

Maastricht, August, 2013

Dear Sisters in the Netherlands, Indonesia, Tanzania, Kenya, Philippines, East Indonesia, Norway, Belgium, USA, Brazil and Timor Leste.

On this day, August 15, we invite you to journey together, to recall and reminisce again the Life of Mary, our Lady, being assumed into Heaven and crowned Queen later. Simultaneously on this feast day, we are also celebrating the moment of grace-filled experience of Mother Elisabeth in front of the miraculous statue of Our Lady, Star of the Sea. Both women have a special role in our spiritual life as well as in the life of our Congregation. Can we identify the revelation of these two women in our vocation and in our present life?

Through the image of these two women, let us reflect together and deepen *first of all*, on **their deep union with God** and *secondly*, **their challenging but growth encounter with the uniqueness of the people around them**. People, who assisted, helped, inspired, rejected and discouraged them and became a part of their journey.

In the bible, the role of Mary in the Salvation History was foretold. God prepared her way until her encounter with the Angel who brought the good news to her. She did not understand but her trust in God developed.

“...Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with a child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High... “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the

Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God... "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her." (Luke 1:30-38)

Mary's anointment when she was still in the womb of Anna made her a unique person. As a chosen one, she started relating to God through the parental nurturance and witnessing of Joaquin and Anna since she was a young girl. The grace she received during her anointment changed her into a new person. Her faith developed. Her cooperation was needed so that the grace of God can happen. Her most drastic manifestation of her union with God was the time when she proclaimed that blessed **yes** in front of the angel after announcing to her what God wanted her to do. It was a result of the transforming grace in her.

Similar experience happened to Mother Elisabeth Gruyters. In her life story, she developed that closeness to God from her early age. Her faith grew stronger and deeper. She matured enough to be able to let go of her desire but to surrender all herself to God.

"....In this state of mind, my faith grew deeper and my hope stronger and a burning love attended by sweet tears granted me a peaceful rest...; and suddenly I heard the blessed 'yes' from Heaven and that 'yes' was no other than this: all things will come. All of a sudden my tears stopped and I came to my senses again with great interior joy, consolation and relief. But Heaven only knows how I knelt among the crowd of people there before that miraculous statue. However, though I was trodden under foot, though my best clothes which I used to wear on such high days with no other intention than to meet my

beloved Bridegroom decently and neatly - for that morning I had received Holy Communion very early – were trampled upon and smudged, I returned home wholly consoled and relieved with this 'Yes'. “(EG 6-7)

The sixteen years of Mother Elisabeth's experience, between 1820 and 1836 were a long struggle to develop a personal relationship with God. He was teaching her how to pray, how to respond to the call to be servant to His Will, a process of growing to union with Him deepened. Inner freedom developed: to trust and to follow what pleases God. Her spiritual capacity was opened to what God wanted her to do. Her experienced of the burning love of God calling her to be servant to His will and her experience of mystical union with God in the birth of her prayers, the blessed Yes was heard. She developed the attitude of opening her heart as to what pleases God. She became indifferent as to what kind of service God asked from her. We saw this in her life's journey from wanting to enter a convent to losing all she desired and in union with God attaining inner freedom to trust and follow what pleases him. Through taking part in Christ's suffering, taking part in the salvific work of Christ in the salvation of others, of humankind – her prophetic actions led to the foundation of the Congregation.

Mary and Mother Elisabeth experienced an intimate union with God in their life. Their experience did not only stay on the personal level but enabled them to see what was happening around and moved them to share their life to the needs of others. They went beyond the boundaries of their comfort zones. Mary's immediate response after her total surrender was to visit her cousin Elizabeth. She walked by foot for a distance to attend her cousin who at that time was waiting

for the birth of her son. She was already far advanced in age and Mary accompanied her in her needs. "...Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home" (Luke. 1: 56). Mother Elisabeth on the other hand continued her charitable works of mercy to the children around and specially her mission with the Nijpels family.

They shared their deep values that would serve later on as radical expressions of following God in their life. Their passion and spirit of hospitality and generosity were real manifestations of their conversion to the Spirit of the Gospel. This intuition and passion are nourished in a heart to heart dialogue with the God of life and hope and familiarity with their contemporaries. Their life of obedient listening to God, the fruit of their contemplative spirit and their faithful application of the teachings of Christ became a strong foundation.

The spiritual experience of baptism and conversion led these two women to live a life of faithfulness and commitment to God. In the process of wanting to be in union with God and responding His call, they were always aware of His presence and strived to do His will. Their courage to respond was sustained by contemplative prayer, returning to that inner source from time to time, was what shaped them of who they were.

Let us recall the experience of Mary after the Angel announced to her that she will bear the Son of God. From the very beginning, she encountered people who energized, challenged, and discouraged her journey of life. After the announcement, she went to the house of her cousin Elizabeth. She found a woman who understood her when

Elizabeth proclaimed: “*Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you bear! But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*” (Luke 1:42-43). She was affirmed by Elizabeth. Feel how Mary felt at that time. That was a preparation for the next experiences to come.

The ambivalent feelings of Joseph at first when he knew her situation and was about to leave her, it was not that easy for her. Nevertheless, she trusted everything to God.

The pain she silently suffered when she was about to give birth to Jesus and how she and Joseph journeyed together to evade the people who wanted to harm Jesus, like King Herod. This situation made her faith and trust in God deepened and became emotionally stronger as she carried silently the Son of God in the midst of difficulties she met on the way. Then when Jesus was on His ministry until He died on the cross, John and another Mary were with her to be of support to her as she silently carried the pain within while looking at her Son. The presence of the disciple and Mary with her around, sustained her strength at that moment in front of the cross up to the tomb.

Mother Elisabeth’s journey on the other hand was a long process of finding what God wanted her to do. The longing to enter the convent and finding the will of God became stronger. She showered prayers to her favorite saints for help. God gave her people who became *grace companions* in her journey. Companions or people who discouraged, inspired, challenged, support and assisted her. Those people she met and shared with, with her vision and passion were not all convinced to her longing but she persevered and the more she was empowered of her intention. Her union with God motivated her to continue

finding His will. She approached spiritual advisers such as the Reverend Father Rector of Wittem (EG 10), Fr Ferdinand, the Rector of the Redemptorist Congregation (EG 11), Fr Maiel, her confessor and Reverend Fr van Baer, Director of St Servaas Church. Some of them were not that very encouraging too.

She also met women in the journey (EG 26) who joined with her but did not survive. The Sisters of Charity from Den Bosch (EG 49) were asked to help her in the journey to Religious life. They stayed only for some time because they were called back by their superior. Again, she and her companion were left by themselves. After years of the establishment of the Congregation, her life continued in the midst of the ups and downs, blessings and challenges. The different crisis she faced made her more attuned to her interior life with God. Those were times of deeper union, a growth experience for her.

Those transcending moments invited them to grow deeper and deeper relating to themselves, others and God in their life. It involved in them their whole person that led to their transformation as a person. The extent of their free cooperation of their thoughts and affections, mentality and conducts were slowly purified and transformed, on their journey in life. They maintained healthy and holy ways of relating despite at times the presence of conflict. "Faith working through love" (*Gal 5: 6*) becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of one's life (cf. *Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 5:17*). Those were the effects of the transforming power of their union with God.

As we celebrate this feast day, we are called to reflect upon the history of our own vocation. Just like Mother Mary and Mother

Elisabeth, we also sometimes come across some difficulties on our journey. We may sometimes feel discourage because the way before us is dark, and there are no clear answers or directions. But, we have to constantly redirect our self to Him, find quiet moments with Him and ponder His will every moment in order to be afire again to do His will in the here and now.

We hope that the life of Mother Mary and Mother Elisabeth always inspires us and be an example in living our life as members of the Sisters of Charity of St Charles Borromeo.

We wish you all a Happy Feast Day.

MEMBERSHIP

“...those who are called by God give a response of love in their turn to Christ their Redeemer: a love which is given entirely and without reserve, and which loses itself in the offering of the whole person as “...a loving sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God” (Rom 12:1)

The Region of the Philippines

Habit Taking

On August 15th, 2013 two Vietnamese postulants start their novitiate in Tagaytay Initial Formation House, the Philippines:

1. Thi Thu
2. Nguyen Huong

IN MEMORIAM

Only this love can motivate and support the privations and trials which one who wishes "... to lose his life..." necessarily encounters for Christ and for the Gospel (cf. Mk 8:35).

Dutch Province

1. Sr. Hieronyma

She is Anna Jacoba Boerakker in real life. She was born in Oss on May 18, 1926. She was professed in Maastricht on May 6, 1951. She returned to her Creator on June 21, 2013 in the Mother House, Maastricht.

2. Sr. Irene

Johanna Elisabeth van Gemert was born on December 30, 1931. She first entered the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of Romeinse Unit on April 19, 1954 and was professed on 21 October 1956. She left her first Congregation and joined our Congregation and was professed on January 13, 1990. She died on June 25, 2013 in Heerlen "Bergweide".

NEWS FROM THE GENERAL BOARD

1. 90th year anniversary of the Congregation in Norway

June 23, 2013, the Sisters in Norway celebrated the 90th jubilee of the presence of our Congregation in this country. Marked by thanksgiving Mass in the parish church, the sisters celebrated this

graceful moment together with the local parishioners and friends. In connection to this event, the sisters scheduled also a pilgrimage to Molde, the first CB community from July 19 to 21 to share a reflection on the ministry of CB in Norway and later on, September 1, to Hamar.

We express our gratitude to all the missionaries who take part in witnessing the life of the Congregation in Norway. Special thanks to all the sisters who are back home in their country after generously giving their life of service to the people there. Thanks also for Sr Pauline Sundari and Sr Stefanie Gowijaya, who are still around, trying to do their best to continue the mission of the Congregation in this Protestant populated country. Congratulations and May God blesses our undertakings!

2. CB Missionaries in the Netherlands

On June 27th, 2013 the General Board and the Dutch Provincial Board gathered all the CB missionaries in this Area. There were 7 sisters present, the GB and the PB. The main purpose of the gathering was to disseminate the result of the General Consultative Body meeting 2013 particularly on The Policy for Missionaries. It was also a time of confirmation for the missionaries regarding their status and thus responsibilities as a missionary in the Dutch Province.

3. Elisabeth Convent, Rawamangun - Jakarta has been closed.

The Indonesia Province officially closed down this community on July 9, 2013. Further the building was handed over to Tarakanita Foundation for the development of Tarakanita 5 Kindergarten

Jakarta and Training Learning Centre of the teachers and the staffs of Tarakanita Foundation.

The convent was established on February 2nd, 1973 as a request of Mgr. A. Djayasaputra, SJ, Archbishop of Jakarta Diocese. Together with some sisters, the late Sr Franka Sarsiyem started this community by establishing a Kindergarten and a polyclinic. A few years later, the kindergarten was enormously developed. There was a need to build an elementary school and later in 1976, a Junior High school was established. Besides serving the people in the schools and the polyclinic, the sisters also took part in social-pastoral ministry. They were involved in different activities of the local parish such as retreats, catecheses, and parish counsel's meetings. Sr Franka took also initiative to establish a simple parish library. Through these ministries the Congregation made contacts and served the local church and society.

Seeing the signs of the times and after great effort of the Province to re-vitalize community life and re-orient its ministry, a decision was made to close this community. We are grateful to all the sisters who got involved in writing the history of the Congregation thru this community. We are sure that the seed of love that had been planted there will bear fruit in the heart of the people who have been inspired by the life of the sisters.

4. **“Stella Maris” Intercultural Community**

The General Chapter 2011, in relation to Mother House and the International Community decided that the General Board together with the Provincial Board of the Dutch Province, journey with the

International Community in view of ascertaining its status (pg. 36, letter c).

On June 29, 2013 the status of the “Stella Maris” International Community was officially confirmed as one of the communities under the Dutch Province. This event was marked by exchange of hopes from the sisters concerned, the PB and the GB. It is our hopes that the presence of this community in the Dutch Province will become a fresh air that gives a new energy and spirit to the rest of the communities and societies. May with this new status the community become God’s instrument of love, hope, and faith now and in the near future.

Kind Regards,
on behalf of the General Board



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