



Rome, November 24, 2011

Dear Sisters,

In a few days Advent will begin and with it the new Liturgical Year. Advent is a season which invites us in a special way to prepare ourselves for the coming of God, a coming that is always new and surprising, a coming of which we do not know the day nor the hour. Advent will help us to free ourselves from our fears of the future which we seek to ascertain and to predict statistically. On this basis we plan and design

the future which is important because we cannot simply live for the moment. But all that does not take away the uncertainty of what the future might bring. During Advent, however, let us look toward that future which God has promised us: toward God's *Adventus*. *Adventus* means God's coming: God himself in his Son, Jesus Christ. "We do not go towards God, God comes to us." (Notker Füglistler) That is the Good News which we see during Advent in a new light, and which also challenges us to say "Yes" to God's *Adventus*.

I chose for this letter a Byzantine mosaic from the Basilica of St. Mark in Venice. This mosaic represents the Annunciation in an unusual way. We find Mary not praying in a room but drawing water from a well, a task that she had to do daily. The artist wants to express that God can enter at any moment into the life of a human being – surprising, inviting, challenging, awaiting our answer. "Say YES to the surprises that thwart your plans, void your dreams, give your days a completely other direction – yes, perhaps even your life. This does not happen accidentally. Give the heavenly Father the freedom to determine the course of your days." (Dom Helder Camara) When we accept God's *Adventus*, his coming to us, then God himself is our future. "When we allow God's love to pervade and to shape our whole life, then heaven is open. Then it is possible to shape the present so that it corresponds more and more to the Good News of Jesus Christ. Then the little things of everyday life acquire meaning, and great problems find solutions." (Pope Benedict XVI) To keep that in mind is important for our personal life, but also especially during the process of reconfiguration and transformation of our Congregation. When our planning and considerations are anchored in God's *Adventus* then

our efforts will not be in vain. “We sow faithfully, not concerned about when the harvest will be ready or by whose hands the reaping will be done.” (Article 33) Once when Martin Luther was asked what he would do if he would know with certainty that tomorrow the world would end, he answered: “Then I would still plant an apple tree.” The same is expressed in a story by Leo Tolstoi: *“An old man planted little apple trees. The people laughed and said to him: Why do you plant these trees? It will take many years before they bear fruit, and you may not live to eat a single apple from these trees. The old man answered: I will not harvest any apples, but after many years others will and they will thank me.”*

Dear Sisters, let us build the future of our Congregation trusting in God’s *Adventus*, in his presence which is already here and which, at the same time, is an always surprising coming among us. Let us not get tired of planting “apple trees” in a world in which an alarmingly high number of people do not have a future perspective! In view of the millions of people who do not have even what is most essential for life, we can only be ever more grateful for all that is at our disposal. But we also have to review again and again our own lifestyle. Advent is a time in which we are invited in a special way to do this.

I wish you, in the midst of all the bustle, a contemplative Advent, a blessed Titular Feast and a joyful and grace-filled Christmas. “The Son of God becomes man so that we have a home in God.” (St. Hildegard von Bingen) But God’s coming, his *Adventus*, occurs in stillness. In stillness we are near to God. In stillness we experience God’s presence. May this Christmas reveal anew to us the power and grace of silence.

With hearty greetings, also from all the Sisters in Villa Paolina,

Your grateful

*Sr. Adalberta*