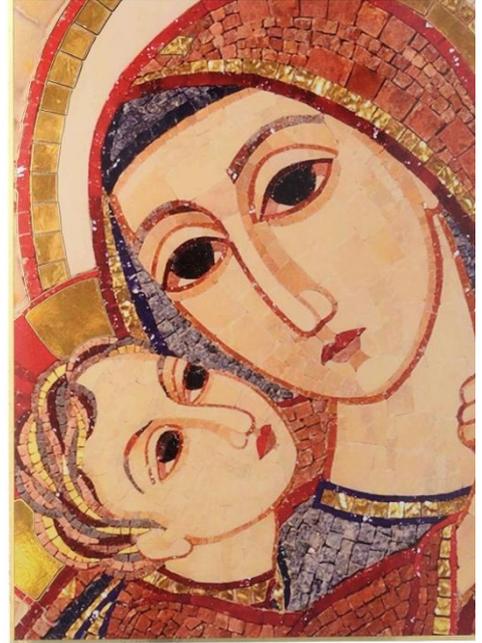


The Letter

Dearest

For all of us Christians Advent is the "time of expectation" of the coming of the Lord, of the Word of God who becomes man to be the "God with us" and to walk on the roads of this Earth, which he himself created, to reveal to us the true face of the Father who is Love and Mercy.

How does the Lord find us this year? With a look that embraces the whole world, He will find a suffering, fearful humanity, folded on itself to try to defend the health of the body from an invisible enemy, distrustful people who "keep their distance" for fear of contagion... there is a fear of this invisible enemy who can kill the body and try to defend himself with all the tools at his disposal, but precautions are taken towards another invisible enemy who, sneakily and ruthlessly, can kill our soul? This is the one who can ruin the plan of Salvation that God has thought for every man, for each of us, and can send us off the road to prevent us from crossing the door of life of eternal happiness that our Father dreamed of for us, making us lose that place in Paradise that Jesus prepared for us.



Today, more than ever, the Word of God risks not being welcomed by "his", who are us, the whole of humanity that has come to existence by the will of the infinite Love of God, to be part of His divine life. This humanity has forgotten its origin and its goal, it moves in the earthly and celestial spaces of Creation thinking that it has absolute ownership, by inexplicable right, without the awareness of having received it as a gift and towards which it exercises neither love nor respect to preserve it and make it more beautiful.

This humanity, Lord, has lost the "gaze of the Treasures", can no longer see or think "beyond"..... Then a cry flows from the bottom of our hearts, in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Why, Lord, do you let us wander away from your ways and let our hearts harden, so that it does not fear you?"

We are this people who have distanced themselves from you, Lord, and who now no longer recognize you as a Father, but you, Lord, do not cease to recognize us as children: "...we are clay and you are the One who shapes us, we are all the work of your hands".

In this world that suffers, and seeks a material pseudo-salvation, we say to you: come, Lord Jesus, "make your face shine **and we will be saved**" (Ps 79), **come, Lord Jesus, the world needs You!**

We are sure that You listen to our prayer, indeed you foreman, because you love us and want our salvation: in this moment of darkness, you are the true light, in this moment of confusion You are the Truth, in this disorientation You are the Way, in this profound suffering You are life. You are for us the certain Hope.

Mary, yours and our Mother, teaches us to believe in the impossible that you make possible. May Mary, intercede with God so that humanity may return to believe and hope, return to dream and fight for goodness, beauty, true freedom and believing in Jesus. May you, Mary, take him to our streets, to our homes, to our communities, and obtain the Grace that makes us sensitive to His/Your Love to open the doors of his heart and life to him, may we not be afraid to answer: "Enter my house Lord Jesus". If we open up to this mystery, our joy will be immense and it will be Christmas!

In communion of fraternal affection and prayer,

Sr. Maddalena Ergasti

On the way with Mary

of Sr. Noemi Minicucci

Mary "promptly steps towards a mountainous city of Judah and tradition says to "Ain Karim" to help the elderly relative. The Virgin performs with love and solicitude what is communicated to her: Elizabeth, elderly and barren, has been carrying a baby in her womb for six months" (1). She did not take care of the fatigue, difficulties and dangers of the journey she was going to undertake. Ain Karim is about 150 km from Nazareth and Mary "faces with love and out of love, this journey that can be considered a sign of the saving mystery of God who visits and redeems his people and is also a sign of the Church, sent into the world to bring the Savior. She puts her going before all her possible expectations and every need" (2). Elizabeth, elderly and in her final months of pregnancy, may need her. It is driven by an inner need, by a strong sense of being useful, to help her.



"Forgetting about herself, of her particular situation of mystery, she didn't delay in following the path of charity service" (3). She is a free woman who does not allow herself to be conditioned by anything. Her gestures and behaviors express boldness and strength, she welcomes what is manifested in the Lord's will and adheres to it with love and solicitude. The Holy Spirit who has taken up his dwelling in her, pushes her to take new paths. She received from God a gift, a new life palpitating in her virginal womb that becomes for her journey to her brothers and sisters. A particular journey, in which she must simply allow herself to be led everywhere by the Lord according to his will. "Mary was able to listen, she knew how to obey, she knew how to serve. This is why God has accomplished great things in her and through her" (4). Her going with promptness shows the courage to follow, without hesitation, the adventure of her call, of letting herself be led where the Lord wants, driven by the desire to realize His project. Her plans have been overturned now she has to reorganize them and so her affections and personal relationships. What matters now is to live immersed in the mystery of God. To set out on a journey is to take ourselves and set out on our way. Mary carries herself and carries with her the greatest gift that is Christ the Lord, she does not go alone, but in her womb is alive and throbbing the Lord, the Word made flesh, the Savior. She says she is: "the first missionary woman of the Christian era. We know that missionary is the one who is sent to proclaim the good news and bring the presence in the history of man of the one who saves, namely Jesus, the first missionary, sent by the Father to work the salvation of humanity" (5).

We, like Mary, are also called to bring Christ into our lives and through our lives. God comes to us through his Word, which must be the center and the end of our days in order to continually renew the covenant with him in the light of the Gospel. The consequence of this experience is the growing desire to share with his brothers and sisters all the wonderful things he does in us. God is a force that makes us start and pulls us out of selfishness and retreat into ourselves. Faith is energy that puts us into action without ever being passively happy with what we already have. The answer to his call and the choice to put our lives in his hands, requires the same courage as this little woman. He does not guarantee us anything, but urges us not to fear anything. It's a real adventure. We don't know tomorrow. The Virgin travels quickly to bring and give Jesus to the world. Jesus, true man. We too, must set out on a journey aware that the Lord is embodied in our lives thanks to the encounter with our brothers and sisters. If we want to know God's plan, we cannot remain closed in the walls of our schemes, but we must be close to those who ask for and give mercy. "We must always broaden our gaze to recognize a greater good that will benefit all of us" (6).

We adhered to the Lord's call, followed him leaving home, comfort, security and did so with joy, but sometimes along the way tiredness took over. Unlike the Virgin, we experienced the difficulty of making our lives fully available, of spending everything of us at the service of the gospel and gradually with reasoning, sometimes even just from a human and rational point of view, we ended up pulling back. Paying attention to the deceptive voices that bypass and deceive us by making us lose sight of God's plan in our lives. The reason for this is that, despite everything, our priority has remained the consideration and achievement of our personal needs. Even in our experience of faith woven with force of grace, a gift of love that springs from the encounter with Christ, we end up seeking and pursuing only our selfishness, perhaps coloring everything with a patina of Christian respectability. The Lord, on the contrary, calls us to truly embody and live his will at every moment, to immerse our lives, like Mary, in the shadow of God's grace by letting it fill the void with our uncertainties and enlightenment, give meaning and help us to recognize its wonders in us and around us. (Continue)

NOTE

(1) M. Vincenza Minet, *Vademecum delle Ancelle della Visitazione*, June 2018 – p. 5.

(2) M. Vincenza Minet, from the Writings. (3) *Ibid*.

(4) *Ibid*

The beauty of Mary

of Mons. Mario Salerno

"Beauty will save the world." It is Dostoevsky's well-known expression in his novel "The Idiot" and is a statement that the Russian writer himself makes in a problematic context in which he admits that "beauty is an enigma". And then the question arises spontaneously: what beauty will save the world, being it multifaceted and, like the diamond, composed of different and all precious faces, from the artistic to the bodily, from the spiritual to the creaturely and universal.

Beauty, in addition to possessing a philosophical, ethical and aesthetic depth, also possesses a theological/theological thickness as a splendor of goodness and truth. In this perspective, only redeemed Beauty will save the world: "the one that arises from the mystery/event of the Humiliated/Exalted and that finally opens us transfigured, after our theological and existential journey lived with responsibility and love towards the Other and others, in the eternal Escaton".

Thus, is the Beauty of the Immaculate Conception, the Mother of the Redeemer who, like the artist of the world, leads everyone "to that infinite ocean of beauty where amazement becomes admiration, intoxication and unspeakable joy" (John Paul II, Letter to artists, 16). It is no coincidence that Mary is contemplated by Dante in the splendors of Paradise as "beauty, which joy was in the eyes of all other saints" (Paradiso XXXI, 134-135) and in popular devotion she sings, with affection and love: "Tota pulchra es Maria et macula originalis non est in te".

Certainly, no creature, not even the Mother of Jesus, is beauty in and of itself: it is God the Author of beauty (Sap 13:3) and creates the beauty of creatures (Sap 13:5). God is Supreme Beauty and his works are beautiful/good (Gen 1). Among this stands out Mary of Nazareth for whom entire generations of believers and the whole Church sing the "Tota pulchra".

Beauty of creation, therefore, and of redeeming grace; God, in Mary Immaculate, creates a faithful image of himself and with the proclamation of the dogma of 1854 the Church exalts, grateful and admired, the creative Omnipotence of Trinitarian Love which in Mary Immaculate has fully manifested in the whole of God the whole of the redeemed and sanctified creature.

Therefore, Mary is the epiphany of salvation, a true synthesis of faith, hope and Christian charity. "The dogma of the Immaculate Conception can be said to be a wonderful doctrinal synthesis of the Christian faith. Indeed, it embodies the fundamental truths of the Christian message, (...) from the desperate situation of a humanity devoted to eternal damnation to the prospect of final salvation in participation in God's own bliss" (John Paul II, Discourse 08.12.1988).

The Mother of Jesus is beautiful when with a humble heart and a true word she welcomes God's will and lets himself be possessed by the Spirit of peace; when unity between God and man, the earth and heaven is recomposed in his virginal womb; when with its simplicity and humility erases an ancient duplicity and a crazy pride. She, the Immaculate Conception, lived "sub Umbra Trinitatis" in her service and following; this transcendent experience of Beauty and sublime redemption, splendor and holiness, is an existential, theological and theological "unicum" with which every believer should relate; hers is a Beauty that reminds the believer of the imperative of imitation.

We can serenely contemplate this Beauty without ever forgetting that "God's fullness of grace corresponds to the fullness of faith on the part of Mary: to the gratia plena the fide plena" (R. Cantalamessa) and never forgetting that "before being raised to Queen of heaven and earth, Mary had to bite the dust of the earth" (T. Bello).

We can and must address to her, Immaculate, our trusting prayer, placing in her tender Heart of Mother our expectations, our hopes, our anxieties and all the planetary drama that we are experiencing in this dark and tormented historical hour of our fragile humanity.



The Psalm of St. Francis for the Christmas Time

of sr. Maddalena Ergasti

1. Sing joyfully to God our strength (Ps. 81:2),
**jubilee to the Lord God alive and true with a voice of exultation (Cfr. Ps. 46.2).*
2. For the Lord the Highest is to be feared, *
The great king over all the earth (Ps. 47:3).
3. *For the most holy Heavenly Father, our King before the ages (Cfr. S 73.12), † sent his beloved Son from above, * and he was born from the Blessed Virgin, Saint Mary.*
4. He invoked him: "You are my Father"; †
and He constituted him his eldest son, *
taller than the kings of the earth (Ps 89:27-28).
5. On that day the Lord sent his mercy, * and in the night his
canticle (Cfr. S 41.9).
6. This is the day, the Lord has made: *
let us rejoice in it and rejoice (S 117:24).
7. *For the most holy beloved child is given un to us; † and was born for us (cf. Is 9,6) along the way and was placed in the manger. **
8. *Glory to the Lord God in the high heavens, * and peace on earth to men of good will (Cf. Lk 2.14).*
9. May the heavens be cheered and the earth rejoice, †
the sea and how much it encloses, *
the fields and what they contain (S 95:11-12).
10. Sing to *him* a new song; *
sing to the Lord from all over the earth (S 95:1).
11. Since he is great is the Lord and worthy of all praise, *
is terrible above all the does (S 95:4).
12. Give to the Lord, or lands of peoples, †
give the Lord glory and honor; *
give the Lord the glory of his name (S 95:7-8).
13. *Bring your bodies to † and take on your shoulders his holy cross (Cfr. Lk 14.27) * and follow to the end his most holy commandments (cf. 1 Pt 2,21).
Gloria al Padre... Come era nel principio... (Scripta / Scritti, 105/107; cf. FF 303).*

N.B. IN ITALICS THE PARTS ADDED BY ST. FRANCIS

This Christmas Psalm, written by St. Francis, is the XV of the Office for the Passion that he had composed for the prayer of himself and his friars.

In the Franciscan Sources it is stated that this psalm was used to pray in all canonical hours, then seven times a day, "For the time of the Nativity of the Lord until the octave of Epiphany". This attests to how important the Saint considered the contents of this prayer.

The text is composed of the harmony of quotations taken from the Psalter and the Liturgy, with numerous personal additions, more than in the other Psalms composed by him. This makes us understand how the Mystery of Christmas was particularly dear to St. Francis.

He narrates it in an essential way, directing all attention to the fact that on holy night the Most Holy Father gives us his only Son through the Virgin Mary, for this reason all creation rejoices with joy.

The invitation to joy is repeated three times (vv. 1.6.10) and follows each time the motivation, introduced by "for" (vv. 2-3.7.11).

Verse 1 invites to rejoice because on Christmas Eve God manifested himself as "our help" and, as Francis adds, as "True and living God". This addition emphasizes, that for him God is not an abstract idea, but a living presence, an indisputable reality from which and in which he lives and acts.

Verse 3 contains the greatness of the mystery contemplated: the most holy Father and king of the ages sends his beloved Son into the lowliness of our world and into our time, conceived by the Virgin Mary who, for her participation in the holiness of the Father, is exalted as blessed and holy.

Verse 4, taken from Ps 88, contains expressions referring to David, but St. Francis applies them to Jesus who invoked God as his "Abba, Father" (Jn. 17:1.11.24; Lk 23:46) and that for this reason he was raised as the eldest son above all the kings of the earth.

Verse 5 raises Christmas night as a gift of God's mercy offered day and night, but especially on "that" day of the birth of his Son. The song that "in the night" is heard, lets us think of the angels of the holy night.

Verse 6 celebrates it as the "Day of the Lord", in the words of Ps 117, the liturgy uses in the morning of Easter. For St. Francis, both Christmas and Easter are days "made by the Lord", only the motivation changes.

Verse 7 combines expressions taken from Is 9.6 and Lk 2.7, thus linking the promise of AT to the realization of it in the NT. Here the emphasis is placed on the **historicity of the event**: the child is really born and placed in the manger. St. Francis adds that this birth took place "along the way", to emphasize the poverty of Jesus and his being a **pilgrim**: Jesus was not born in his parents' house, but along the way. He was placed in the animal feeder, because he had no place in the hotel, as if to show that from birth "the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9:58). Another aspect that we find here is the deep affection for Jesus invoked as: "most holy beloved child", similar to v.3 where he is named as "Beloved Son", but this without **falling into sentimentalism**. The newborn child remains for St. Francis the "most holy child" to whom he approaches with reverence and at the same time with tenderness. The intimacy with which he approaches Jesus is not exclusive, but is open to all: "given to us", "he was born for us". In the divine child the whole human family received a gift. For this reason, all peoples and even the whole creation must give praise and honor to God.

Verses 9-12 are taken from Sal 95 himself. A psalm of praise that was sung in the morning of Christmas and epiphany. St. Francis puts together verses that contain **the invitation to the whole cosmos to praise God**: heaven and earth, sea and countryside, all peoples and nations must give God the praise that belongs to him. The triple invitation of verse 12, which says "dates (offerings)", makes one think of the (three) **Magi of the East** who offer the Child their precious gifts. So, the feast of Christmas is extended up to the feast of the Epiphany.

In verse 13 the invitation to "bring the offer" becomes more personal, according to the spirit of the New Testament: the true offering consists in the total gift of all of ourselves to God and that is, of the soul and body (Cfr. 12:1), carrying upon us the cross of Christ. The carrying of the cross and the following of Jesus are connected here, as already in the Gospel (cfr. Lk 14.27). As Jesus asks us to carry our cross day by day, so does St Francis: "... follow to the end his most holy commandments!".

The Psalm of Christmas does not stop, therefore, only at the invitation to praise of God, but leads to the exhortation to action, and to an action that involves all man. Only fidelity continues in self-giving to the Lord, and the fulfilment of his will shows if and to what extent we have understood the mystery of Christmas.

This song of praise ends with an exhortation to offer the Lord not material gifts, but our lives, carrying his *holy cross* and following the *holy commandments* to the end; in evangelical perfection, as St. Francis himself testified during earthly existence. Because everything we profess, the love we feel for the Highest, must be translated into everyday life, and the forms that it can take are infinite. These are all expressions of our action and fidelity. St Francis therefore goes beyond the sentimentalism that the birth of Jesus can generate and in a few significant words captures the deepest mystery of Christmas and what this great event should mean in the life of every Christian: God who descends among us, becomes like us and then embraces the holy cross.

For St. Francis, God continues to give himself to us in his Son. The humility of the Most High God, which occurred in Bethlehem, is prolonged in history and is implemented in every Eucharist. It is Jesus himself, son of God made man, "descended from Heaven" who immolates for us on the cross, rises and returns to give himself to us today, to "descend on the earth" in the Holy Eucharist that we celebrate on the altar. This mystery requires our life response and our commitment to a persevering following of Jesus Christ.

(taken from a reflection by Leonard Lehmann, OFM Capp)





After the postponement related to the pandemic emergency, last November *The Economy of Francis* was finally celebrated, the appointment wanted by Pope Bergoglio to relaunch the theme of the custody of Creation.

The event, scheduled from 26 to 28 March 2020, with the participation of about 2,000 participants from over 100 countries, it envisaged Assisi as an exceptional location, since the aim of the meeting was to discuss a new way of understanding the economy, drawing on the spirituality of Francis of Assisi: in this perspective they would take on a role as absolute protagonists both the concept of sustainable *economy* (played that is, on a use of resources such as to allow its regeneration for future generations), and that of civil economy (completely alternative to the capitalist one, that is, capable of favoring development without giving up principles such as social solidarity and reciprocity).

In order to make the meeting even more interesting in the eyes of world public opinion, Pope Francis had addressed an appeal to young economists and entrepreneurs under 35, from all over the world: a real *lever*, a call not only to reflection but to concrete action, with the younger generations finally protagonists of the future.

Unfortunately, the spread of the Coronavirus epidemic forced the organization of the event to postpone it until November, falling back on the choice to celebrate it online from 19 to 21 November this year; however, this has not diminished the scope of the appointment, on the contrary, the virtual has become a premise for a meeting in presence, to be held as an emergency ended (autumn 2021).

The urgency of *networking immediately* loaded the event with pragmatism. In fact, the first fact that has emerged is precisely the need to weave a network of human and professional relationships that allow sustainability to make its way: cardinal Peter Turkson reiterated this, Prefect of the Dicastery for The Service of Integral Human Development, who, addressing the participants, affirmed how the construction of "a global network of young leaders and brings about change in the economic field, can "give a soul to the economy of the *future*" (*helping*) Pope Francis, the Church and *the whole world to come out better*, imagining and developing a different, inclusive economy that can help us behave like brothers and sisters living in a common home".

Equally central were the speeches of Muhammad Yunus, 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner and Vandana Shiva, member of the International Forum on Globalization: the first, *creator of microcredit*, pointed out that "*The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed all the weaknesses of the current system. Those on the fringes of existence globally ended up even further on the sidelines. Now everyone is working to get back to the situation before the pandemic. But why do we want to go back to that system, which was terrible? The*

train that was taking us to death stopped. It is time to come down and ask ourselves: do we want to go back or is it the right time to go in the opposite direction, a world without pollution, without concentration of wealth, without massive unemployment?" The second, a well-known environmental activist, added that "if we work in harmony with nature, we create well-being (but) the keywords must be: local distribution, healthy food, giving back to the Earth what the Earth gives us, sharing (from the perspective) of gratitude, service, care".

Of course, Pope Francis summed up the whole meeting through a message, so transversal that it goes straight to each of us: "The gravity of the current situation, which the Covid pandemic has brought out even more, requires a responsible awareness of all the social actors, of all of us, among whom you have a primary role: the consequences of our action and decisions will touch you personally, therefore you cannot remain out of the places where it is generated, I do not say your future, but your present. You cannot stay out of where the present and the future are generated. Either you are involved or history will pass over you."

And again "Remember the legacy of the Enlightenment, of enlightened elites. All for the people, nothing with the people. And that's not right. We don't think for them, we think with them. And from them we learn to advance economic models that will benefit everyone." Finally, "it is time to dare risk, to encourage and stimulate models of development, of progress and sustainability in which people and especially the excluded (and among them also sister earth), cease to be – at best – a purely nominal, technical or functional presence to become protagonists of their lives as well as of the entire social fabric " because " If it is urgent to find answers, it is essential to grow and support leadership groups capable of developing culture, starting processes – do not forget this word: start processes – trace paths, broaden horizons, create memberships".

Needless to say, the challenge is global and we are also in it, it challenges us, it demands an answer, a commitment. What do we want to do with this planet? You have to figure it out now and figure it out together. It is no longer an abstract concept; it is no longer a decision that can be postponed.



In the Magnificat, Mary teaches us the Hope of Don Emilio Salvatore

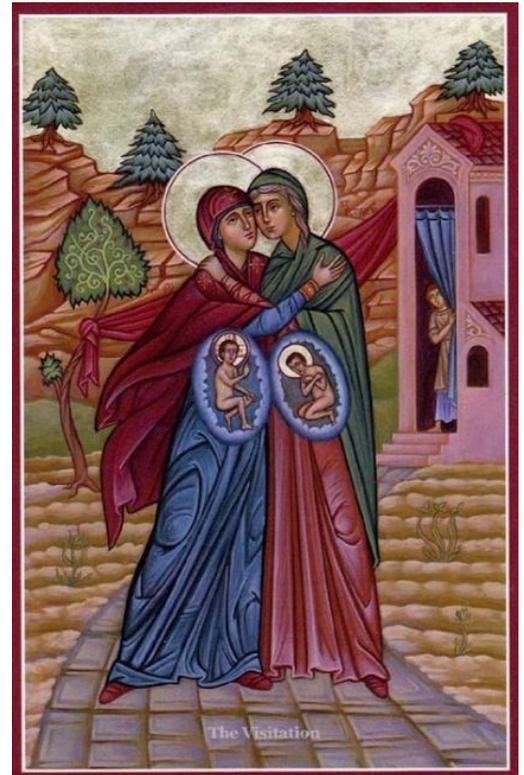
The *Magnificat* presents a particular and personal situation: it celebrates the experience of a woman freed from a situation of poverty, for whom the Lord has done great things (cf. Lk 1:48-49). Both the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus* support the tales of childhood, a real world of expectation and hope.

On the mouth of Mary, the daughter of Zion, and Zechariah, the priest, father of John, who prophesies at the birth of his son are these two hymns that express, albeit with different formal characteristics, a single celebratory movement of the work of salvation. Both begin with praise-exaltation (v. 46b) and a *solemn berakah/blessing* (v. 68), respectively, addressed to the God of Israel, operator of salvation. These introductions are followed by the timely *recollection* (anamnesic movement) of the events for which God is celebrated, as is evident from *the hóti particle/since*, which introduces the celebratory movement and justifies its presence. The memory of ancient events is clearer and more explicit in Zechariah's song, which *speaks of lútrōsis/redemption*, the original context of which is offered by the experience of exodus. But such a pattern of reading history involves both songs. This rooted within the living faith of Israel, for Luke, the first of salvation that will be put into the center of time with the coming of Jesus, Savior of the world. The first part (vv. 46-50) reveals a precise conception of salvation, higher and spiritual towards the first part of Zechariah's canticle, where enemies are mentioned, according to the Jewish expectations of the time: what is somehow also present in the second part of the *Magnificat* (vv. 51-53). Behind the *tapeinōsis /poverty* of the servant, who experienced the powerful action of God the Savior, we can already see the plight of *the poor* profoundly transformed by divine intervention (cf. v. 52).

The story of *the servant* anticipates and announces that of the *servant* Israel rescued for God's fidelity to his promises (cf. vv. 54-55). The expression 'looking to misery' recalls various situations of suffering-trial-humiliation, both at a personal and Community level, but basically evokes the experience of Egyptian slavery. From this condition the children of Israel cried to the Lord and he looked to their misery, listened to their cry and intervened to free them (cf. Ex 3:7ss). For them, his servants, as for Mary, the servant, God has accomplished great things (Lk 1:49): with a powerful arm he has annihilated his enemies (cf. Ex 15:6; Lk 1:51), manifesting in the eyes of all his holiness (cf. Ex 15:11ss; Lk 1.49). The mode of singing is *narrative*, that is, it enumerates the works of God, which are an intervention in history, aimed at giving it a different, nonconformist orientation on the model of what happened in the history of Israel: *exodus* = manifestation of power; *new exodus* = manifestation of power compared to other supposedly powerful; *now eschatological* = decisive intervention foretold in future history. In this way the song also manifests the identity of God; its intentionality in history; it opens the story to subsequent developments: what God has done in the past, will also occur in the current context and will have its consequences, its fulfillment in the future.

Singing apparently calms a narrative tension, but instead places a serious mortgage on future events, showing what God knows how to do, can do and wants to do. A young woman like Mary is *unblemished*, as she is free from skeletons, sins, guilt, obsessions due to psychological and social conditioning. Of course, she is lost, she feels the weight of the event, the being before God, but she lets herself be reassured by the Lord's messenger.

Let's confront you for a moment. What are our fears? That's a lot! How can a mother not be afraid of a child taking drugs, in the face of violence against children? How can a young person not be afraid in the face of the unknown of an increasingly black future with regard to study and work? Faced with a hoarding of places for nepotism and corruption? How can a young teacher not be afraid of poor results about his educational work? How can a husband or wife not be afraid to live married life, when infidelity is made a role model? How can a judge not be afraid in the face of Camorra and Mafia intimidation? How can an elderly person not be afraid in the face of the unknowns of the future? How can a pregnant woman not be afraid to give birth to a child in the face of such wickedness? How can the world hope for a better season, in the time of persistent pandemic?



Among the main fears, the basic ones, you can see above all two: the fear of not being loved and the fear of failure, of failure. It is these that block the path of access to life, to maturity, to Christian witness. This also applies to religious life. How can a Congregation face the challenges of the present situation?

The current ecclesial season is a *paradigm shift*: from the static image of the deposit (static identity) we move to a dynamic dimension of ferment (yeast in pasta) in other words they must be rethought: identity ("who are we") and belonging ("whose who are we?"), especially ecclesial and human, and the way in which these dynamics are intertwined. It is no coincidence that the whole of society is undergoing a whirlwind change of means and human sensitivity, so culture itself takes on new dimensions.

The parabolic saying of Jesus ("New wine is poured into fresh wineskins": Mc 2,22) becomes enlightening. In religious life (but we could say throughout the Church) are evident: the tension and the need for a change of mentality. This process (from assumption to analysis) in one word is *discernment*. First, *you can't bypass the voltage!*

Tension is in everyone's eyes; one wonders:

- *what's old?* Mental, cultural structures, people's personal situation, economic ballast no longer sustainable, a series of huge demands for bureaucratic requirements, etc.;
- *what is new?* The Gospel, the charisma or the rule? The Gospel is as it was at the time of Jesus, then there is the response to the novelty that is proposed.

There are some traps that we can fall into. The first is *the temptation to patch an old dress with new cloth*, e.g., consuming the most valid energies in the continuous management of increasingly immediate emergencies. In this way you are not faithful to our time, but you risk chasing it into a kind of uncritical dependence (follow *the wave*). The second is *the temptation to stand still* - as the song from my childhood says, waiting for unlikely line reversals; it's Masada's *temptation* ("to die but don't change"). Before we talk about what we need to do, we must free ourselves from the mental encrustations dictated by endless expectations and pre-misunderstandings, the result of practices, good in themselves and valid for the past, but absolutely inadequate for the present. To linger in them is to feast – to use another metaphor – when we should fast. All this seems difficult to apply in concrete situations, because we are too concerned to preserve what we have, even though we know that it is sometimes patently inadequate in the present and the future. Our consumed wineskins continue to dictate the law, even if the wine breaks the wineskins. It is necessary to dare, that is, to imagine new ways of true following Christ, prophetic and charismatic, to allow the charism to remain relevant and make the life of consecrated people capable of speaking to contemporaries. It is also *necessary to discern*, that is, to reconcile the new wine of our charisms with *obsolete structures* that not only do not manifest their beauty and freshness, but often make them invisible or at least very confused.

Ultimately, in conclusion, *the metanoia* or change of mentality is the condition for seeking God's will before our supposed human security, for the conversion of men, women and structures. Only it will allow us to welcome the wine of the feast, capable of expressing a naturally evangelical effervescence: what only makes the unique witness of religious life in the Church and in the world sensible.

Mary teaches us not to be afraid of history. Like Mary we rely on God! We believe in Him, we live with hope, not as an inert expectation of what will come, but as a stimulating and active preparation for the advent of a different humanity, of the Kingdom. It is the invitation to overcome fragility, the sense of bewilderment to accept the plan of the God who saves. It is the proposal of Hope that ended, already in the scene of the Annunciation, with the solemn affirmation of full trust in the Lord: "Nothing is impossible". Only he who relies on his only strength, who believes himself omnipotent, loses hope; the battle of life is won by the one who abandons himself to the Omnipotence of the One who can do anything, can make a sterile womb re-flower and make the virgulate of the Hope of peoples germinate.

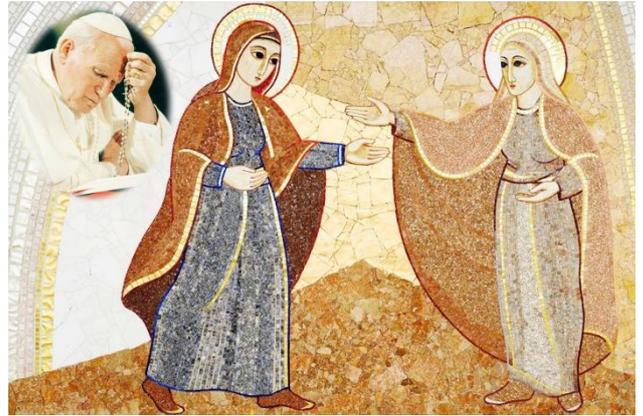
Mary is the *teacher of hope*, because the possibility of failure, which touched her and Jesus, were won by love and abandonment in the hands of the Father. Love overcomes fear says John's first *letter* (4:18): "In love there is no fear, on the contrary perfect love drives away fear".

The Visitation in the Magisterium of the Popes

of Sr. Rubi Arellano - Wikipedia

I begin the treatment of the Magisterium of the Pontiffs on the Mystery of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth starting from the writings and homilies of St. John Paul II, to whom our religious family has a particular devotion, being our co-patron, after St. Joseph.

At the end of the Marian month in 1979, in his homily the Holy Father had to emphasize three points in this passage of the Gospel, which will help us to enter into the Mystery of the Visitation: "And blessed is she who believed in *the fulfillment of the Lord's words*" (Lk 1:45).



1. With this greeting, Elderly Elizabeth exalts her young relative Mary, who has come, humble and modest, to lend her services. Under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, the Mother of the Baptist first begins to proclaim, in the history of the Church, the wonders that God has worked in the maiden of Nazareth, and sees fully realized in Mary the bliss of faith, because she believed in the fulfillment of the Word of God. It was the fundamental inner attitude of the Most Holy Virgin towards God: her faith. Mary believed!

She believed in the Lord's words transmitted by the angel Gabriel; her pure heart, already all given to God since childhood, at the Annunciation has expanded into the unconditional generous "fiat" with which she has agreed to become the Mother of the Messiah and Son of God: from that moment she, inserting herself even more deeply into God's plan, will be led by the hand of the mysterious Providence and throughout her life, rooted in faith, she will spiritually follow her Son, becoming his first and perfect "disciple" and realizing daily the demands of this sequela, in the words of Jesus: "He who does not carry his own cross and does not come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:27). Mary will advance throughout her life in the "wandering of faith" (cfr. Lumen Gentium, 58), while her beloved Son, misled, slandered, condemned, crucified, will trace to her, day after day, a painful path, a necessary premise for that glorification, sung in the "Magnificat": "All generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48). But first, Mary too will have to rise on Calvary to witness, painfully, the death of her Jesus.

2. Today's Feast of the Visitation presents us with another aspect of Mary's inner life: her attitude of humble service and selfless love for those in need. She has just met the state of her relative Elizabeth from the angel Gabriel, and immediately sets out to the mountain to reach "quickly" a city of Judah, today's "Ain Karim". The meeting of the two Mothers is also the meeting between the Forerunner and the Messiah, who, through the mediation of his Mother, begins to work salvation by making John the Baptist gasp with joy still in the womb of his mother. "No one has ever seen God; if we love each other, God remains in us... This is the commandment we have from him: he who loves God, also loves his brother" (1Jn 4:12.21), St. John the Evangelist will say. *But who, better than Mary, had implemented this message? And who, if not Jesus, whom she carried in her lap, pushed her, spurred her on, inspired her to this continuous attitude of generous service and selfless love towards others?* "The Son of Man... he did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mt 20:28), Jesus will say to his disciples; but his Mother had already perfectly realized this attitude of the Son. Let us listen again to the famous comment, full of spiritual unction, that St Ambrose makes of Mary's journey: "Joyful to fulfill her desire, delicate in her duty, caring in her joy, she hastened to the mountain. Where, if not to the tops, should she carelessly tend to the One, who was already full of God? The grace of the Holy Spirit knows no obstacles, which delay the step" (St. Ambrose, Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam, II, 19: CCL 14, p. 39). And if we reflect with particular attention on the passage of the Letter to the Romans, we realize that an effective image emerges of the behavior of Mary Most Holy, for our building: her charity had no fiction; loved others deeply; fervent in spirit, served the Lord; happy in hope; strong in tribulation, persevering in prayer; for the needs of our brothers and sisters (cf. Rm 12,9-13).

3. "Happy in hope": the atmosphere that pervades the Gospel episode of the Visitation is joy, the mystery of the Visitation is a mystery of joy. John the Baptist rejoices in the womb of St Elizabeth; this, full of joy for the gift of motherhood, breaks out in blessings to the Lord; Mary raises the "Magnificat", a hymn all overflowing with messianic joy. But what is the mysterious, hidden source of such joy? It is Jesus, who Mary has already conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit, and who is already beginning to defeat what is the root of fear, anguish and sadness: sin, the most humiliating slavery for man.

IN THE FAMILY

ITALY

Santa Marinella. On September 27th, the memory of St. Vincent of Paoli, the name-day of Mother Vincenza was celebrated, by the sisters of the community of Mother House, with Holy Mass and fraternal agape. That of St. Vincent, every year, is the feast of the Family, because all communities find themselves spiritually united in praying for the Foundress and in transmitting good wishes full of love and gratitude. Mother Vincenza, like all sensitive people who love intensely, is happy to see that her love for us all is reciprocated with joy and generosity.



On **December 8th** we had the joy of receiving the new edition of our Constitutions, updated with the changes made, with the approval of the Holy See, by the General Chapters of 2008 and 2017.



Rome - General House. The house in Via G. Baglivi, in addition to being the seat of the General Secretariat of the Institute, has in fact become a *small Bethany*, where both the sisters who find themselves transiting Rome during the journey from one house to another are welcomed, as well as those held in the city by bureaucratic practices, as well as small groups that need a collected and silent space for training.

Venice-Villabona. Sr. Clarissa and Sr. M. Thèrese continued their service in the Caritas canteen despite the long months since the beginning of the pandemic while, only about two months ago, the Listening Center was reopened. They dedicate themselves with great willingness to visit lonely and/or sick people who live in the house without someone to help them.



Bologna - San Giorgio al Piano. In October, on the occasion of World Mission Day, some of the friends who are active in the parish organized a market with the sale of plants, honey, biscuits and various items in favor of the Missions, in particular that of Borongan that they have always tried to support. We express to all of them



our gratitude for their love, sacrifice, efforts and time dedicated to this noble commitment to help all the poor followed by our Congregation. May the Lord greatly reward for all that you continue to do with such fidelity!

Oristano. Sr. Esther and Sr. Adele are particularly active in collaborating with the Volunteers of the Diocesan Caritas. They maintain this commitment with generosity and enthusiasm, because it allows them to live the Charisma in a spirit of service.



Assisi - Hermitage of Santa Maria della Visitazione. The community, although located on the hill at a certain distance from the parish church of Palazzo, tries to collaborate in pastoral activities: catechesis and visit to the sick to bring Holy Communion. At the end of November our sisters had the joy of an abundant harvest in the olive grove surrounding the house. Two sisters from Santa Marinella also came to their aid.



POLAND

The four sisters are so caring for kindergarten children, collaborating with teachers. Sr. Ewa is from this year the Director of the school and Sr. Dorina Daganio, having obtained the Polish Language Diploma, can teach English to children. The parish service is also carried out regularly



and everyone takes care of it, in turn. Recently, Sr. Perline successfully completed a first Polish course together with other female students. Sr. Louissette is attending the Language University Course, for now online due to the pandemic.



CAMERUN

Evodula. The Community welcomed a group of young people eager to learn about religious life and our Congregation. They spent a few days with our Sisters sharing with them prayer, daily activities and some meetings to listen and ask questions.



On **October 5th**, in the primary school of the Diocese of Obala, "Mary Queen of the Universe", the lessons of the new school year began. The joy of the students and families is great, since during the end of the period of the great holidays the school buildings were razed to the ground and the school rebuilt from scratch., thanks to the funding received by the Italian Episcopal Conference.



On **October 18**, despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic, the Sisters of the community gathered for a day of community formation. What was once considered ordinary has now become an exception and a valuable opportunity.



From 11 to 14 November, the Sisters participated triduum in preparation for the start of annual pastoral activities in the parish. During these three days several activities were carried out: on Friday the 13th night, a prayer vigil with Holy Mass and the adoration animated by all the young people of the parish; Saturday morning the sports march took place and the day ended with the biblical education conference held by the Parish Priest, after which followed the cultural evening animated by all the



young people who brought out their talents. On Sunday there was the official start of pastoral activities.

Kribi. On **7 and 8 October** the sisters of the community took part in the meetings organized by the Diocese. The Bishop, Mons. Damase Zinga Atangana, was present, together with the members of the Pastoral Council in the Diocese.

From **October 12th** the activity of the diocesan kindergarten has started again: three classes for a total of about 90 children. They do not use masks because, thanks to the very warm climate in this period and probably for other environmental factors, the infections and spread of the coronavirus have ceased.



BRASILE

Saint Paul. On October 1st, the sisters celebrated the patronal feast of the Sanctuary/parish dedicated to St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, where for several months they have been carrying out their apostolate Sr. Rosangela, who works in the library, and Sr. Marivic, engaged in the secretariat. On the same day the two Sisters left the house of José Barros Magaldi to move into the house, next

to the Sanctuary itself, renovated by Mons. Aguinaldo to welcome the Sisters. In the move they were helped by Sr. Venancia who came specially from Jaiba, to help them.

On **October 12**, the feast of Nossa Senhora Aparecida, patron saint of Brazil, was solemnly celebrated, also in the Sanctuary of S. Teresina.

On **November 6th** the Blessing of the new house of the Community in St. Paul was celebrated, seven priests and some other collaborators in the activities of the



Shrine intervened. It was a moment of thanks to the Lord and to the people who, on behalf of Bishop Mons. Luiz Antônio Guedes, were the tools of this new opportunity for service and accommodation for us Servants of the Visitation in São Paulo.

Jaiba. On the occasion of missionary October, Sr. Celine and Sr. Eliana animated the faithful in the parish to explain the life of the missionaries and the Charism of Servants of the Visitation.



On **November 17th** the second station of the training course of the "Itaù Social Unicef" program took place in which the "Life Project" participated. One of the tasks was to tell a little bit about the history of the institution. In the session the results were a surprise: the leaders of the initiative decided to pay tribute to two people who told stories of overcoming and hard work with adolescent children in extreme poverty at the beginning of the foundation of the Life Project.



FILIPPINE

Borongan. In early October, in Borongan's mission, a new baby arrived whose mother, because she suffers from epilepsy, cannot take care of him until the baby will be able to walk. Our Sisters welcomed him with joy, to help his mother in this time of need. Continue their collaboration with the Lay Association of "**Guardians of the Visitation**" born in the United States of America. Mrs. Cathy and her husband Kevin are particularly sensitive to the Charism of the Visitation and active in their Parish and diocese of Joliet, suffragan of that of Chicago, to create opportunities to make known our Congregation and its Charism. For the missionary



awareness of the faithful of the Parish of St. Petronilla they proposed for Advent an initiative with the theme: "Project of a blanket for children", with a collection of offers from 29 November to 24 December.



Manila. Our sisters, in collaboration with the parish priest Mons. Albert Venus and the Catechist Sisters of the Sacred Heart, continue their mission alongside the poor, in helping them through the distribution of food to families and those who have no fixed abode, once a week they prepare hot food. Moreover, through the valuable contribution of some benefactors from Italy, they can provide technological tools to children who otherwise, due to lack of means, could not continue to attend classes, given that they are carried out online due to the pandemic.



SOLOMON ISLANDS

Gizo. The four sisters in the Community of Nusabaruku are engaged in various apostolic activities: in primary school, in aid to families and in the health field. Sr. Janaina also deals with the training of altar boys, while youth animation is carried out by Sr. Laurette, in collaboration with the F.M.A. Nuns.



During **the missionary month**, the Community visited all the houses in both Nusabaruku and Fishing Village to recite the Holy Rosary together.



KENYA

Nairobi. In the training house, the second-year novices were absent for a few weeks, because they had a missionary experience in the community of Ol Moran: visit to sick people in their homes, especially the elderly and lonely They have implemented charity according to the spirit of the Charism of the Visitation through practical experience in helping poor and needy people. Back in the community everyone was happy to share this beautiful experience.

During missionary October the Community resumed its visits to the poor in the Kibera slum. Moreover, young postulants and novices, together with their formators and other sisters of the Community, have offered the Holy Rosary for those who are called to be witnesses of the Gospel in places where it is not yet known, even facing inconvenience and opposition.

Ol Moran. On **November 22nd**, our children of the Magnificat House received the Sacrament of Baptism in the parish of Saint Mark, it was a particularly exciting moment for them that made them all happy.

A particularly engaging moment for all, sisters and children, was again this year the collection of corn. Thanks to Providence, the fruits have been abundant, this means that for many months there will be food for all the poor who will knock at the door of the mission and for the community with our children.



Madagascar

Mahitsy. During October the sisters implemented various small charity initiatives, such as the distribution of school supplies to children from poor families.



VERGIN AND MOTHER MARY

Star of the new evangelization, help us to shine in witnessing communion, service, ardent and generous faith, of justice and love towards the poor, so that the joy of the Gospel may reach the end of the earth and no suburbs may be deprived of his light.

Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium

INSIGHTS

Perpetual profession and renewal of vows

In December in many Communities, we live the joy of the sisters who take a new step on the path of religious life. This year, on the **day of the Immaculate Conception** in the **Mother House**, **three sisters said their "Yes forever"**: Sr. Gwladys, Sr. Evalyne and Sr. Catherine

Nine renewed **their vows**. The Solemn Holy Mass was celebrated by his Excellency Mons. Gino Reali Bishop of our Diocese of Porto-Santa Rufina. Because of the pandemic, the whole day was lived in a strictly community climate, but in a climate of sober solemnity and with so much joy, in thanksgiving to the Lord for the gift of vocation and consecration.



On **Sunday 6 December in Kenya-Ol Moran** nine Junior sisters renewed their vows in the parish church. Don Giacomo Basso, parish priest, celebrated Holy Mass with the participation of numerous faithful.



On the same day, in **Brazil-Jaiba**, two sisters also renewed their vows in the construction parish church dedicated to the Assumption. The parish priest Fr. Valdecir celebrated Holy Mass. Here too many Christians were present, but always in compliance with anti-covid norms.



On **8 December**, in Madagascar-**Mahitsy**, four sisters from both communities renewed their religious vows. Holy Mass was celebrated in the Community Chapel.



Also, on the **Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception**, the community of the Philippines-**Borongan** also joyfully celebrated the renewal of the vows of four sisters. The Bishop presided over Holy Mass in the small church of Catian, with the participation of many people from the village.



Also, in the **community of the Solomon Islands-Nusabaruku** on December 8, two sisters made the renewal of vows in the village church celebrated by the Bishop of Gizo Mons. Luciano Capelli.



WORKS IN PROGRESS...

Perhaps not everyone knows this, but Providence accompanies us, precedes us and continually offers us evidence of the tender love that the Lord nourishes for us. It is also of this kind the support we have received from the Italian Episcopal



Conference regarding the funding of two projects for the realization of works in our missions: the new reconstruction of the **Diocesan Primary School "Maria Regina dell'Universo" in Evodoula-cameroon.**

So also, the **construction of the House for Orphaned and Abandoned Children in Bevalala-Madagascar.**



In two other realities there are major works in progress, however, entirely at the expense of our Institute: **the expansion of the Formation House in Nairobi-Kenya**, which should be ready by the end of the year and **the anti-seismic consolidation works of two very large sectors of the Mother House in Santa Marinella-Italy**, which will be completed by the end of December, for the most important and supporting part of the buildings.



THEY PRECEDED US

- **Paquito Rombines**, father of Sr. Blendy, on the island of Mindanao - Philippines (September 19);
- **Vivencia Docena Labutap**, mother of Sr. Clarissa, in the town of Guiuan - Philippines (September 28).

Let us entrust their souls to the Lord, so that he may welcome all of them into Heaven and console the families they have left behind.

DON PIGI: MEMORY OF A MISSIONARY PRIEST OF MILAN

On **November 19**, **Don Piergiorgio Perini** died in Milan, at the age of 91, for all Don Pigi. He was among his closest collaborators in the Parish of Sant'Eustorgio in which he had been parish priest for thirty years and in which, in 1987, he had started a new method of evangelization in Italy, that of the "parish cells" that he had known ten years earlier in Florida. He himself then became founder and president of the International Service Body of Parish Cells of Evangelization. Don Pigi, a man of prayer and deep spiritual life, conceived the parish as a family and was convinced that it should be missionary, otherwise he would lose his soul. In the priestly life of Don Pigi has also entered providentially our religious family "Servants of the Visitation", through a dear priest friend of his: Fr. Angelo Saverio Zanisi, founder of Borongan's mission in the Philippines. Now these two "good and faithful servants" of the Kingdom of God have certainly found themselves and will be able, even more effectively, to take care of all those who helped while they were still among us.

Don Pigi was able to transmit his missionary passion also to his collaborators and parishioners all: the first who became active in making the Missionary Group live and operate in Sant'Eustorgio, the latter for having put in place all their creativity and generosity to collect all kinds of aid to be sent in the famous "gift packages" that many have been sent to the poorest in the world, continuously throughout the year. The charity of the missionary group is still fruitful today, also through the dedication of Luigi Mariani and many other volunteers.

The beneficiaries of this intense missionary activity are the poor followed by our sisters from the Manila and Borongan missions in the Philippines and Nairobi and Ol Moran in Kenya. Sr. Noemi and Sr. Rubi, who live in these countries and who have personally known Don Pigi, sharing with him many mission experiences, have a vivid and grateful memory for what they have received spiritually and pastorally from him, together with providential material help intended for the poorest of the poor.

All of us Servants of the Visitation, join the choir "Thank you Don Pigi" for all the good received and we ask him confidently to continue to accompany the steps of our missionary sisters in the various countries of the world, also here in Europe, where people have a deep need to receive the witness of the Gospel.

