

+ Paderborn , August 8, 2006

Dear Sisters,



This letter will reach you from Paderborn where I am staying until August 15, after closing the meeting for the younger sisters. In a few days we will celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven and on the 21st the 157<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our Congregation. These two feasts are closely linked. At least it was important enough for Mother Pauline to mention explicitly in her autobiography that the day of her investing fell during the octave of the Feast of the Assumption of Mary. Her own life was – as that of Mary’s – not free from thorny ways. But she entrusted herself and the Congregation, time and again, to Mary, as we know from some of her notes. ”I will allow myself to be guided by her [Mary],“ she wrote in her Retreat in 1848. Characteristics of Mary are also recognized in Mother Pauline, especially her basic attitudes of FIAT and MAGNIFICAT.

I found the original image of the above picture in the Romanesque Church, St. Peter’s in Augsburg. I would like to meditate with you upon this picture today. The name of the painter is not known; the image goes back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is called “Maria Undoing Knots.” It is an unusual portrayal of Our Lady. Mary is standing between heaven and earth, turned towards the observer but not looking at him/her. She is rather absorbed in undoing the knots of a white ribbon that an angel is giving her. There is a contrast between the upper and lower part of the image. In the upper part we see Mary surrounded by heavenly glory. The Holy Spirit is, so to speak, immersing her into the fullness of divine light. The lower part is shrouded in semi-darkness, we can recognize only a few bright spots. Mary strikes at the head of the serpent, symbol of sin and death. With its slithering movement, the serpent is similar to the knots in the white ribbon. Mary takes an intermediary position between heaven and earth that is impressively indicated by the white ribbon. On the one side of the ribbon we see a snarl of knots, on the other side it glides down smoothly. Mary takes the knotted ribbon – symbol of our “ribbon” of life – and begins to undo the knots – slowly, firmly, with concentration, knowing deeply in her heart that she also can do it only in God’s light. The other angel takes the smooth ribbon that is freed from the knots and is passing it on to the earth where we see two persons, the Archangel Raphael and Tobias, who are taking their path upwards. The picture radiates peace and hope and invites us not to remain an observer but to enter into the liberating action of Mary.

Dear Sisters, we all know the use of ordinary knots. As a memory aid we sometimes tie a knot in our handkerchief that we can undo very easily. Displeasing and annoying are the unintended knots: in the shoelace, the ball of wool, the thread, which appear just when we are already in a hurry. Instead of remaining calm we tug impatiently at the knots with the consequence that they become tighter or the shoelace or the thread breaks totally.

But these knots are still harmless compared with the “knots” in our “ribbon” of life: knots in ourselves; knots in our relationships; knots caused by destroyed plans of life or by fear in front of a future which cannot be planned and yet which is inevitably approaching us; knots of aging and sickness. No human life is without knots, conflicts, pain, entanglement or apparently hopeless situations. Time and again we are in danger of getting involved in the whirlpool of self-interests or interests of others. “All knots

which give us a hard time, are in the end connected with the one big knot: death, caused by the desire of the human being to be like God. Only Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, can liberate us from this snare.” (Bishop Algermissen) The message of the painting is to show that Mary took part in undoing the knots of the human family. Therefore many seek refuge in Mary also in their personal knots of life. Mary, who herself suffered through many knots of life, will not send us away. But we may not forget that the undoing of the knots does not happen automatically; it demands our collaboration, at least that we give her in humility and confidence our entangled “ribbon” of life. Then Mary will point out the very essential aspect of our collaboration: “Do whatever HE tells you.” Mary knows that she herself is only an instrument for the divine action, and she does not want to be more. The only one who can really undo the knots is Jesus Christ, by his death and resurrection. Jesus Christ alone can undo the knots, he alone can redeem us. Full of confidence we may go to Mary who is “full of grace,” she is the mediator of divine grace. “Men and women of every time and place have recourse to her motherly kindness and her virginal purity and grace, in all their needs and aspirations, their joys and sorrows, their moments of loneliness and their common endeavors. They constantly experience the gift of her goodness and the unfailing love which she pours out from the depths of her heart. The testimonials of gratitude, offered to her from every continent and culture, are a recognition of that pure love which is not self-seeking but simply benevolent. At the same time, the devotion of the faithful shows an infallible intuition of how such love is possible: it becomes so, as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him—a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God's love to become in their turn a fountain.” (DEUS CARITAS EST # 42)

Let us look a moment to Mother Pauline. She, too, was confronted in her life with many knots which she always undid with that confidence in God’s help that is so characteristic of her. Today, the Lord asks the same of us, dear Sisters. Also we are called to undo knots, in ourselves, in our communities, in the fulfillment of our mission that is entrusted to us today. The preparations for the Provincial Chapters which are in progress in each Province can help us to look with calmness at our “knots” which block the development of life. From each of us is asked a total commitment. But God’s words of encouragement are also said to us: “I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope.” (Jer 29:11).

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### Information:

On June 28 I received information from our postulator that Mother Pauline’s Canonization Process had been officially opened in Rome. The Diocesan process in the Diocese of Detroit had closed earlier than expected. I am very grateful that Sister Mary Clement Eiden and Sister Pauline Schafer – who was also one of the witnesses – had been present for the concluding ceremony. Both were impressed by the care with which the documents for Rome had been sealed and then given to one member of the Tribunal who brought them personally to Rome to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on June 9. No one of us had expected such a fast conclusion of the procedure in Detroit and such a fast beginning of the process in Rome. That alone gives us reason enough to thank God. Let us continue to pray for all who are directly involved in the process of Canonization! But mainly, dear Sisters, let us put on, so to say, Mother Pauline’s charism! Let us support one another on this journey! The Canonization of Mother Pauline for which many are longing is without doubt a great gift. But at the same time we are challenged to bring the light, which Mother Pauline brought to the “blind” (concretely and figuratively) of her time, to all those who live today on the “dark side” of life. The preparations for the Provincial Chapters and for the General Chapter and the Chapters themselves can help us.

I wish all of us blessed Feastdays. In gratitude and united with you, greeting you also in the name of my assistants, your

*Sr. Adalberta*