



World Day for Consecrated Life
2 February 2019

Jubilee Letter – 2019

Witness to Love

Dear Sister Jubilarians of 2019,

With gratitude and joy, I congratulate each of you on the anniversary of your first profession of vows, some 25, 40, 50, 60, 70, 75, or 80 years ago! May you experience anew the light of Christ and the love of our ever-faithful God as you celebrate this moment in your life. We pray that God blesses you with peace and joy as you reflect on all that the years have held for you and as you discern and respond to God's continuing call to love.

It is significant to mark the day celebrating consecrated life, which reminds us of our call to be the light of Christ in the world. Your jubilee is a great source of light and hope for us your sisters and for our world. The witness of your lives inspires and strengthens each of us on our journey.

Everything begins with an encounter with God, an encounter with Divine Love. The journey in consecrated life is born of such an encounter, in which we discover a call. Writing this letter, I prayed for each of you and thought about the encounters that led to your covenant love relationship with God. What did you hear from the beginning that remains in you (cf. 1 John 2:24), that became your life and to which you give witness? It is not so much the words we speak as the life we live that gives witness to our encounter with God.

❖ **What encounter with God does your life witness to?**

Witness to joy

*Through our life as apostolic women religious,
we witness to the joy and challenge of following Christ.
(YAS, C 43)*

Joy flows from our encounter with God and living with the certainty of knowing we are loved by God. "Wherever consecrated people are, there is always joy!" claimed Pope Francis.

How do we witness to joy? Have you ever had reason to wonder about this? Some years ago, while waiting with two young people for a bus in Nairobi, I faced this question. They were curious about what I was doing in that part of the city, and as I explained, they expressed surprise about my being a religious. They said that the sisters they knew seemed sad, disappointed, even angry. From then on, without judgment, I became more attentive and would try to see with another's eyes how and to what we religious might be giving witness.

Authentic witness in consecrated life is characterized by joy. Yet, we know of real challenges in the life of religious today. There can be times when the demands of discipleship are very great and become burdensome; the joy of self-surrender, of being completely given over to our loving God, is lost. Still for us the call remains: “to serve the Triune God all our lives with joy, ...” (Blessed M. Theresa, 714).

❖ How has your life witnessed to joy?

Witness to the willingness

*Strengthened by Christ’s grace and following his example,
we are willing to suffer want, insult, oppression, and death for the sake of the kingdom.*
(YAS, C 17)

Jesus’ entire life was an act of love for the life of the world. For this he was sent, that all may have life, life to the full (cf. *Jn* 10:10). Our Constitution *You Are Sent* constantly reminds us of our call to a radical following of Christ, to a willingness to bear the cost of love.

Following Christ will eventually lead to the cross. St. Bonaventure wrote that “there is no other path into the heart of God than through the burning love of the crucified Christ.” We School Sisters acknowledge this truth. “As we identify more deeply with Christ, the very pattern of his life becomes ours” (YAS, C 46).

Through our baptism and religious consecration, we come to know ourselves as God’s beloved, and this love renews us, transforms us, and sends us into mission. Committed to God’s mission, we are drawn into Christ’s self-emptying, urged to lay down our lives so others might live (cf. YAS, Foreword, C 33-34). Jubilee is a moment for us to contemplate how we have experienced this reality in our lives, how we have lived this, and how others have witnessed this to us.

The gospel story of the widow who gave her last coins, her whole livelihood, highlights such complete trust in God that she could give God everything. Often, I saw this in the refugee camps as widows came forth during Mass, offering their few coins, obtained from selling some of their meagre food rations. Our life-offering, too, must to be based on such complete and courageous trust.

In our world today, it seems more necessary than ever for us to embrace a prophetic witness characteristic of consecrated life and prophetically proclaim the primacy of God’s reign (cf. YAS, C 12). “Consecrated persons are being asked to bear witness everywhere with the boldness of a prophet who is unafraid of risking even [her] life” (Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 85).

Strengthened by the grace and example of Christ, we are moved by the cry of the disempowered and the groaning of creation. We open ourselves to the suffering of others, willing to welcome and bear their suffering. Nurturing a compassionate heart, we discover the courage to weep — to cry God’s tears, to love with the heart of God. In the psalmist’s words, God has kept count of the suffering and has gathered and recorded the tears (cf. Psalm 56). God suffers. God weeps, because God loves. We are willing to suffer, to witness to the love of the Eternal One.

❖ How has your life witnessed to the willingness to bear the cost of love?

Witness to divine love

May we be living witnesses to the irrevocable love of our God become incarnate...
(YAS, Foreword)

Divine love! How can we ever begin to comprehend this profound yet incarnate mystery? *You Are Sent* calls us time and again to recognize that God first loves us and loves faithfully, intimately, irrevocably, radically, unconditionally, universally. Contemplating this mystery, we are caught up in divine love and come to realize that we are from love, of love, for love.

Christ's self-gift reveals the ongoing, total gift of God's self, God's love of all, for the life of all. Divine love is infinite and immediate; it comes to us in our openness, embraces us and flows through our lives into the world through our words and actions, through our very being. The divine love we encounter must be embodied and respond to real, even commonplace needs.

We begin to grasp that divine love is humble, vulnerable love. "God is vulnerable ... because God is eternally committed to reciprocity, in order to make of our relationships the very movement of divinity" (Simón Pedro Arnold, OSB, "The Mystery of the Incarnation: Revelation of the Triune God as a Vulnerable God," LCWR Assembly 2018). God is vulnerable and comes to us in vulnerability, meeting us in our vulnerability.

At the core of our being, we know the unquenchable thirst for the Divine, to be more deeply united with our God. Through the power of the Spirit, we transcend ourselves and enter into deeper communion with the Triune God. "The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways" (*Laudato Si'*, 238).

In the phrase "infinite bond of love" we recognize and feel the strength of love that is eternal connection, relationship, communion. The word "inspiring" suggests the power of creativity and movement forward that brings forth the new, "new pathways," new life. Empowered to be witnesses of divine love, we proclaim anew God's reign of love, of communion.

"Unity is diversity embraced, protected, and maintained by an infinitely generous love" (Richard Rohr, OFM, "Trinity: Unity in Diversity," March 3, 2017). The vision of Pentecost reveals the universal design of divine love, a love that embraces all humanity and the whole of creation, bringing forth oneness that is of the heart of God. Through our lives as women religious, may we forever be living witnesses to divine love.

❖ How have you known and given witness to divine love?

Dear Sister Jubilarians, your life-witness to the irrevocable love of God, to Divine Love, is the source of our joy and gratitude. Your lives make visible to us the humble, Infinite Love that gives everything. With you, we witness to love and celebrate love.

With love and in prayerful support,

Sister Roxanne Schares

Sister Roxanne Schares, SSND
General Superior