

+ Rome, December 14, 2007



Dear Sisters,

The Christmas scene that I have chosen for this letter was painted by Sieger Köder. At first glance it seems to be a traditional Christmas picture. There is a stable, shepherds, a manger. Outside it is night as the stars can be seen. But what is extraordinary is that there is no child in the manger but a book in which we can read the Christmas message from the Gospel of St. John: “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The Word became a human being, one of us in order to show us who God is. This Good News we only know from the Scripture. So it is not too absurd to place the Gospel in the manger.

I chose this picture because in this letter – in continuity with our considerations about eucharistic life-style – I want to reflect about the Word of God which is the essential part of the Liturgy of the Word. The daily encounter with the Word of God, be it in the Eucharist, in our meditation or

Scripture reading or in Bible sharing it is inseparably connected with our eucharistic life-style. The Document the General Chapter of 1995 expresses this very clearly: “Live the Word of God in Eucharistic Community – Our Way to the Future.” In the introductory paragraph we read: “We come together at the table of the Word to hear, to be challenged, to be changed.” The painter Sieger Köder rightly puts the Word of God in the center of the picture, the Word that time and again through us assumes a “face” and in us wants to become “flesh.”

When we look closely we see that the text ends with the words: “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us and we.” The sentence discontinues here. Is that only because the painter did not have enough space? Surely not, because that he could have measured before. “And we” – the text ends with these words, but in essence our “text” of life begins with these words. This becomes unmistakably clear when we rephrase the unfinished sentence as a question: And we? Then there are no longer the shepherds who contemplate the Word of God and who then give witness of all they have seen. And we? Here we are called personally. And we? What do we do with the Word of God that became flesh and that wants to become incarnate in us anew time and again? Do we listen to it so that it becomes a personal message that challenges us? Does the Word of God awaken us – with all its consequences? Or do we let the Word of God pass by – as so many other words which daily inundate us? “The Gospel terrifies me,” says St. Augustine, “producing that healthy fear which prevents us from living for ourselves alone and compels us to pass on the hope we hold in common.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, 29)

There is still something else characteristic of this picture from Sieger Köder: At the Word of God are gathered young and old, a beautiful image of each Christian community. Do we gather together at the Word of God? Do we help one another to be “at home” in the Word of God? This is indispensable when we want to be a living memory of Christ’s life and action. Erich Zenger, a well-known Bible scholar, once said: “With the Bible it is like with the bread. We can discuss about the bread, we can analyse it and dissolve it into its ingredients; but only to those who eat the bread does it give strength for their life.” Let us therefore “eat” the Word of God – personally and in community! “As women of the Word, we hope to create a community life which is rooted deeply in prayer, the sharing of Scripture and Eucharist. We came to envision covenant communities ..., which serve the mission of today’s

Church with a new joy, a new energy and enthusiasm – the fruit of intimacy with Christ. (Document of the General Chapter 1995)

From Mary we know that she “kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” (Cf. Lk 2:19). She was totally “at home” in the Word of God. “Mary lived on the Word of God, she was imbued with the Word of God. And the fact that she was immersed in the Word of God and was totally familiar with the Word also endowed her later with the inner enlightenment of wisdom. Whoever thinks with God thinks well, and whoever speaks to God speaks well. They have valid criteria to judge all the things of the world. They become prudent, wise, and at the same time good; they also become strong and courageous with the strength of God, who resists evil and fosters good in the world.” (Pope Benedict XVI)

Many years ago I read a sentence which I never forgot: “I will sit down and read in the Bible until I am blind and forget who I have been; I will read until I become Christ-like.” Mother Pauline says precisely the same thing: “Study Jesus!” (Retreat 1847)

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#### Information:

- With great joy I can communicate to you that the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life have approved our revised Constitutions with the date of December 8, 2007; in fact, they were accepted exactly as they had been approved by the General Chapter. In his letter to me that accompanied the approval of the Constitutions, the Secretary, Archbishop Gardin, wrote: “The revised text is the fruit of much prayer and study and work, involving all of the Sisters. As you point out, these efforts have enabled three themes to emerge as characteristic of the Congregation: a contemplative attitude, your Eucharistic lifestyle and frequent reference to Blessed Pauline, your Foundress. May this revised text serve as inspiration and strength for all of the Sisters in realizing these characteristics in their daily life and mission.” Dear Sisters, let us thank the Lord for this great grace which has been bestowed upon us and has been entrusted to our lives as Sisters of Christian Charity! These are “our” Constitutions, dear Sisters, because all of you have contributed to the revision. In a special way I want to thank the Provincial Superiors (not forgetting Sr. Fidelia Schnettler, Sr. Mary Edward Spohrer and Sr. Mary Clement Eiden), who, together with the Sisters of the Generalate, had worked intensely during the past six years on the Constitutions.
- Another great gift is the second Encyclical, *SPE SALVI*, by Pope Benedict XVI. I cannot recommend it enough to you for study and sharing. During the Angelus prayer on December 2, the Pope himself gave a summary of the most important aspects of this Encyclical. Among other things he said: “*Spe salvi facti sumus* - in hope we were saved.” (Rm 8: 24). “In this, as in other passages of the New Testament, the word ‘hope’ is strictly connected with the word ‘faith’. It is a gift that changes the life of the one who receives it. In what does this hope consist, so great and so ‘trustworthy’, to make us say that *in it* we have ‘salvation’? In essence it consists in the knowledge of God, in the discovery of the heart of the good and merciful Father. Jesus, with his death on the Cross and his Resurrection, has revealed his Face to us, the face of a God so great in love as to communicate to us an uncrushable hope that not even death can break, because the life of the one who entrusts himself to this Father opens itself to the prospect of eternal beatitude. We hope in Christ, we await him! With Mary, his Mother, the Church goes to meet her Spouse: she does so with works of charity, because hope, like faith, is demonstrated in love.” (Pope Benedict XVI, December 2, 2007)

Dear Sisters, when we in a few days celebrate Christmas then the Advent of our life does not end. “Human life is a journey,” says Pope Benedict XVI in his Encyclical. For us Christians it is a journey with the One who has said: “I am the Way.” and: “I am with you always.” Let us begin the year 2008 with this confidence!

With hearty Christmas greetings, also from the Sisters of the Generalate community in Villa Paolina,  
your grateful

*Sr. Adalberto*