



That very same hour
Anna arrived
and gave thanks to God
and spoke about the child to all,
who were awaiting the redemption.

(Luke 2:38)

+ Rome, January 17, 2011

Dear Sisters,

The Christmas Season has passed; liturgically Ordinary Time has begun. Yet on February 2, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the mystery of Christmas shines forth once again. Since 1997 we also celebrate the World Day of Consecrated Life on this day, because the consecration of the Son of God – symbolized in his presentation in the Temple – is a model for all who have dedicated their lives totally to the Lord. It was the wish of Pope John Paul II to thank God on this day in a special way for the gift of consecrated life and to foster its recognition and appreciation among the faithful.

The Gospel of the Feast is focused mainly on Simeon. The prophetess Anna remains often in the background or is even ignored totally, especially when only the short form of the Gospel is proclaimed. But it is just she who has so much to teach us religious. The three verses of the Gospel according to Luke give us a profound insight into this extraordinary woman. Already her name sheds light on her character: Anna – grace. Not without reason Luke also mentions that she is the daughter of Phanuel – face of God. For the people in the Old and New Testament the name always meant the whole person. Anna is a woman, exceptionally gifted by God's grace, who in her old age experiences the encounter of her life and contemplates God's face in the child Jesus.

Anna lost her husband when she was still young. Widowhood was generally combined with poverty. But she does not quarrel with God; rather she dedicates her whole future life to him. She spends many hours of the day and night in the Temple and serves God with fasting and prayer. This intense mystic relationship with God over many years had made her perceptive, a prophetess. She had listened perseveringly to the Word of God and studied the Scripture. In this way she attained the insight that at some time the Messiah, the Savior of Israel, would come. Her image of the Messiah is not fixed on a political liberator as it was for many of her contemporaries. Therefore she was able to recognize the Messiah in the child that was brought into the Temple. She waited many years for this moment. And then the unprecedented happens. This woman does something that was and is still strongly forbidden for Jewish women: She speaks up. She overrides all regulations, praises God and speaks

about the future of the child to all who await redemption. She cannot remain in silence. Thus Anna becomes the first one to proclaim the Good News, long before Mary Magdalene. The image that I chose for this letter shows Anna who holds the child gently and tenderly in her hands. Her face is shining and becomes, even without words, an impressive testimony of faith. It is as if Anna has become a light herself by the encounter with the One who later will say about himself: "I am the Light of the world." (Jn. 8,12)

The prophetess Anna can be a model for us and, as such can help us to fulfill our mystical prophetic mission. "The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he/she will not exist at all," said Karl Rahner already many years ago. He wanted to say that in the future our faith can only be kept alive by the testimony of people who have a deep experience of God. Mysticism and prophecy belong inseparably together. Mother Pauline summarizes this reality with the simple words: "My hands at work; my heart with God." Mysticism is only life-giving when it flows into prophetic service. Vice versa, we cannot speak prophetically when our relationship with God is not a mystical one. It is our mission to receive, like Anna, "the enlightenment that comes from God [mystical aspect] and to carry the Christ Light by our love [prophetic aspect]." (Document of the General Chapter 2007) That requires a contemplative awareness "which perceives all with the eyes of God and leads us from God to the world and from the world to God." (Cf. Article 12 of our Constitutions)

In an audience on November 26, 2010 for representatives of men's (USG) and women's (UISG) Congregations Pope Benedict XVI pointed to this, our mission. Among other things he said: "May you always be enthusiastic seekers and witnesses of God! The profound renewal of the consecrated life starts from the centrality of the word of God, and more practically, from the Gospel, the supreme rule for all of you... Contemporary society stands in need of this, and the Church expects this of you: to be a living Gospel." In a special way the Pope underlined community life. "The witness of your consecration passes through it. Fraternal life is one of the main aspects that young people seek when they approach your life; it is an important prophetic element that you offer in a strongly individualistic society. There is a need for serious and constant discernment to listen to what the Spirit says to the communities. Without discernment, accompanied by prayer and reflection, the consecrated life runs the risk of adapting to the criteria of this world: individualism, consumerism, materialism... I encourage you to walk in faith and hope. I ask of you a renewed commitment to the pastoral care of vocations and to initial and continuing formation."

May the Holy Spirit arouse us so that only the essential of religious life will remain, that is what counts: the mystical and prophetic aspects of our way of life because the future of Religious life is in its mystical and prophetic force. (Cf. Declaration of the Plenary Assembly of the UISG, May 2010)

Information:

- To all of you a hearty THANK YOU – also in the name of the Sisters of the Generalate – for all the congratulations for Christmas and the New Year. May it be a year of blessing for all people! The seed of love, justice and peace, which the Son of God had brought into the world, is entrusted to us. May it grow in us and become fruitful for all who are entrusted to us!
- From January 18-25 we celebrate the annual week of prayer for Christian unity. The theme for this year is: “Believe, celebrate and pray together.” (Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.”) The unity of Christians begins in our own heart, in our own communities. Pope Benedict XVI said: “The commitment to unity among Christians is not the work of a few only, nor is it an incidental undertaking for the life of the Church. Each one of us is called to make his or her contribution towards the completion of those steps that lead to full communion among the disciples of Christ, without ever forgetting that this unity is above all a gift from God to be constantly invoked.” (Homily on January 25, 2010)
- In my last letter (November 30, 2010) I had informed you about the re-nomination of Sr. Joan Daniel Healy as Provincial Superior of the N.A. Eastern Province. Today I can share with you the names of her councilors: first assistant: Sr. Mary Joseph Schultz, second assistant: Sr. Mary Mark Smith, and third assistant: Sr. Mary Irene Sorber. I am very grateful that these three Sisters are ready to support Sr. Joan Daniel with all their gifts of mind and heart in her leadership service. The term of office begins on August 21. – To the outgoing Sisters - Sr. Joseph Spring, Sr. Maria Assumpta Shurer, Sr. Josita Marks and Sr. Francis Tan – I express my deep gratitude for their selfless service during the past five years and I wish them God’s blessing for their future.
- I ask for your accompanying prayers for the coming travels which will soon begin. On January 20 Sr. DeSales and I travel to Chile (Sr. María del Rosario is already there), where we will participate in a meeting for the treasurers and principals of the Chilean Province. On January 28 Sr. María del Rosario and I travel to Uruguay, from there on February 2 to Buenos Aires. From February 4-12 Sr. Maria del Rosario and I will visit our new mission in Puerto Suarez, Bolivia. On February 13 Sr. DeSales and I travel back from Buenos Aires to Rome where we will arrive on February 14. Sr. Maria del Rosario will return later to Rome, because she will then make her home visit.

With hearty greetings from the Sisters of the Generalate community,

I am your grateful

Sr. Adalberto