



Bethlehem and Calvary
give hands to each other.
Meaning and blessing
of life
consists in the surrender
for others.

+ Rome, March 5, 2011

Dear Sisters,

The Christmas Season is already more than two months in the past; soon we will be beginning the Lenten Season. These two events – the birth of Jesus and his suffering and death - cannot be separated in the History of Salvation. His passion begins at the moment of his birth. This is shown in a very impressive way in the picture that I chose for this letter. It is a wooden relief which I discovered in a Marian Shrine in Bolivia. Since then it has become part of my mind and heart. Bethlehem and Calvary, life and death, give hands to each other. The two are represented as a younger and as an elderly woman – Mary as Mother and as Pietà. An old legend relates that the crib and the cross had been carpentered from the wood of the same tree. With this a very profound theological truth is revealed: The crib and cross belong inseparably together. St. Paul expresses this in an inimitable way in his hymn of Christ: “Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him...” (Phil. 2:6-9) Paul begins this hymn as follows: “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:5)

Dear Sisters, these words can accompany us in a special way during the following weeks in which we prepare ourselves for the greatest event of our faith. In our life as Christians and even more as Religious there is nothing more important than to live with Jesus Christ in order to “become more and more like him and in this way become truly human.” (Pope Benedict XVI in: Light of the World. An Interview with Peter Seewald) Therefore we cannot stay with his birth and his childhood, but we have to go with him “up to Jerusalem” (cf. Mt. 20:18), the place of his suffering and death, but also the location of his resurrection.

Have the same attitude as Jesus Christ! Our Constitutions express it likewise: “Jesus Christ is our Way, our Truth, our Life. From him we draw the light and strength we need to follow him ever more closely. His Spirit then permeates us and manifests itself in our whole being.” (Art.5) This requires that we get to know Christ always more. Our source is Holy Scripture, especially the Gospels, which are a never-exhausted source for each Christian, and therefore how much more so for us, who have dedicated ourselves through the vows to become a living memory of Jesus in our world. (Cf. Art.1) “In the living out of our consecration, we give radical witness to Gospel values and to a deeply personal relationship with Christ lived in a community animated by love and dedicated to being Eucharist for the world.” (Art.18) To give a radical witness – that is our mandate, our mission. In doing so it is not so important what we do but that our consecrated life lived in community gives such witness. (Cf. Art.32)

The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Dominum* challenges all Christians to deepen their relationship with Christ, the Word of God. (Cf. VD 77) Religious are called in a special way to be a living exegesis of God’s Word. (Cf. VD 83) “Indeed it is given to consecrated men and women to demonstrate as a form of life, the primacy of God and a passion for the Gospel and to proclaim this to the poor and the lowliest of the earth.” (Homily of Pope Benedict XVI on February 2, 2011)

Dear Sisters, with the call to follow Christ more closely is combined a radical demand. There is nothing that could be preferred to this call. Therefore I invite you to dedicate more time during this Lent for the Word of God, namely for the personal contemplative reading as well as for sharing in community. I highly recommend that you read, meditate and share once again the **Document of the General Chapter of 1995** – “Live the Word of God in Eucharistic Community – Our Way into the Future.” This Document has lost nothing of its actuality. We know how much Mother Pauline’s life from her youth on had been formed by the Word of God. This biblical spirituality is especially visible in the First Draft of the Constitutions of 1849. The sharing of the Word of God in community on a regular basis is an inestimable source of grace. With his Word, that became flesh in Jesus Christ, God wants to relate with each one of us and with each community. “The Word of God reveals to us reality, shows us the way to conversion and gives us strength and consolation – and that in this sequence.” (Richard Rohr) The challenges caused by suffering, injustice and destruction in our society are so immense that we can no longer allow ourselves to be satisfied with a good feeling or a naive piety. Let us repent and return to the mystery of the Incarnation which unites “Bethlehem and Calvary” and which wants to take shape in our concrete daily life. When we live from the Word of God, when we face the challenge of God’s Word and when we let ourselves be aroused anew by this Word then we will be true eucharistic communities who “bring Christ’s light to our various ministries.” (Cf. Art.33)

Information:

With gratitude I look back on my visit with our Sisters in Puerto Suárez, Bolivia. This country is among the poorest ones in Latin America. Two thirds of the population lives in poverty, of those, 40% in extreme poverty. 72% belong to one of the 36 indigenous tribes. Bolivia defines itself as a pluralistic national state. The life expectancy of the people is at an average of 65. The infant mortality rate is high. Many live in little huts in almost inaccessible wooded areas, without electricity, without water. The infrastructure is underdeveloped, though there are noticeable efforts of improvement. From the network of approximately 54,000 km (ca. 33,500 miles) of roads, for example, only 3,000 km (ca. 1,900 miles) are bituminized, about 17,000 km (ca. 10,000 miles), are graveled and almost 34,000 km (ca. 21,000 miles) are pure earth. In a country with heavy rainy seasons these roads cause disastrous transport connections, as Sr. Maria del Rosario and I could experience. In contrast to that, Bolivia is rich in natural resources: tin, natural gas, petroleum, and smaller resources of gold, zinc, silver, copper and lead. But the country itself does not have any profit from these. Almost half of the employed people work as "campesinos" in agriculture. They cultivate mainly potatoes, corn, rice, manioc, cotton, sugar cane, coffee, cacao and many tropical fruits. In addition they cultivate coca, from which is made the drug cocaine. Although the drug traffic is very strongly checked it is very difficult to get it under control. .

Over 90% of the Bolivians are Catholic. The beginning of Catholicism goes back to the 16th century. It developed especially under the Jesuits from the end of the 17th century until the middle of the 18th century. After the Jesuits had to leave the country in 1767, there were more than 100 years during which there were no missionaries in Bolivia. It was only in the beginning of the 20th century that the Franciscans took over the missions in that country. In many regions they met a very vivid church thanks to the dedication of the lay people. Up to today many parishes are guided and formed by catechists. However the expansion of the sects is a great danger for the church. Therefore the catechesis of the children and of the adults is of high importance.

To our Sisters is entrusted the pastoral service which they accomplish together with lay people. Very often linked to the parishes are little chapels, to which a priest can come only very seldom. Our Sisters give catechesis and lead the communion service on Sundays. During the week they give catechesis in the remote elementary schools. Often the Sisters have to travel great distances on impassable ways in order to get to these places. If the parish priest is absent they are asked to celebrate the Communion service also during the week. In Puerto Suárez they are entrusted with visits to the people in their homes, especially the sick. It is also planned that they will minister in the local prison. It was impressive for me to see how much the people – children, young people and adults – are longing for the Word of God. The focus of the religious education is to get to know the Bible. Our Sisters are very well accepted by the people, and they feel "at home".

I thank the Chilean Province that the leadership has dared this new foundation in spite of having a personnel shortage. I thank Sr. Sofia, Sr. Maria Ingrid from Chile and Sr. Celina Raquel from Uruguay-Argentina, that they felt ready to begin this new mission. May God bless their effort and may it be a contribution for the church in Bolivia so that the people remain faithful in the midst of an anti-catholic current.

Since December 2 Sisters again began an apostolic activity in Salto, Uruguay. I say “again” because our Sisters had served in the local school until 1980. The convent was dissolved then, but the school remained the property of the Uruguay-Argentinean Province (now Delegation). The administration of the school since then has been in the hands of laity. During the past 30 years the connection to the Sisters has never been interrupted. On the contrary, with the admission of Lay Associates and with a yearly commitment of two or three Sisters for one week, Mother Pauline’s charism remained alive. Some of the rooms of the former Sisters’ convent are leased to students of the University. When the woman responsible for the residence died last December two of our Sisters resumed, temporarily, the care of the students. Soon it became clear that this apostolic activity meets Mother Pauline’s charism today. Now there are two Sisters who are the contact persons for the students; but they are also active in the school. The people are grateful that the Sisters have come back. “We prayed many years for this,” they told me.

From March 30 to April 16 I will be in the German Province to participate in the Superiors conference, the Assembly and to make retreat.

Dear Sisters, let us go with the Word of God through the coming weeks, this Word that always is a call and a challenge. I want to summarize my reflection with a word of Karl Rahner: “I do not only have a call and a mission, I am a call of God, I am a unique word of God, I am a mission of God in this world.”

In gratitude united with you,

your

Sr. Adalberto