



Mary, did you know?

Jubilee letter 2024

Dear Sister Jubilarian,

2024 is the year of your Jubilee of 25, 40, 50, 60 70, 75, 80, or 85 years of religious life. So long ago, you gave your loving YES to God's call and have followed God's path since then.

A song that I found this year and that touched me deeply may guide the reflection related to your Jubilee: "Mary, did you know". At the end of the letter, I will share a link for those who want to listen to the song in English. This is the text:

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy
Has come to make you new?
This child that you delivered, will soon deliver you.*

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will calm the storm with his hand?
Did you know that your baby boy
Has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby
You kiss the face of God.
Mary, did you know?*

*The blind will see, the deaf will hear
The dead will live again
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak
The praises of the Lamb
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy
Is heaven's perfect Lamb?
That sleeping child you're holding is the great, I Am.
Mary, did you know?*

Songwriters: Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene

What Mary did know was that she was engaged to Joseph but not yet living with him. What she knew was how usually a child came to life, and that if a woman conceived outside of marriage she could be stoned to death. For sure she did not know what life would hold for her if she agreed to the angel's call. But she trusted in God and in the angel's message and responded with this great answer, "Let it be done to me as you say." When Jesus was born and she looked at the baby she may have believed that this is the son of God, but did not anticipate the great things he would do later in his life.

Did you know at the beginning when you professed your vows what life would hold for you? Some aspects of life you expected at the beginning may have happened, others did not. Unexpected situations called for renewed discernment and faithful next steps. We are united on this way of life with Mary, the mother of Jesus who gave her FIAT, her YES, to the unknown not understanding completely what the angel revealed to her.

This is what each of you said when you took your vows: God, do with me according to your will, I am willing to go with you. Only with this attitude of trust and faith could you commit yourself to this way of life and be faithful until today.

Mary surely had wonderful moments with her son, but her life was not just romantic with a sweet Jesus boy. She also faced sorrows and troubles, misunderstandings and hurts. Simeon called it swords that would pierce her soul. Your years in the service of God as a School Sister of Notre Dame may also contain both times of joy and pleasure as well as times of trouble and experiences of sorrow and hurt.

Mary became a refugee to Egypt with the young boy. She had to search for the twelve-year-old Jesus and then hear his question "Did you not know that I have to be in my father's house?" She first was rejected when she asked her son to help in Cana at the wedding. She saw the tensions building up around Jesus when he spoke about the loving and merciful God to those who wanted to stick to law and order. She finally saw his suffering and witnessed his death on a cross before she experienced the joy of the resurrection. In all of that, she stayed the loving mother of God. All the challenging moments had made her strong because they never turned her away from her commitment to Jesus. The joyful moments of her way with Jesus kept encouraging her to trust in God's promise.

I invite you to look back on your life, recognize the difficult moments and see how they helped you to grow to the person you are today. And then look at the bright moments of your life with gratitude for the strength and energy these times provided for you. Jubilee is a great invitation to rejoice in the wonderful works God has done through each of you. Each life is a mixture of experiences that can either make us bitter and sad if we focus on the negative or give us new hope and joy if we integrate everything and focus on the encouraging aspects.

Mary stayed faithful to her answer to the angel and to God: I belong to the Lord and am willing to do God's will. You stayed faithful to your YES given so many years ago. You dared to walk into the unknown and you will continue to walk into an unknown future as we never know what surprises may wait for us around the corner.

Only in living with Jesus and hearing about his mission when he was away from home going around preaching and healing, she may have known what her baby boy had become. In the Bible, to know often means not just to be aware of every detail of information, but it includes the attitude of love, trust and personal relationship.

Jubilee invites you to reflect upon your "knowledge" of God. How do you know God? How intense is your personal relationship with the one who called you? How has your love changed? How does your love express itself today?

Such a review of life may help to acknowledge and thank all those who accompanied you during these many years, to thank them or to forgive them as you will also be thanked for all you did well and forgiven what could have been better.

With renewed love and dedication, you may say today, "God, I do not know what is before me. I trust in your presence and in your unconditional love and promise to continue my way with you as the best companion I can imagine. I am willing to be a witness of your love."

We join across waters and continents in celebrating the God of life and are grateful for the 189 Jubilarians and – with the words of our foundress - we will continue to serve the Triune God as the only concern of our life.

“In all may God be our goal and end, our highest good, in whom we find all that makes us content and truly happy.” (M. Theresia, letter #714, Trust and Dare July 2)

On behalf of the congregation, I congratulate you and promise my prayer for each of you. Let us also pray mutually for one another this year,

M. Dominica Michalke, SSND

General Superior

photo taken by M. Dominica Michalke, SSND, in Assisi

Song 3D siblings, Mary, did you know: https://youtu.be/01tZP5mODhg?si=GWZYO37_XpyQz5k2

Song with video: https://youtu.be/CihO7vA_ps4?si=oKuWmwTx223kxNTM