



The Letter of the women's secular institute of the Heart of Jesus

« GOD, OUR FATHER,

(Prayer of MCR)

I am now in the twilight of a life that has given me many joys and despite trials and disappointments; I believe today it was worth living.

Receive the homage of my earthly pilgrimage, with my wonder and gratitude.

I ask you therefore for the grace of a serene and generous old age.

Let me taste the beauties of Creation, the laughter of children and the singing of birds.

Preserve me, Lord, both from the nostalgia that locks in the past and from the bitterness that dries out the heart.

Teach me to think of others instead of engaging them in my service.

Blessed are you, God of tenderness and mercy, for the work in the world of your Son Jesus, and for the gift of your Spirit of holiness.

Overcome my loneliness of your loving presence.

May your word enlighten the road I have yet to follow and may the hope of the Resurrection sustain me.

Gather in the peace of your love the men and women of goodwill, today and in the world to come.

Amen »



« The Saints of all times, whom today we celebrate all together, are not simply symbols, distant, unreachable human beings. On the contrary, they are people who lived with their feet on the ground; they experienced the daily toil of existence with its successes and failures, finding in the Lord the strength to rise again and again, and to continue on their journey. From this we can understand that holiness is a goal that cannot be achieved only through one's own strengths, but rather it is the fruit of God's grace and of our free response to it. Therefore, holiness is *a gift and a calling* »¹ addressed to everyone whatever their age.



Old age, a path to holiness

Old age begins when people feel their time is limited, because they have fewer years left to live than they already have. The field of new things and the capacity to embrace them is narrowing, space and the world are shrinking.

Time is running out, and we look to the past. The older we get, the more we enter the "everything is already done" phase, and yet not everything is finished yet. If old age is a long series of declines in strength, it is also the abandonment of all that may have been accumulated in terms of knowledge, assets and power. It brings us face to face with human fragility.



Summary

- ◆ Prayer
- ◆ Old age, a path to holiness
- ◆ Notes
- ◆ Some News



Our societies expect us to stay young, or at least to "age well". And what does it mean to "age well" in an active society where profitability is a core value? What use is a dependent and vulnerable person?

At first glance, the picture of old age is gloomy, but isn't our autumn destined to become the springtime of eternity? Let's take a look at what the Bible has to say.



Biblical approach

In Israel, the elders are placed at the head of the communities. They are recognized for the experience they have acquired over the years. They are witnesses to the covenant and play a conciliatory role in conflicts. In the New Testament, wisdom is frequently associated with the elders.



OLD AGE

A PATH TO HOLINESS



It is the elders who first step aside, following Jesus' words in the scene of the adulteress (Jn 8:9). Wisdom is where life gains ground over death, even in the midst of our limitations. It is hope and the art of living, turning death into begetting throughout our lives. *"True death is not the end of life; it is that which, from the beginning, prevents one from being born"*¹² (Jn 3:5-7).

Longevity is a sign of blessing (Deut 4:40; Prov 3:1-2) and of faithfulness to God (1Kings 3:14). Moreover, the promise of long life is part of the covenant code (Ex-23:26). Associated with rectitude, it becomes synonymous with moral fullness and wisdom, commanding consideration and esteem (Lev 19:32; Prov 16:31; Si 8:6). "When it grows old, it still bears fruit; it keeps its sap and its greenness" (Ps 92:15).

Although the Bible encourages respect and protection for the elderly, we also encounter explicit situations of oppression: *"Let us crush the poor and his righteousness, let us be unsparing to the widow, and inconsiderate to the white-haired old man. Let our strength be the standard of justice, for that which is weak is useless"* (Wis 2:10-11).

However, for the Bible, the old man is not always the wise man we imagine. There are several pitfalls that threaten elders:



- **O**ne is to remain a prisoner of tradition to the point of distorting the meaning of the law (Mt 15:2-6), or to be more attached to the letter than to the substance, thus distorting fidelity (Mt 27:41).

- **A**nother would be to claim to know everything, and to confine oneself to a moralizing role: "Age must speak, and the number of years make wisdom known!" In reality, it's the spirit in man, the breath of the Mighty One, that makes him intelligent. The oldest are not the wisest. (Jb 32, 7-9).

- **C**oncupiscence and libertinism: think of the story of Susanna. (Dn13)

In parallel, the Bible also speaks of the trials of old age: *"I am eighty years old today. Can I discern between good and bad? Can your servant appreciate what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voice of singers and songsters?"* (2 Sam 19:36). As for King David, he *"was old, advanced in years; they covered him with clothes, and it did not warm him."* (1R 1, 1-4). The sense of abandonment and anguish that often mark old age are also well present in the Bible. *"O death, your sentence is good for the man in need, whose strength declines, for a great old man who worries about everything, who rebels and loses patience."* (Si 41, 2). Or *"in the days of old age and gray hair, do not forsake me, O my God"* (Ps 71:18).

The Bible urges the elderly not to confuse being with having, or the personal, ever-potentially reborn "I" with the selfish, decrepit "me". To Jesus' words, *"unless*



you are born from above, you cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus replies, *"How can a man be born when he's old? Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be reborn?"* Nicodemus is seeking to increase his knowledge. He was not yet able to conceive that this "power to be born" that would turn his life upside down did not depend on age, but on availability to the Holy Spirit.

❧ ❧ ❧ ❧ ❧ ❧ ❧
Living to a ripe old age and becoming a saint

Every stage of our earthly journey has its own way of responding to Christ's love. Everything depends on our attitude. Can we turn irreversible degradation into a springboard for new momentum?



What the incarnation of Jesus Christ teaches us is that human life begins with the heart and ends with the heart. The first, greatest and undoubtedly most beautiful call, especially in old age, is to let ourselves be loved by God as we are. And what if letting go became grasping! Is "taking charge" of oneself necessarily antithetical to dependence? The battle here is not the search for mastery, but the acceptance of the burden and the letting go. Like Him, we must choose to undergo our trials rather than suffer them, so that they don't have the last word in us.

OLD AGE

A PATH TO HOLINESS



Declining physical capacity

As we age, the body is no longer what it once was, and energy gives way to fatigue. The appearance of yesteryear is gone, replaced by a body aged by time. The person is still itself, but not quite the same. The body adapts less and less, recovers less quickly. Health deteriorates, body pain and damage to sense organs narrow the sphere of freedom, cutting one off from others. Intellectual and psychological limitations humiliate us.

This is where the sacrament of the sick comes into its own. Through it, God gives us the grace we need to live in the present with Him.

Like every human reality, old age is marked by the sign of the cross. The experience of darkness, abandonment, illness, suffering and anguish is not spared for the believer. But "let us not lose heart, for though the outward man in us is going to ruin, the inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). Prayer supports this decaying body, helping us to care for it while accepting its failings.



We then present ourselves to the Lord with this flesh that has become a burden, waiting to be cared for and respected. "Lord, see my worn-out body, and yet you love it. Today, with You, I welcome it as it is and choose it as my travelling companion. So, with You, my gaze turns to this world where You love so much, and to my brothers in humanity, to present them to You." Just as God's Word does not return to him without effect, so no suffering experienced in Christ ever returns to its fundamental



absurdity. The Eucharist, which remembers Christ's offering, unites to Him all suffering, all love and generosity for those who suffer or are in need.



"In the crucible of these sufferings, doing God's will means above all wanting our hearts never to cease to unite with the charity of the Son, who went so far as to die on a cross, in a forgiveness that already heralds Easter. To do God's will is to unite with Jesus' will, so that his Spirit helps us to avoid sinking into bitterness and resentment, by opening the doors to inner freedom and to the joy that nothing can take away".³ Lord, give us this day our daily bread, so that we may last until tomorrow.



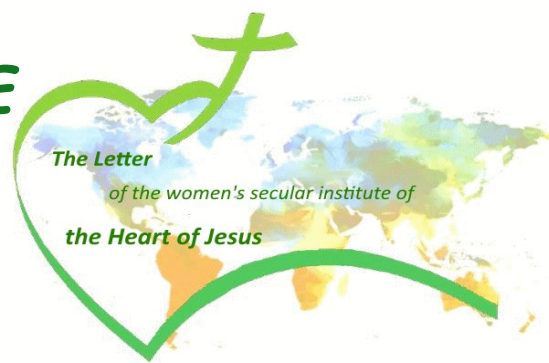
Feeling downgraded

Many people feel downgraded when they retire. Only those who produce have a place and value in the eyes of modern society. However, many senior citizens still keep up an activity that is often indispensable to society (childcare, voluntary work, church work, etc.), but things become more complicated as age advances and infirmities take over, rendering them unable to keep up their activities. It can be very difficult to let go of one's responsibilities.

The difficulty of adapting in a world where everything changes so rapidly cuts people off from the present world. New



The Letter of secular institute of the Heart of Jesus



technologies often confine them to the periphery of society. Today's culture is entirely focused on the future, and considers the experience of older people to be of no interest, while older people seek to learn from the young, to stay young, but often fail to do so.

*Stripped to the bare essentials, the very elderly person swings between wisdom and resentment, smiles and laments, past and future. They are constantly having to come to terms with a present that no longer forms a project.*⁴

Then comes the question of the meaning and purpose of their lives. Fighting against the numbness of habit, the older person can encourage younger people to open up to what is not of immediate or palpable interest, to perceive the truth hidden beneath the hustle and bustle of the modern world.



She is free to "be", to enter into the life of the One who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6). We've entered a time of conviviality, of free encounters and of listening to the people whom the Lord puts in our path, in the authenticity of exchanges. "You serve to love", says a little girl to her bedridden grandmother.



Making good use of memories



Old age is an opportune time to re-read one's life, to give thanks for one's own journey, but also for that of one's fellow travellers and the eras through which they have passed. Then, the inner horizon broadens, life takes on its full meaning and God finds his place. A happy, luminous remembrance of God's call, of his faithfulness throughout the days, of our following in his footsteps and with him, of our presence at the heart of the city of men. Now we can say: yes, "I know in whom I have believed" (2Tm 1:12), He has been faithful! And with the apostle give





OLD AGE

A PATH TO HOLINESS

thanks: *"I am full of gratitude to him who gives me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord..."*. Says Paul (1Tm 1,12)

Some of us can be tempted by the distortion of memory that leads us to contemplate the past with glasses that embellish all things! Things used to be better, but they weren't! It was certainly different! Men remain the same. Socrates once said, "There is no more youth. Is there any more distressing sight than that of an old-timer whose importunate remonstrances irritate the young people around her?"

With memories come the irreversibles of our lives: the trials and wounds, the regrets, the sins and failures of the past. These haunting memories demand that we look at them with Jesus, rather than burying them or brooding over them.

Acknowledging our sins and entrusting them to God's mercy is a source of life for each and every one of us. Yes, over our unfaithful years, our remorse and our sins, a light can dawn. The buried seed can germinate. *"There is no*



*other remedy for remorse than the humble knowledge of one's sin in the breaking of the heart where hope is restored.*⁵ Peter, at the meal on the banks of the lake after the resurrection, is overcome by his triple betrayal. Jesus turns to him and asks three questions, not about denial, but about love. It is hard and incisive for Peter to hear this "Do you love me?" Each of these questions provokes



a new step and reintroduces him to the reality of love. The sinner is not only forgiven, but becomes a new creation. His scar becomes a source.

Within us, wounds buried in the depths of the soul can emerge. Perhaps the time has come to present them to the Lord, so that he can come and heal them, pour out his gentleness, and make our thorns blossom and our gaps germinate. "When I cried out to you, O Lord my God, you healed me" (Psalm 29:3).

With the passage of time, is forgiveness, once impossible to ask, now accessible to free our souls and allow healing? Forgiveness given and received can then take on a positive hue and find their place in the unity of our lives, now invested by mercy (Is 1:18).



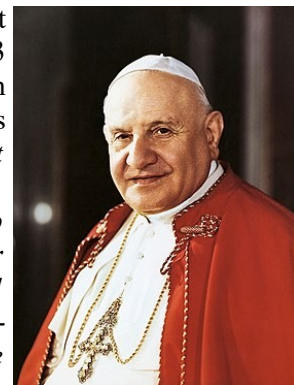
Late fruitfulness

As we age, we think of life as behind us: let's continue to live our lives with the Lord, offering him every minute of our daily lives. Certainly! But as long as we live, God is not finished with us! A new call can still arise in the midst of our old age, for nothing is impossible for God.

Abraham and Sarah are both described as old and worn out: they can no longer conceive either (*Sarah had ceased to have what happens to women*) or the other (*my lord is an old man*). And yet, they will have a

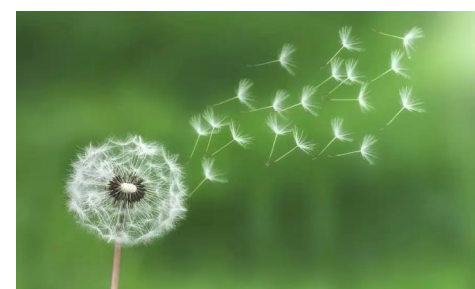
son! The same goes for Elisabeth and Zechariah.

At any age, the Lord can barge in, create something new and allow us to "reinvent ourselves" in today's reality. Every stage of life is open to God's possibilities, for those who make themselves available. Just think of Sister Emmanuel, who at the age of 63 left to live with the ragpickers of Cairo. *"At almost 70, there is little to count on for the future. [...] I must therefore not delude myself, but familiarize myself with the thought of the end; not with the panic that weakens, but with the confidence that preserves the fervor to live, to work and to serve"* wrote John XXIII, elected Pope 7 years later, in his diary.



Of course, not all of us are called to such destinies. But, more simply, let's think about the fruits of prayer, especially intercession. There's no need for grand speeches, just a simple presentation to the Lord, the offering of a small gesture... As long as it's done with love and faith.

Like the scribe in the Gospel "who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven, who is like a householder who draws from his treasure both new and old" (Mt 13:52), the elders, through their experience and their lives, become a relay for the memory of mankind. They collect tradition and pass it on to the next generation, adapting it to the present day. We also think of the young



OLD AGE

A PATH TO HOLINESS

people who turn to their elders to find out about their family history, or the grandparents who pass on the faith to their grandchildren, but also of all those who take time out of their day to listen, to be attentive, to make their hearts available. What is the Lord calling me to today?



time of nostalgia, but of openness to God's infinity. The present time, governed by hope, faith and charity, is freed from the passing of years and becomes the moment of God's presence, in the expectation that God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).



The prospect of death

Some elderly people dread changes or the absence of a loved one, which can make them feel finite. Even minor ailments can take on worrying aspects: could this be the beginning of the end? All the more so as they are confronted with the loneliness and deaths of relatives, friends and acquaintances. With them, a world has disappeared, so the temptation to turn inward, to indifference and defeatism is great. Spiritual dynamism risks dissolving into bitterness, and the heart becomes sclerotic. The voice of the tempter takes over, and the forces of death gain ground. *"I will go, wandering through my years with my bitterness"* says the prophet Isaiah (Is 38:15). In Christianity, death is not the end of everything. It is certainly an end, but also a new beginning: one that will enable full communion with God. For Christians, old age is a time of hope, a time of waiting for God to come and take them away. It is a time of preparation for the great encounter. It is no longer a



So we might ask ourselves, despite what society thinks, whether keeping young, trying to keep up with the times at all costs, is not missing the point? It's no longer a question of decline and failure, but of walking with Christ. Union with Christ blesses our existence and gives it meaning. We must be contemporary with Christ first and foremost. Encountering Christ surpasses anything new in this world.

Notes :

1. Pope Francis
2. P. Beauchamp, L'un et l'autre Testament. Essai de lecture (Parole de Dieu), Paris, ed. Seuil, 1976, 199.
3. Father Guy Touton, dominicain | 7 mai 2010 , le chrétien devant la souffrance.
4. La personne âgée au croisement de l'éthique et de la bible, Claude Lichtert, in Journal of Ethics and Moral Theology 2016, p 35 à 64
5. « L'automne est mon printemps », Renée de Tryon Montalembert, ed. Fayard, 1989



Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For that which is corruptible must clothe itself with incorruptibility, and that which is mortal must clothe itself with immortality.

And when this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about: Death is swallowed up in victory.
1Co15,51-54

Dates to remember:

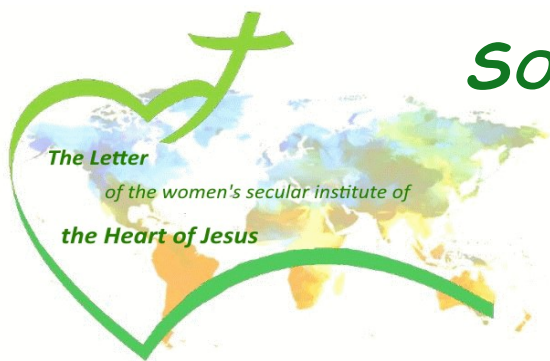
- *Next directories:* December 14, January 11, February 29,
- *Next federal council:* March 19 to 21,
- *Next general council:* November 19, December 17, January 14, February 18, March 22/23/24 in Paris

NEWS



A retreat took place this summer in Benin. It was preached by Bernard de Chastenier. Both Chantal Adiko who is in formation and Afiavi Bernadette Habada who is inquiring participated.



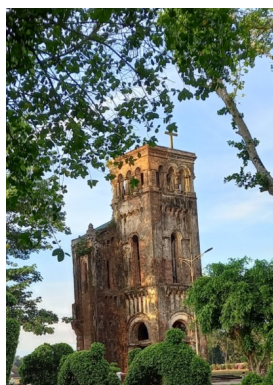


SOME SUMMER NEWS CONTINUED

Following our last orientations, a commission dealing with finances was created under the responsibility of Sabine Esnault.

An American member: Kathy as well as Suong and Yen Van, Vietnamese members, participate in it.

The objective is to study how to increase the income of the institute while the number of French contributors decreases, in order to continue to travel and organize formation sessions.



A meeting of the entire FCU of Việt Nam took place in July at La Vang sanctuary. It is the place of a Marian apparition dating from August 17, 1798. We were 501 people. The meeting was characterized by sharing, prayer and joy. Cecile Legris, Pierre Jean Stygelbout and Emmanuel Chazot made the trip.



At the end of September, members of the region 'France' met again. This was the opportunity to meet by Zoom several members of

Vietnam and our 2 sisters from Benin. It was a great joy for all. The themes of the WE were dealing with communication and balance in Our busy Lives.

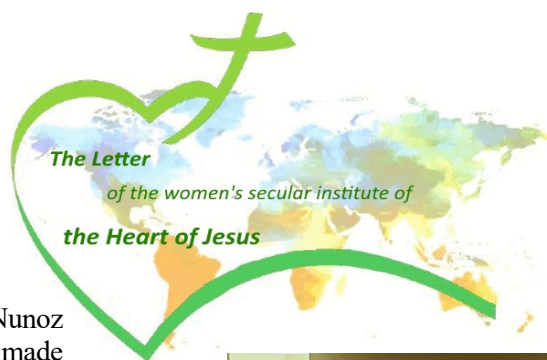


Marie Françoise Ngankoa, who lives in Rome, entered the inquiring time in August. She is most welcome among us!



SOME SUMMER NEWS

CONTINUED



Thérèse was happy to participate in the FCU retreat in the United States. During the retreat, Kathy Catchings made her Perpetual Vows, Alexandra Nunoz made her first vows, and 2 persons entered the formation. A PCJ also made perpetual vows.



KATHY



ALEXANDRA



Entry to training

Church News:

- The first session of the Synod of Bishops ended on October 29. It has been the first synod in the history of the Church (for 2000 years) where lay people, women and men were able to fully take part in the work and vote!

While waiting for the final synthesis of this session, I urge you to read the Letter of the Synod addressed to the People of God and published on October 25.

- Two apostolic exhortations were published during this first session of the synod: **Laudate Deum**, published on October 4, is about climate change in the context of COP 28, in which the pope will participate. The 2nd one was published on October 15 on the occasion of the feast of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and **is about confidence in the merciful love of God**. Let us not hesitate to work and meditate on this text. N'hésitons pas à travailler et méditer ce dernier texte.



Mary visited our sisters in Việt Nam in July. She visited 9 fraternities and participated in a regional council in La Vang. It took place over 3 days, just before the Family meeting.



regional council



Institut Séculier Féminin du Cœur de Jésus - FAMILLE COR UNUM

202, avenue du Maine – F-75014 PARIS – Tél. 01.45.40.45.51 – contact@isfcj.org – <http://www.famillecorunum.com> – <http://www.isfcj.org>