



+ Wilmette, November 4, 2005

Dear Sisters,

Today we celebrate the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Profession of Mother Pauline, her “nuptial feast” with Jesus Christ, “the only Beloved of her soul,” as she writes in her Autobiography. It was a day of “supreme happiness,” and yet, it was only a reflection of the “eternal bridal day.” In remembering November 4, 1850, she writes some years later: “O endless bliss, when one day the bells, whose joyful, festive peal called me to this

blessed death – to this nuptial feast – will proclaim my real day of death, my departure from this world, my entrance into heavenly glory – to the most intimate union with Christ.” On the day of her investing she had prayed similarly: “Help me that, when the second bridal day – my day of death dawns – I may go forth to meet you with the same blissful, heavenly joy; that then, with burning candle in hand, with burning light, I may draw near to you.” (Autobiography)

In 1834 the young Pauline had experienced how consciously her mother faced the hour of death. Since then she felt “an intense desire for heaven,” she writes in her Autobiography. Considering her own death became an essential part of her spiritual journey. In her letters and especially in her retreat notes we find time and time again reflections on death, thoughts which are usually combined with expressions of great longing and joy to be forever united with Jesus Christ and all her loved ones. (cf. Retreat February 1855) For Mother Pauline death was not like an impenetrable wall which separates the living from the dead, but more like a wall that allows us to look over to the other side, there where our deceased rest. This fact Mother Pauline wanted to make visible in a symbolic way when she had built the wall of the cemetery at the Motherhouse in Paderborn. (see photo)

We are in the month of November, the month that is dedicated in a special way to our deceased. This year we had to confront death quite often. The death of Pope John Paul II was significant for the entire Church. Many Sisters mourned and still mourn the death of close relatives. In our Congregation we again had a high number of deceased Sisters. Does all that have a message for us here and now?

We live with death, although our society would like to push it aside into anonymity. We cannot ignore the fact that death is part of life; on the contrary, to “think of our death serves life.” (Fr. Anselm Grün) The question is: What would be different in my/our life if we had only a short lifespan at our disposal, maybe only the present day? In the book, “Tuesdays with Morrie” by Mitch Albom, there is one chapter in which Morrie and Mitch talk about dying and death. “Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live,” says the terminally ill Morrie. “That way you can actually be more involved in your life while you’re living.” Confronting ourselves more with our own death would be an expression of our wholehearted acceptance of the gift of life in its fullness.

Pope John Paul II was a great teacher of the Christian view of death and resurrection. As a child and young man he was already confronted with death. He himself was near death at the beginning of his pontificate. During the last years of his life, especially the last months before he died, he had been more and more consciously heading toward his final encounter with God. “To reconcile oneself with death means to accept life in its fullness,” he preached in one of his homilies. “Death is a negative reality, against which nature rebels,” he said another time. “But Christ made death a sign of his total surrender.

When we accept death, we conquer death.” Pope John Paul II confronted his own death without fear. Some of his last words, as we know, had been: “I am happy. Be also happy.”

Dear Sisters, let us live with the reality of death; then death will become LIFE for us! “It is the task of Christian education,” Pope Benedict XVI said in one interview, “to give people the confidence that through death we go towards true life. The hereafter gives me a standard to live by and gives seriousness and meaning to life here on earth, not only for the present moment, but in such a way that life at the end will have been worthwhile – not only for myself, but for the whole.”

In the “Gotteslob” the Hymnal of the German Dioceses, there is a hymn that in its simplicity captures this “whole.” It has accompanied me for many years:

*Lord of my **life**,*  
*Help me that I may not live in vain here on earth.*  
*Lord of my **days**,*  
*Help me that I will not become unbearable for my neighbor.*  
*Lord of my **hours**,*  
*Help me that I will not be closed in on myself*  
*Help me, Lord of my **soul**,*  
*that I will not be absent at those places where I am needed.*

“That I will not be absent at those places where I am needed.” Dear Sisters, let us ask God to give us this grace! It may mean that we, now and then, have to accept the “little deaths” of letting go – letting go of places, activities, people that are dear to our hearts – in order to follow God’s call to go to or to remain at “those places where we are needed.” That is not easy, but just in that surrender is the seed for new life.

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Some information:

- Sister M. Judith and I are still in the midst of the visitation in our N.A. Western Province. The fields of ministry of the Sisters are widespread and often in areas where there are very few priests. Time and time again I am impressed by the almost youthful spirit with which the Sisters carry on their pastoral service, although 80 and more years of age.
- A special grace for us was the visit with our Sisters from New Orleans. By the media we all have pursued the unimaginable devastation of the hurricane Katrina. During the visitation Sister M. Judith and I could get a little insight of the extent of the damage. What we saw is indescribable. Many inhabitants lost everything, so also our Sisters. It is true, some can be replaced, but not the very personal items, as for example family photos, letters, personal notes and similar items. In spite of all our Sisters radiate a marvelous inner freedom and joy, an attitude which gives them strength to remain at the side of hopeless and desperate people. Let us be at the side of our Sisters and of all whom they help! They need our prayers. And they are grateful for every material help that we can give to them.
- The jubilarians of this year asked me to thank all of you for all the signs of sisterly love, especially for the prayers and Holy Masses which you had given them on the occasion of their jubilee.
- I want to remind you on the change of the Provincial Leadership in the Gramn Province on November 7. Let us accompany this important event with our prayers, dear Sisters!
- Personally I thank you for all your accompanying prayers during my long absence from Rome. Again and again we experienced God's protection.

The Advent season will soon be beginning. I wish you already today God's blessing and a joyful expectation of his coming which we already experience now as his presence in our life.

In gratitude, your

*Sr. Adalberta*