

THE LETTER OF THE WOMEN'S SECULAR INSTITUTE OF THE HEART OF JESUS

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MARY, MY MOTHER AND MY MASTER

The words of the Apostle Paul shed lights on the beginning of this new year: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Gal 4:4). The expression "the fullness of time" is striking. In ancient times, time was measured using vases of water; the passage of time was marked by how long it took for an empty vase to be filled.



Hence the meaning of the phrase "fullness of time": once the vase of history is filled, divine grace spills over. God becomes man and he does so through a woman, Mary. She is the means chosen by God, the

culmination of that long line of individuals and generations that "drop by drop" prepared for the Lord's coming into the world. The Mother, then, stands at the very heart of the mystery of time. It pleased God to turn history around through her, the woman. With that one word, "woman", the Scripture brings us back to the beginning, to Genesis, and makes us realize that the Mother and Child mark a new creation, a new beginning. Thus, at the beginning of the time of salvation, there is the Holy Mother of God, our Holy Mother.



It is fair, then, that the year should open by invoking her; it is fair that God's faithful people should acclaim her with joy, as once those bold Christians did in Ephesus, as the Holy Mother of God. For those words, Mother of God, express the joyful certainty that the Lord, a tiny Child in his mother's arms, has united himself forever to our humanity, to the point where she isn't just his mother, but ours too.



Mary, my dear Mother!

It was wonderful that you said "YES" so that the Son of God could be incarnate and become a human being to bring salvation to all people.

Your "FIAT" was even more radical at the foot of the Cross, when you held the body of Jesus in your arms.

You accepted everything with a loving heart to offer sacrifice on the cross with Jesus. You are blessed because you believed in God's promise.

You are wonderful because you have done God's will. Do not let me do my own will, but do everything according to God's will.

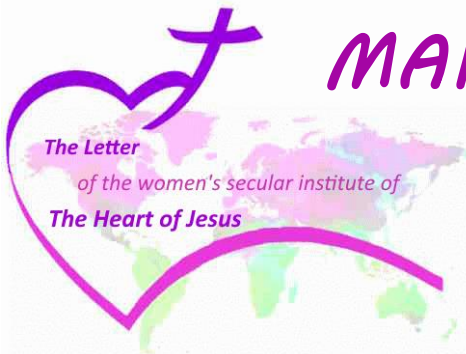
My dear Mother, please hold me in your arms to awaken and nourish my faith, to support and enlighten my hope, and to promote my charity.

Please lead me on the path of holiness, to live a life of sacrifice, fidelity and self-denial, to dedicate my whole life to God.

Finally, keep me in your heart and help me to always keep you in my heart, so that one day I can be with you in heaven. Amen.

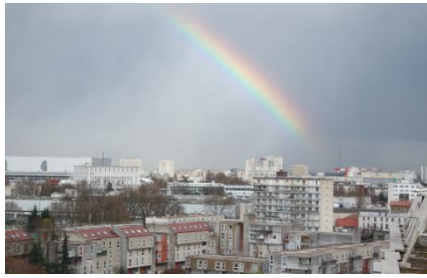
Extract from "Prayer from the heart"

by Father Thai Nguyen



MARY, MY MOTHER AND MY MASTER

Mother of God: it is a simple phrase that confesses the Lord's eternal covenant with us. Mother of God: a dogma of faith, but also a "dogma of hope"; God in man, and man in God, forever.



Mary's receptiveness to the working of the Spirit brought us the greatest of all gifts: she "enabled the Lord of Majesty to become our brother"¹. The motherhood of Mary is the path leading us to the paternal tenderness of God. It is the closest, the most direct and easiest of paths. The Mother leads us to the beginning and heart of faith. This is a boundless gift that makes us beloved sons and daughters, tabernacles of the Father's love.



It follows that welcoming the Mother into our lives is not a matter of devotion but a requirement of faith: "If we want to be Christians, we must be 'Marials'"², that is "children of Mary". For in the mystery of the Church, which is itself rightly called Mother and Virgin, the Blessed Virgin stands out offering an eminent and singular model of the virgin and mother. By her belief and obedience, not knowing man but overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, as the new Eve she brought forth on earth the very Son of the Father, showing an undefiled faith, not in the word of the ancient serpent, but in that of God's messenger.³



Jesus performs his first sign at the wedding feast of Cana. There, she is the one who realized that the wine had run out, and called out to Jesus (cf. Jn 2:3). The needs of her children prompt the Mother, to beg Jesus to intervene. Mary knows our needs; she intercedes to make grace abound in our lives and to guide us towards authentic fulfillment. Each of us has shortcomings, times of loneliness and an inner emptiness that cries out to be filled. Each of us knows this well. Whenever we are tempted to retreat into ourselves, let us run to her; whenever we are no longer able to untie the knots in our lives, we can seek refuge in her. Our times, bereft of peace, need a Mother who can reunite the human family. Let us look to Mary, in order to become artisans of unity. Let us do so with her maternal creativity and concern for her children. For she unites them and consoles them; she listens to their troubles and she dries their tears.



She cares for us and remains close to us. With tender love, she will open our eyes to fullness. For she will lead us to Jesus, who is himself "the fullness of time", of every time, of our own time, of each one of us. Dear friends, may this year be filled with the consolation of the Lord! May this year be filled with the tender maternal love of Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

Mary, Mother of the Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, when presenting Mary, writes: "*The Virgin Mary is acknowledged, and honored as being truly the mother of God and of the redeemer. She is 'clearly the mother of the members of Christ' since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of her head. Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church*"⁴ Mary was present with the Church in prayer from the earliest days. "*All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers*" (Acts 1:14). Mary also prayed earnestly to God for the Holy Spirit who had come upon her on the day of the Annunciation, so that "all might be filled with the Holy Spirit" on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4)⁵.



After her earthly life, Mary was taken to heaven, body and soul, to enjoy heavenly glory. In heaven, our Mother continues her motherhood by interceding until the Church reaches the heaven.⁶ Until the end of the world, the plan of salvation continues in the Church Body of Christ. In this body, Mary is present as a prominent member, closely united to the head, Christ. She always loves, protects and guides the Church with the heart of a gentle mother.

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Mary, Mother of us all

“Mary conceived, brought forth and nourished Christ. She presented Him to the Father in the temple, and was united with Him by compassion as He died on the Cross. In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace”⁷. St. Teresa of Lisieux had a warm love for the Virgin Mary: “She is truly the Queen of heaven and earth, but she is more like a mother than a queen.”⁸ And Saint Augustine says: “If we put together all the love of all mothers in all

times and spaces, it would still not be as great as Mary's love for us”.

Mary is our Mother in many ways:

- With maternal love, she always watches over us. If we turn to her and pray, she hears the prayers of her children and intercedes for us with her Son and the Father.
- The beauty of Mary is that she is never too tired or too busy to listen to her children. She always welcomes our prayers, not only with her ears, but also with her Immaculate Heart. She brings your wounds to Jesus for healing through his Mother's intercession. Don't give up the habit of talking to her often!
- A loving mother never hesitates or delays in correcting her children when they make mistakes. In the message of Fatima, Mary warned of souls lost through sins of the flesh and lack of prayer and sacrifice. Our Mother is gentle but very firm!

Mary is the Master of our spiritual life

In the 1974 Apostolic Exhortation “*Marialis Cultus*”, Pope Paul VI wrote: “*As a model for the whole Church in the worship of God, Mary is also a guide for Christians in their spiritual life*”⁹. As the mother of the Redeemer, she, more than anyone else, can teach and guide us on the path of following Jesus.



On the day of the Annunciation, Mary allowed herself to be completely filled with the Holy Spirit because she is all welcoming and available to grace. We, on the other hand, often feel what St. Paul said: “When I want to do right, evil is at hand. For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” (Rm 7:21-23). St. Paul's experience talks about our human condition. This isn't the case for Mary, who is the only creature

without sin. She was completely filled with the Holy Spirit, she belonged to God and lived for God. Therefore, Mother is a model for us in our spiritual life. She helps us on the path of holiness and makes us obedient to the Holy Spirit.



Mary in the spirituality of the Cor Unum Family

In the Ignatian Tradition:

Throughout his life, Saint Ignatius had a special devotion to the Virgin Mary. Because of that profound interior experience, Mary was given a unique position in the Spiritual Exercises. Those who love the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises will discover Christ, Mary and the path to holiness.¹⁰

Our Lady with Pierre de Clorivière and Daniel Fontaine

About Pierre de Clorivière

For Pierre de Clorivière, love for Mary was not just a religious feeling, but an interior experience, and he wanted all of us to have the same experience. “*All my efforts are aimed at making your interior life like that of Mary, in spite of your weak capacity*”¹¹. “*Our devotion must come first from within, thanks to the close union of our sentiments with those of the Heart of Mary, and from there with those of the Heart of Jesus*” (Letter of August 11, 1805).

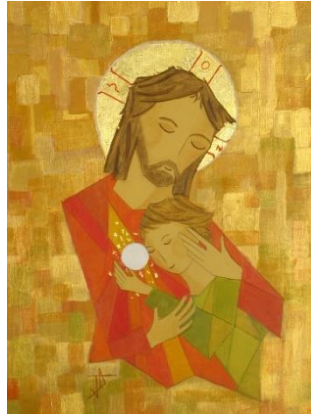


In a letter about the Blessed Virgin Mary dated January 18, 1800, Father De Clorivière wrote: “If you want to belong



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especially to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, if you want to be a member of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, if you want to be a member of the Sacred Heart Association, let us show special devotion to Mary. *I constantly pray to God that sincere and loving devotion to His Most Holy Mother will always be a distinguishing feature of this Association. Without this devotion, how can we share the most tender and profound sentiments of the Heart of Jesus? Therefore, after the duty to love and follow the example of Jesus, devotion to Mary is the first duty of those who volunteer to serve God in this newly born Association*" (Circulating Letters, p. 403).



Continuing the Tradition of Our Predecessors

- The Rule of Life refers to Mary when it speaks of obedience (chapt 4, n67): *"As at Cana, Golgotha and the Cenacle, wherever the Church is born and grows, she is there"*¹².

Like our elder sister, Mary opens a path of obedience to the Father. How good it is that Mary walks with us, reminding us that proclaiming the Gospel is done first and foremost by listening to the Word of God and stepping out in faith like a servant.

- Every year we celebrate the feast of February 2nd: the anniversary of the foundation of our Institute (1791), the day when secular institutes were recognized by Pius XII with the apostolic constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* and the day when the PCJs were recognized as a secular Institute (1952). This day reminds us to be aware of the devotion to which we are called. Together with Mary, we say, "Behold, I come to do your will" (Heb 10:9).

And for us, members of the Secular Institute of the Heart of Jesus

Christ chose us from the world. The world and the Church need my presence. "As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world" (Jn 17:18). We participate in the mission of Christ and the mission of the

Church in a special way according to our own charism (1 Cor 7:7). The more I commit myself to this mission, the more I am immersed in Christ. The profession of the evangelical counsels is a special way of living out baptismal consecration. This consecration also implies a "death", as "a grain of wheat falls to the ground, if it dies, it produces much fruit" (Jn 12:24). Our consecration through sacred bonds determines a new way of life, which is only possible by burying our earthly life in Christ. Let us share with Mary this death to ourselves that produces the fruit of the



"new life" in the risen Christ.

On the spiritual level, we cannot do anything but agree to be "seduced by Lord" (Jr 20:7). As we know, perfection is not within our grasp. In the spiritual life, the Virgin Mary teaches us to humbly step out of our position and entrust ourselves to God. When we commit ourselves to the Institute, we rely completely on our Mother because we believe that she is the one who will help us to be faithful. *"And may your Mother keep me faithful and available for the mission that You (Lord Jesus) entrust to me in the heart of the world."*¹⁴

In our life of prayer, let us learn from Mary by uniting our prayers with the prayers of Jesus. *"Like Christ's prayer, our prayer is woven from the very tissue of life itself. Let us love to contemplate God at work in events, and let ourselves be enlightened by his Word"* (Constitution, n. 48). In this sense, we are called to pray, contemplate and *"celebrate the Lord at work in the events of lives and in the world"* (Constitution, n. 42).



About Daniel Fontaine

Reading the biography of Father Daniel Fontaine (1862-1920), we see that he was very attached to the Virgin Mary. From his early age, Daniel's mother dedicated him to Mary. As a seminarian in Rome, together with Louis Liagre and Hippolyte de la Cell, he founded a Marian Society: *"We dedicate ourselves totally to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as Christians and as priests"*. He always ended his homilies with a reference to the Virgin Mary. During his difficult pastoral work with the orphans of Auteuil and the new recruits of Arras, he always prayed the Rosary and taught everyone to love the Rosary, so that the Poor Clare Sisters of that city called him "the priest of Mary". When he became parish priest of Quinze-vingts and began to rebuild the Institute of the Heart of Jesus at Montmartre, he and his



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

At the school of Mary, in their daily lives, the members of the Secular Institute aim to be servants of all. The Church and Tradition describe her as a profoundly humble and poor woman, like an "anawim" of the Lord. She is also the one who obeyed, served and "pondered these things in her heart" (Lk 2:19). She is the one who contemplates God's work and gives Him glory (Magnificat). In this she is an example for us. We want to bear witness to a life that seeks to build good communities where human dignity is respected. We wish our life is proof that earthly realities, if lived with the power of the Gospel, can bring life to others, make society freer and more just, and thus glorify God.

Today in some parts of the

Reflection questions:

- What role does Mary play in my life as a member of the Institute?
- Is my life shaped by God's Word as Mary's life was?

News

Dates to remember:

- Next directories: February 29
- Next federal council: March 19 to 21
- Next general council: February 18, March 22/23 in person

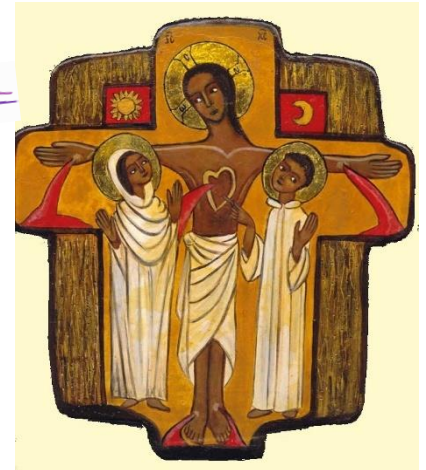


world, our members are getting older. The Institute needs many new vocations. Tell this to Mother Mary and rely on her, as a mother who always provides for the family's urgent needs. At the same time, each member is also deeply aware of his or her responsibility in promoting vocations for the institute as well as for the Church.

Conclusion

Even today,

Jesus says to me: "Here is your Mother". With Saint John, are we fully welcoming our Mother into our home, into our life, into our soul? Are we quick to welcome our Mother into our group, our fraternity and our fraternal life? The experience of our founders is very significant. If we know how to welcome Mary into our lives, she will make us children who always know how to please the Father and serve our sisters as servants, following Jesus' example. Devotion to Mary is part of the spiritual heritage of our Institute.



1. Extract from "Prayer from the heart" by Father Thai Nguyen
2. Thomas de Célano, Vita secunda, CL, 198: FF 786
3. Saint Paul VI, Homily in Cagliari, 24 April 1970
4. Lumen Gentium n.°63
5. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 963
6. Lumen Gentium n.59
7. Lumen Gentium n.62
8. Lumen Gentium n.61
9. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Last interviews, 21.8.1897
10. Mary in the Spiritual Exercises, Maurice Giuliani, SJ
11. Here is Your Mother, p. 231 – Pierre de Clorivière
12. Formation Material of the Cor Unum Family, n. 31
13. Rule of life - chapter 4, n. 67
14. Prayer of Commitment to the Secular Institute of the Heart of Jesus

Notes

"Prayer" year in preparation for the Jubilee

The jubilee of 2025 is all the more important for us as its theme is "Pilgrims of Hope". What a coincidence! The General Assembly of the Cor Unum Family in 2022 also opens up a 6-year future for us, with a similar theme: "Walking together in Hope".

Francis "earnestly hopes that we will dedicate the year 2024, which precedes the jubilee event, to a great 'symphony' of prayer". In response to the Pope's invitation, the year 2024 will be a high point for our Institute. The theme will be "Like the disciples, we will put ourselves at the school of the Our Father".

From Lent until Advent 2024 - the opening of the Jubilee Year 2025 - we will choose one day a month to spend a special time in silence: taking time to reread the past month and the extended prayer time. "Let us fan the flame of hope that has been given to us and help everyone to acquire new strengths and certainties by looking to the future with an open mind, a trusting heart and a clear-sighted vision."

* Letter from Pope Francis to Archbishop Rino Fisichella in preparation for Jubilee 2025.