

to bring fuller life to others



*Congregation of the Sisters
of the Sorrowful Mother
Third Order Regular of Saint Francis of Assisi*

July 2013 #2

Dear Friends,

In the first issue of this newsletter we presented the theme ‘Who is Jesus?’ In this issue we want to focus on the mission of Jesus beginning with his own words: **‘I HAVE COME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY’**. (Jn.10:10) This is the excerpt of the Gospel in which John the Evangelist introduces Jesus as the ‘gate’ and as the ‘shepherd’: the *Gate* through which we enter into life and the *Shepherd* who leads us to true freedom. It is through all life and through his works that Jesus makes the love of God visible and tangible, the God who comes down among us and lives with us, the God who allowed himself to become one with us.

Jesus came to bring us divine life, not merely the earthly life we received from our parents; he gives us ‘eternal life’, that is, participation in the life of the Son of God. Jesus can give life abundantly because he not only has life, but he is ‘the life’ himself. The mission of Jesus is therefore to reveal the immense love of God for us. He can meet our deepest aspirations, the hunger for full and never ending life because God’s gifts are without measure. Only he can satisfy our desire for infinity, because he is ‘eternal life’ and the abundant life that he came to give us begins here and now.

Confronted with these words of Jesus and with his mission, we will discover that there is a more beautiful and attractive life than just earthly existence. The life that he gives us abundantly fills us daily and makes us able to spend ourselves for others. How can we transmit the joy and strength of this truth to the people who are disconnected from faith in Christ and who can no longer find meaning in their lives? How are we able to transmit the saving power of Jesus’ mission to so many young people?

Dear friends, Jesus shares the fate of every man and woman, he faces death, physical death, but also all the other forms of death, such as despair, hatred, violence, lack of meaning, injustice, indifference. Through his overcoming of death, Jesus reveals to us the meaning of life. This is his mission: to give life and give it abundantly. And we—lay people, religious, and priests—are all called to participate in this mission with all that we are and all that we have.

*Sr. M. Teresina Marra, SSM
General Superior*

Biblical Reflection

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). How did these words echo in the ears of those who were listening to Jesus and in ours?

Our Spiritual Heritage

Without fear and with a deep trust Mother Frances cared for others, especially the poor. Genuine love for others needs a source of nourishment.

Experiences

How do we describe the mission of Jesus to the youth of today? How can we learn to recognize what Jesus is asking us to do to bring fuller life to others?

The Mission of Jesus



“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”

(John 10:10)

Biblical Reflection

Who knows how these words echoed in the ears of those who were listening to Jesus? Someone may have thought: “what does this man want? I already have my life and my security, what more does He think He can offer me?...”. Perhaps others felt touched by these words and went back home wondering what this abundance of life could be.



But we can also presume that among those listeners there were many men and women who witnessed the miracles of Jesus, or at least they may have heard something about them. Possibly, some of them were part of the great crowd that was fed with the few loaves and fishes. Still others may have met the paralytic man or the lepers rejoicing on their way after they were healed by Jesus, while some may have been present at the pool of Siloam when the Master restored sight to the blind man.

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”: surely the listeners of the Lord understood His words in the light of their personal experience of Jesus. He came to feed the hungry, to heal the sick and to cure the bedridden; Jesus came to teach and to instruct; He came to elevate the dignity of those who were dehumanized by the wounds of life, Jesus came to raise the dead as He did the son of the widow from Nain and His friend Lazarus from Bethany.

All these deeds of Jesus manifest life and life in abundance: Jesus heals, feeds, cures, teaches, meets people; in so many ways Jesus gives life and gives it in abundance. All these gestures are concrete signs that refer to the greatest deed: the love of the Father which Jesus came to bring us, “as the Father has loved me, so I too have loved you” (John 15:9). The abundance of life is the love that God gives to each of us, it is the unconditional love that God has for me.

There is an encounter of Jesus in the gospels that strikes me deeply. It is Jesus’ meeting with a rich man (Mk 10:17-21): In the encounter, the man demonstrates a sincere desire to stay with Jesus and he asks Him what he should do in order to inherit eternal life; that is nothing but life in abundance. In the middle of their dialogue—as we can read in the Gospel—“looking upon him [He] loved him”. What’s the meaning of these words? Jesus looked at this man’s depth; He looked into this man’s heart, discovered his deep need to be loved and accepted, then offered him friendship and love. Thus, I think that this is the core of *life in abundance*: to allow ourselves to be reached and touched by God’s love, particularly when we think or feel that we don’t deserve it; to allow God



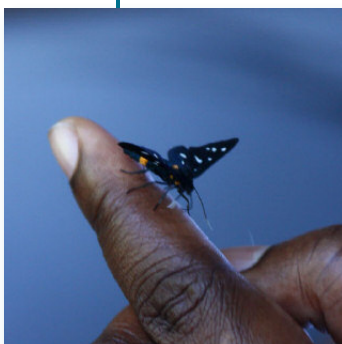


to love us even when events of our life tend to make us aware of our weaknesses, our poverty, our wounds, our failures and when we experience our limitations and selfishness.

Jesus came to bring us this love of the Father; Jesus came so that we may experience this unconditional love that is able to transform our lives; He came in order that we may experience God as a companion who walks with us in our daily lives. It is only when we experience this gratuitous love, that we can love other people in the same way. When we accept the fuller life that comes from God, then we can with Him *bring fuller life to others* because we can only give to others what we received. For this reason, we need to renew this experience of being loved by God from time to time (because an experience is always something very concrete).

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”: today we listen to Jesus’ words, as did His contemporaries. How do these words echo in us? What does it mean for me at this moment in my life to receive the abundance of life that Jesus brings to me?

Sr. Samuela Maria Rigon, SSM



There are no difficulties, trials or misunderstandings to fear, provided we remain united to God as branches to the vine, provided we do not lose our friendship with him, provided we make ever more room for him in our lives. This is especially so whenever we feel poor, weak and sinful, because God grants strength to our weakness, riches to our poverty, conversion and forgiveness to our sinfulness.

(Pope Francis, April 28, 2013)

Our Spiritual Heritage

The mission of Jesus can be summarized in many ways but for sure he lived a life of being for others, a life that wanted everyone to know: “You are unconditionally loved and cherished for who you are and not only for what you do.” The source of this mission was his personal loving relationship with his father. There he received the strength, the peace and the joy he needed as being truly human—especially when the response to his invitation, to let ourselves be loved unconditionally, was hesitant or negative.



This is the heritage our sisters learned from him from our beginnings.

Without fear and with a deep trust Mother Frances cared for others, especially the poor. She was there for those who felt left out and forgotten and gave them the dignity they deserved as God’s beloved children. She wrote to Father Jordan that she wanted her sisters to be like a lighthouse whose rays penetrate far into the surf of human misery. It was her deep desire that the reign of Christ be extended on earth. For this it is necessary that our hearts first expand in active love of others. (c. Letter to F. Jordan 81,5).

To serve others without any reference to God is pure humanism, a sign of the times, a sign that is only time-dependent because the supporting and remaining fundamental is lacking, the love of God. Genuine love for others needs a source of nourishment. Because the love we offer others is not always reciprocated, it can be a disappointment. That I can remain a loving person despite disappointment I need someone who never lets me down, someone who is faithful and loving even when I am not able to love anymore. God’s love is the source from which our love for others flows forth). Our first sisters could put themselves completely in the service of others because they were drinking from the well of God’s love. Prayer and worship are always a time when the human person can enjoy the source of love to the fullest.

The “least ones” were the focus of attention for Jesus, for St. Francis and for our sisters in the past. They went where they were needed and proclaimed the good news of God’s love to village after village, helping the sick, caring for the children, sharing with the outcasts.

If we stay alert to the signs of the times and the manner of Jesus’ mission, our future as SSM’s will be with the poor, the oppressed, the little ones, the sick, the elderly, those who have no voice—all of them waiting to hear the Word of God and to experience God’s care through us.

St. Francis at the end of his life said: “I have done my part: may Christ teach you yours.” (2 Cel 214) The poor are our best teachers.

Sr. Gudrun Maria Schellner, SSM

Experiences

In this issue we chose to reflect on The Mission of Jesus, sharing the message and life of Jesus. In my personal experience I find that many times we Catholics are reluctant to share our own story of faith, our spiritual experiences, our personal issues, concerns and challenges. We have all had moments in which we knew we were in the deep presence of God. We were touched or helped or healed by God; we were brought up short or deeply comforted by hearing or reading a scripture passage, a Christian hymn, or a homily that touched us. Frequently the encouragement or help came through a specific person; yet we were convinced it was really God who brought it about. We need to witness to others that religion is closely connected to our everyday lives and help lead them into a deeper relationship with God. Our witness can be shown through our everyday actions and our words. We don't preach nor do we judge but by our lives we witness the Gospel of unconditional love. We try to live the Beatitudes, to see and respond to the world in the context of love of God and of neighbor. I read somewhere that in order for us to be able to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel, we need to know our Faith, live our Faith and share our Faith. This can also be a way for us to bring fuller life to others.

Sr. Catherine Marie Hanegan, SSM



I have unlimited confidence in the Lord's mercy and providence

(Letter of M. Frances Streitel to F. Jordan 58,7)

In this light, we asked some of our sisters who serve in youth ministry to respond to these questions:

How do we describe the mission of Jesus to the youth of today who are disconnected from the church and faith issues? How do we share in His mission?



The urgent need of our recent times is definitely the new evangelization, the new announcement of the Gospel to those who have already received Baptism, the announcement of a living Gospel, of Jesus Christ living and active in his Church and in those who live for him, with him, and in him. This announcement is for all (Mt. 28) but today it is particularly necessary for the youth; they are our future, and, at the same time, also the “new poor”, those who are in need. Many young people are disoriented, confused, absorbed by a

technology that is constantly changing, but their hearts are always the places of their great desires, dreams and high aspirations, sacred places that are able to sense the truth. It is out of love for them that it is urgent to announce the Gospel in the streets as Jesus did; it is necessary to reach the youth in the places they frequent, look for them in the places where they are and try to appease their hunger for meaning and fullness of life. We are sent to announce Jesus to them in a direct way, through our words and actions: Jesus who passes by saves, heals, effects recovery, offers the fullness of life when he is welcomed in our histories and lives. For us this is sharing in Jesus’ desire and “concern”: he didn’t want to lose anyone of those whom the Father gave him; this is giving our brothers and sisters the possibility to rediscover and know Jesus more deeply.

*Sr. Maria Stella Carta, SSM
Italy*

*Life in the ‘Life’
Gift received that becomes a gift offered to our brothers,
service of love
Life has blossomed from love
Divine origin, gift to humanity.
Gift for serving.*

(Sr. M. Francesca Marra, SSM – Ifunde, May 4, 2008)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19).



How do I describe the mission of Jesus to the youth who are disconnected from the church and faith issues without allowing them to withdraw into themselves?

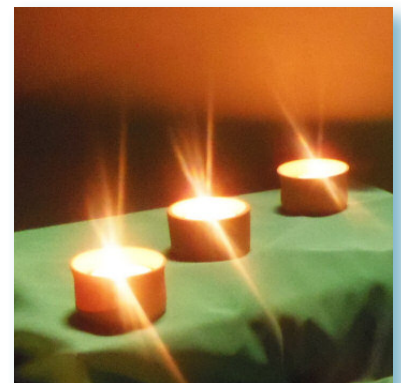
I wait, not in a passive way but actively. I try to follow the example of Jesus, that is, by simply being there with and for them. I do not do this in a spectacular way, just ordinary contact, but I do it daily and consistently.

Due to the fact that I am a sister my behavior may raise questions, curiosity and sometimes misunderstandings. All three of these things provide an opportunity to talk about Jesus, His mission, the Church and religious life. I allow myself to be questioned by the youth as both a Christian and a religious. I listen, respond to their questions, express interest in their lives, ask them what motivates them, what is important to them, and what gives them strength and joy. I also invite them to take a look at certain things that may or may not be happening in their lives. ***“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope,” (1 Pt: 3:15)***

*Sr. Susanna Mirjam Fieglmüller, SSM
Austria*

How can we learn to recognize what Jesus is asking us to do to bring fuller life to ourselves and others?

I believe that Jesus continues to speak to us through the Holy Spirit in many ways: through the Scripture, other persons and events around us. We are therefore called to stay constantly connected and alert, as Jesus was, to what is happening in us and around us. Growing in self-knowledge and attempting to bring fuller life to others also helps us to experience fullness of life.



Simply praying rosaries, novenas and expressing good intentions during a time of intercession is not enough; we are required to take bold risky actions. To bring fuller life to others requires us therefore to move out of our comfort zones in order to truly listen, in order to know what is ours to do.

I believe that we ought to be willing to dive into the deep and risk to engage the social and spiritual issues that keeps calling out for attention. Each day we should pray somewhat like this: “Lord, give us wisdom and insight to see who you need us to help today, and hearts to respond to your request! Continue to renew the desire in us each day to touch the world with your love, for if we do not, Lord, who will!”

*Sr. Gillian Angela Marie Jerome, SSM
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God's designs are also revealed through those with and among whom we live, and the events and circumstances of our daily lives. ...The Word of God, the voice of the Church, the welfare of our community, the needs of others, as well as our own needs, strengths and limitations, guide us. (Our Way of Life, 28)

This question, that is so important for every Christian, soon raised other questions for me: do I feel that Jesus is challenging me with his Word every day? How can I recognize his voice among the many that I listen to? What does fuller life mean?

Fuller life for me means to live *in* God and *of* God, to feel the joy to be accompanied by his presence, a presence that is Love and Strength, Peace and Consolation. It is a gentle but also a very strong presence that allowed and allows me to “stay” under the cross of my suffering and that of other people, a presence that gives me hope also before death. Only when I experience being immersed in an ***enlivening relationship with Him*** are my relationships with my sisters in the community or in the ministry also enlivening: sometimes one smile, one look are enough.

But, although my life has been “given” to God in service to my brothers and sisters, I realize that sometimes there is a temptation to live as if God did not exist or were not beside me as I live the commitments of my daily life.

How do I not lose touch then with that fundamental relationship with God who is fuller life?

Pope Francis' words in the General Audience of 15 May 2013 help me: “*Let us invoke the Holy Spirit every day*”. He reminded us that the Holy Spirit “*guides us into all Truth*”, i.e., “*inside a deeper communion with Christ*”, giving us “*the intelligence of God's things*”. These words are inviting me to open my heart to God's Word every day to try to find the time for personal prayer, for having a loving dialogue with God and reading all events in the light of faith.

Sr. M. Monica Baneschi, SSM
Italy



Jesus Christ taught that man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but that he is also called “to practice mercy” towards others: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

(Dives in misericordia, John Paul II, 1980)