



25th World Day for Consecrated Life
2 February 2021

Jubilee Letter – 2021

Embracing Our Deepest Identity

Moving toward the fullness of personhood in Christ, ... (YAS, C 46)

Dear Sister Jubilarians of 2021,

With a joy-filled heart, I think of each you and congratulate you on the anniversary of your first profession of vows, some 25, 40, 50, 60, 70, 75, or 80 years ago! As you celebrate this moment in your life, I pray that you experience anew God's fidelity and intimate love.

Your jubilee is a great source of hope for us and our world, especially during these uncertain and trying times. Your lives bear witness to God's love and desire for abundant life for all. We thank you for the gift of your fidelity; we thank God for how God has been present through you and for what God has accomplished through and in you.

In some ways, jubilee is a crossroads: a moment to pause, reflect, and celebrate, and an invitation to embrace the challenge of the newness of the Gospel for our times and to choose new life, a new path forward. "Every crossroads is a leap of faith, an opportunity to grow, transform and become more of who God intends for us to be" (Ted Dunn, *Graced Crossroads: Pathways to Deep Change and Transformation*, p. 238).

What delighted our Blessed Theresa was the inward transformation of her sisters toward the likeness of God (cf. YAS, "Origins of our Congregation"). Our identity as consecrated persons, rooted in the divine mystery of the Triune God, is not static, but dynamic, ever evolving toward new life and toward our deepest identity. Who does God need you and us to be for our world today?

Praying for each of you by name, I wondered about your experience at crossroads in your life, making choices and moving toward fullness of personhood, toward new life, toward your deepest identity. During your jubilee year, I encourage you to reflect on this movement, this transformative journey. How has God invited, even urged you, to grow into your true self?

Life: A Radical Following

We are called and consecrated ... for a radical following ... (YAS, C 48).

Consecrated for a radical following of Christ, our life is for the world, for God's mission in the world. Our call begins and unfolds with an encounter and an invitation to "come and see," to "come, follow." This encounter touches the restlessness, that deep yearning for God at the core of our being. Our minds and hearts open to love that impels us into discipleship.

Through the ordinary days of our lives as we strive to follow Christ faithfully, we begin to live the life of Jesus until one day his life becomes our life. Then it is no longer merely a following, although following is challenging enough. “Caught up in Christ’s unconditional love, we joyfully commit the totality of our person to him... in him we find our all” (YAS, C 13). In our response, we find ourselves on a journey of becoming more, a beloved disciple.

The Gospel of John offers us two beautiful examples of such discipleship. We recall the references made to the “disciple Jesus loved.” At the last supper, reclining next to Jesus (cf. Jn 13:23), the beloved disciple knows such intimacy that he is attuned to Jesus’ heartbeat, to Jesus’ concerns, to all that Jesus loves. A short time later, this disciple is given as son to Jesus’ mother and she is given as mother to the disciple (cf. Jn 19:26). The other is of Mary of Magdala. Driven by her yearning that flows out of the intimacy of love, while it is still dark, she is at the tomb, searching for her beloved. On hearing her name spoken by him, she is transformed and becomes disciple to the disciples.

“As our intimate relationship with (Christ) deepens, he frees us to love more radically” (YAS, C 13), to follow more closely, to look more honestly upon the needs of our world, and to live and act more boldly. We are driven by love, made new, and empowered to respond in unsuspected ways; for God’s “love constantly impels us to find new ways forward” (*Laudato Si’*, 245).

✦ **What has been your life experience of an intimate, radical following?**

Light: Prophetic Witness

Becoming more like Christ, we witness ... (YAS, C 13).

In the darkness of our times with the raging pandemics of disease, division and discrimination, violence, and devastation of Earth, what greater need is there than light—a light that shines in the darkness and cannot be overcome (cf. Jn 1:5). Christ, light of the world, light for all nations, has called us to be light and to shine for all to see (cf. Mt. 5:14, 16). This we celebrate today: The Presentation of the Lord, who is light, and Consecrated Life, that is “prophetic vision ...” (Pope Francis, 2019 World Day for Consecrated Life).

Following Christ, we come to know God, who is light and in whom there is no darkness, and we are empowered to walk in the light and “live our lives in the light” (1 Jn 1: 5,7) and become children of light (cf. Jn 12:36). Only in an intimate, radical following of Christ who is light do we begin to reflect the light received and shine and radiate the light we become.

Becoming light, becoming more like Christ, “prophetically we proclaim the primacy of God’s reign, present yet still to come” (YAS, C 12). By our very being, we are “called to radiate light and communicate life” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 83) in our world, witnessing God-with-us and God’s universal love for all (cf. YAS, C 13).

“Here and now...the Lord’s disciples are called to live as a community which is the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt 5:13-16). We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 92), to embody attitudes and values, shaping a soul-force that counteracts forces of darkness and division. In our life in mission, we are called to create relationships and *God-enlightened spaces* (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 142) that foster healing, oneness, universal communion.

Is this not the essence of the commitments of our Directional Statement *Love Gives Everything*? To be transformed, to deepen our consciousness of who we are, to give prophetic witness of unity in diversity, to live more interculturally, to respond boldly. Fidelity to our consecrated life is light to the world, is prophetic witness of God among us, of God's love for and in us. This love creates a cosmic, all-inclusive communion, encompassing all humanity and the whole of creation.

▲ **What light, what prophetic witness does God ask of you?**

Love: Our Deepest Identity

As we identify more deeply with Christ, the very pattern of his life becomes ours (YAS, C 46).

A life of radical following of Jesus leads us to becoming light, to becoming *Godly*, to becoming love—the fullness of personhood, our deepest identity. Witnessing to God's all-inclusive love opens us to experience and to accept the paschal mystery in our lives (cf. YAS, C 5).

“We are drawn anew into Christ's self-emptying, into the mystery of ongoing redemption” (YAS, C 33). Loving as Jesus loved, we become love incarnated in the world, a love that gives everything. This evolving journey is cruciform, demanding that we take up our cross daily (cf. Lk 9:23), love graciously and generously, and lay down our lives so others may live.

Love's unfolding requires self-emptying. From a surrendered and emptied place, we neither cling to nor identify with our small selves. Rather, through the power of the Spirit, we transcend ourselves to be ever more deeply united with our God and with God's people, to be more for others (cf. YAS, Foreword).

This is the transformative journey of love: growing into our truest selves, into the divine image of God, into our deepest identity that is love. God's infinite, unconditional love is the reason for our being. Love is the essence of who we are. “Nothing less than an infinite union with Infinite Love will do” (James Finley, *Intimacy: The Divine Ambush*). Created in the divine image of the Triune God who is infinite Love, our life journey is one of welcoming grace and choosing love—the essence of who we are, our deepest identity, our destiny.

▲ **At what crossroads on this transformative journey do you find yourself?**

My dear Sister Jubilarians, God is with you. God breathes life within you and shines light through you. God loves you and sends you forth to witness to Love, to be love. Today and throughout your jubilee year, may you praise and thank God for the gift of your vocation and celebrate the experience of ever-faithful, infinite Love.

May you discover yourselves at the crossroads for a new moment of choice for life, as light, and of love on this transformative journey of embracing your deepest identity.

With you on this journey,

Sister Roxanne Schares

Sister Roxanne Schares, SSND

General Superior