a love story that God writes on this earth. Each one of us is God's love story" (Pope Francis, General Audience, 17 May 2017). Our lives become the story of God loving us into being and of our coming to love. "We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason 'each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.'" (*Laudato Si'*, #65). Our Constitution *You Are Sent* calls us to recognize and live the truth of how God loves. God first loves us and loves faithfully, unconditionally, intimately, radically (cf. *YAS*, C 10, 13, 28, 36). God who is love gives everything.

The Gospel of John offers many insights into expressions of divine love. We realize that God so loved the world that God sent the only Son, so that all may have life. We recall times of Jesus healing, calling forth, and responding in love with his act of ultimate love, loving to the end, loving to perfection, loving into the future. This we particularly remember during Holy Week, celebrate in Easter, and participate in our living of Eucharist, "the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life... itself an act of cosmic love" (*Laudato Si'*, #236).

How we experience and participate in God's love story depends on our openness and readiness to meet our loving God again and again in ever-new encounters. Our love stories and life journeys as School Sisters of Notre Dame are born and reborn in our call and our encounter with God who loves. "In the power of Christ's spirit, we respond anew to God's continuing call, accepting his love as he consecrates us as apostolic women religious" (*YAS*, C 3).

- ▲ **How have you experienced your love story flowing from God's love story?**
- ▲ **How has your SSND life in God's love deepened with the years?**

Impelled by Love

Caught up in this divine love, we enter into the profound mystery of the Triune God. The love of the Triune God cannot be contained; it overflows. Love pours forth from one person of the Trinity into the other, into creation, into us. In the words of Thomas Merton, "Love comes out of God and gathers us to God in order to pour itself back into God through all of us...we all become doors and windows through which God shines..." (*New Seeds of Contemplation*, 67).

In this mystery, we experience the dynamic relationship and action of the Triune God. We are invited into communion with God who loves, who is loved, and who is love itself. We experience being loved radically and in new ways and being called to love in new ways. God draws us more deeply into the divine embrace, in order to extend the gift of this holy embrace of love outward in ever-widening circles to all the world.

In remembering and retelling our love stories, we also experience our failures to love and our need for mercy. We become painfully aware of the ruptures in relationships with God, with one another, and with Earth itself. Yet pondering the mystery of mercy, we are encouraged; “sin itself makes more radiant the love of God.” (Pope Francis, Homily, 12 December 2015)

Authentic encounters with the love of the Triune God liberate, heal, and transform us anew for mission. Through the power of the Spirit, we are called to transcend ourselves for a radical following of Christ by living our vowed life as consecrated women religious in community (cf. *YAS*, Foreword). Deepening our consciousness of who we are in relationship with the Triune God, we grow in communion with one another and all creation. We engage in a life-long, transformative process of moving from one communion to another, from communion to more intimate, deepening, expanding communion.

The truth of our being loved by God and belonging to God calls us into a universal communion. When our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, nothing and no one is excluded from our concern (cf. *Laudato Si'*, #92). Our hearts must break with our world fractured by violence and war, with those forced to flee their homes, with those excluded and marginalized, with wounded Earth and its creatures.

Being in such communion, we learn kenosis. Communion with the Triune God involves our participating in self-emptying, sacrificial love that gives everything: in loving all humanity and all creation, loving all God loves, as God loves. “Christ’s universal yet intimate love impels us to dedicate ourselves totally to him and thus to his people” (*YAS*, GD 11).

True communion is never static. It necessarily finds expression in mission, which invites us into mission and draws others into mission, into divine communion, and into fostering ever-greater communion and fullness of life for all. The love of the Triune God impels us into the heart of the world to lay down our lives and live a love that gives everything. Together with God, we can love the world into wholeness, into a new love story that God desires for each of us, for all humanity, for the whole of creation.

- ▲ **How have you experienced being drawn evermore deeply into divine communion?**
- ▲ **How are you impelled to embrace anew a love that gives everything?**

Dear Sister Jubilarians, your life commitments and love stories in God are our reason for heartfelt gratitude and deep joy. Your lives make visible to us Infinite Love that gives everything. We celebrate and rejoice with you.

I assure you of the love and prayerful support of our entire congregation.

Sister Roxanne Schares
Sister Roxanne Schares, SSND
General Superior