



27th World Day for Consecrated Life
2 February 2023

Jubilee Letter – 2023

Graced by Love

*... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...
And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (Jn 1:14, 16)*

Dear Sister Jubilarians of 2023,

With heartfelt gratitude, I congratulate and pray for each of you on the anniversary of your first profession of vows, some 25, 40, 50, 60, 70, 75, and 80 years ago. This is a Kairos moment for each of you with the invitation to respond anew to God's continuing call to love and to celebrate the gift of your life that is graced by Love.

Your jubilee is a source of joy and grace for us, your sisters, and our entire congregation. As I prayerfully read each of your names, I was deeply touched by the tremendous gift of each of your lives, the lives of 180 of you, many of whom I have come to know and share in the richness of your life in mission as a School Sister of Notre Dame.

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the mystery of the Incarnation, God's love for us, born among us. "Because of the great love God had for us" (Eph 2:4), the Word, full of grace and truth, became one of us, God-with-us. From this fullness of grace, each of us has received grace upon grace (cf. Jn 1:16).

Time and again, we must awaken to this grace, freely and willingly receive the grace of being loved, and allow it to enfold us and unfold in us, becoming alive and active in and through us. In the words of Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr, "We were made in love, for love, and unto love, and it is out of this love that we act." Truly, we are graced by Love.

To be graced by Love is to participate in the fullness of grace that God offers. This is not something we can understand with our minds. God and love can only be experienced and lived. During your jubilee year, I encourage each of you to remember how you have experienced this grace, this dynamic of love that has created, empowered, and transformed you. I invite you to contemplate the call and grace of Love in your life, now and into the future.

Created by Love

*... we acknowledge, accept, and freely surrender to the reality of who God is and who we are,
creatures unconditionally loved by our Creator. (YAS, C 28)*

Our Creator God, source of love and all being, loved us into being. This incredible truth holds much to ponder. Creation is God loving. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis noted that "Creation is

of the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things" (LS, 77), and God is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists" (LS, 238). We have been created by Love.

Creation itself is the first act of divine revelation. According to St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), "Creation is the primary and most perfect revelation of the Divine." It is God's expression of God's very self, of Love. Everything tells us of God and God's love. "The entire material universe speaks of God's love, (God's) boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God" (LS, 84). We are part of this revelation of the Divine, of 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'" (LS, 65). This is who we are / who you are, created by Love.

^ How have you experienced the grace of being created by Love?

Empowered by Love

Because God first loved us, we respond in love ... (YAS, C 10)

Being graced by Love is not something static; it holds the call to more. We are empowered by Love. Because God does not exist outside of relationship, we come to realize that we are created by love in love for love. As one of God's beloved, a fundamental step in this movement to the more is opening ourselves to receive and surrender to the incredible love of God.

This can be frightening; yet fear of love is only healed by love. From the first letter of John we know, "In love there can be no fear, for perfect love drives out fear" (1 Jn 4:18). As we grow in receiving God's love, we are moved to respond: to love God and love what God loves—all creation, and to love as God loves with tenderness and compassion.

The One who creates an ever-expanding universe is drawing us ever deeper into the divine embrace, in order to extend the gift of this holy embrace of love outward in ever-widening circles to all. This is not about a loss of self, rather an expansion.

Empowered by Love, we come to realize that nothing and no one can be excluded from our concern. Often heartbreak, suffering, and sorrow seem to empower love, move us out of ourselves to more love. This brings to mind insights from the poem by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer, "[More Love, More Love](#)," as she reflects on the words of Rita Mae Brown who wrote, "Sorrow is how we learn to love. Your heart isn't breaking. It hurts because it's getting larger. The larger it gets, the more love it holds." Flowing from this, poet Rosemerry writes,

If sorrow is how we learn to love,
then let us learn.
Already enough sorrow's been sown
for whole continents to erupt
into astonishing tenderness.
Let us learn. ...
Let us choose love as if our lives depend on it.
The sorrow is great. Let us learn to love greater—
riotous love, expansive love, ...

We can only begin to imagine how many hearts have broken and how great the sorrow is in these times with violence and war, pandemics and poverty, displacement and separated families, wounded Earth and its creatures. Suffering demands our response (cf. *YAS*, C 17), that we “become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it” (*LS*, 19).

To this we have said “yes:” to joyfully commit the totality of our person to Christ, to love more radically, to witness to his universal love. (cf. *YAS*, C 13). To this we are called: to more love, to learn to love greater with riotous love, expansive love... empowered by Love.

▲ How have you been empowered by Love to more love?

Transformed by Love

God draws us more deeply into God’s self, transforming us into God’s image. (*YAS*, C 31)

What happens in loving with more love that is empowered by Love? Being graced by love opens us to the miracle of Love, that of being transformed by Love.

We must allow ourselves to be deeply moved by the love of God, for the power of graced love within us can transform us and transform our world. Graced by love, we are called and empowered to become God’s grace of love in the world today. Love alone, love that is concrete, palpable, and lived has the power to transform.

True love, divine love frees us to be open to risk being transformed. Such love moves us beyond ourselves, our perspectives, our small worlds to be more, to love more, and to participate in God’s work of loving—of healing, of reconciling, of bringing all to oneness.

Being transformed by Love is costly. Because, as Dieterich Bonhoeffer wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship*, “it costs a... life, and it is grace because it gives (one) the only true life.” It will demand everything of us, but it will not weaken us. Rather, it brings forth in us a new vitality that lies at the heart of universal communion, of communion with the Triune God—Divine Love. Being transformed by Love will transform the world.

▲ How have you welcomed the grace of being transformed by Love?

Dear Sister Jubilarians, may you celebrate your being graced by Love, by a Love that creates, empowers, and transforms. Throughout your jubilee year, may you be filled with gratitude and joy for the gift of your vocation and of being loved into a new life “joined in a splendid universal communion” (*LS*, 220).

Graced by Love, may you and each of us “be living witnesses to the irrevocable love of our God become incarnate” (*YAS*, Foreword) among us, filling us with grace upon grace.

In loving and prayerful support,

Sister Roxanne Schares

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General Superior