



“Over the centuries, the Church has always looked to Mary as the *summa contemplatrix*. From the annunciation to the resurrection, through the pilgrimage of faith that reached its climax at the foot of the cross, Mary persevered in *contemplation of the mystery dwelling within her*. In Mary, we glimpse the mystical journey of the consecrated person, grounded in a humble wisdom that savors the mystery of the ultimate fulfillment. Following Mary’s example, the contemplative is a person centered in God and for whom God is the *unum necessarium...*”

~ Vultum Dei Quaerere n. 10

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Circular Letter #13
Advent 2020

Dear Mothers and Sisters,

I send each of you my fervent prayers that you may experience a truly Marian and Christ-filled Advent and Christmas season. The liturgy and the spirit of Advent call us to a deeper savoring of the Word of Life, and a deeper longing for union with the Bridegroom, as we ardently cry out on behalf of the entire Church and of every human person: “Come Lord Jesus!”(cf Rev 22:20). Come into every human heart!

I am sending you the above icon which can nourish our spiritual journey not only during Advent but also throughout our entire life. No doubt you are already familiar with several variations of this icon (“Our Lady of the Sign”) whose origin is actually very ancient, thanks to the Church’s mystical intuition of the mystery of Mary and of the Church. Although this icon can be “read” and “prayed” in many ways, seeing in it Mary’s motherhood of the Divine Priest-Redeemer, as well as the Church’s union with the great High-Priest, we can also see in it an image of *our own union with the praying Christ*. ***From our contemplation of Jesus living in Mary, the Holy Spirit can quickly draw us to the contemplation of Jesus living in ourselves and this can be a great help in sustaining our spirit of recollection during the day.***

Like Mary, we too are Christ-bearers* by reason of sanctifying grace and the divine indwelling first received in baptism and constantly deepened through a sacramental life. ***Indeed, the life we live now is not our own—Christ is living in us (cf Gal 2:19-20). ***Notice that in this icon Christ is depicted as a priest whose hands are lifted in prayer.*** Truly, the great High Priest who abides within us ***“lives forever to make intercession”*** (cf Hebrews 7:25). ***Notice too that the praying hands of Mary (an image of ourselves) are depicted as an extension of Christ’s prayer.*****

This is very meaningful for us as contemplative Nuns who dwell in spirit in the very heart of the Church and the world in these troubled and often violent times. In this regard, Vultum Dei Quaerere #17 gives us something we should ponder often: “In the book of Exodus, we read that Moses decided the fate of his people by prayer; he ensured victory over the enemy as long as he kept his arms raised to ask for the Lord’s help....***This is a most eloquent image of the power and efficacy of your own prayer on behalf of all humanity and the Church....Now, as then, we can conclude that the fate of humanity***

is decided by the prayerful hearts and uplifted hands of contemplative women.”

Many books could be written on the deep layers of meaning in this magnificent icon, but I have shared these few thoughts for you to ponder, so that together, all of the members of our Monastic Congregation may be graced with ***a new realization of the divine indwelling, and particularly, of Christ dwelling and praying within us***, so that ***our entire life becomes an Advent of Christ-bearing for the world, until we “are filled with all the fullness of God”*** (Eph 3:19). The more we remain in Christ and He remains in us, the more efficacious is the part we play in deciding the fate of humanity.

Each of us can say that: *this profound mystery continues ceaselessly within me day and night, for the Divine High Priest who dwells within me is **always contemplating and adoring the Father, and offering prayers and supplications for the salvation of the world***, as #2 Part II of our Constitutions tells us. *Therefore, when I am at Mass and the Divine Office, Christ is praying in me and inviting me into His prayer. When I cook, clean, recreate, work in the garden, care for the building maintenance, do the monastery banking, purchasing, and other administration work, and even when I sleep, the prayer of the great High Priest never ceases within me and I am always able to offer His prayer to the Father.*

*When I suffer, and particularly when the suffering makes it nearly impossible to utter a word of prayer, it is then that in weakness of mind and body yet firmly believing in the power and efficacy of Christ’s suffering prayer, I in my poverty can simply offer Christ’s prayer to the Father as my own prayer. And finally I also want to point out that in complex and confusing situations where the Holy Will of God is not clear and I don’t know what to pray for, yes then too I can trustingly **offer to the Father the prayer His Beloved Son is praying within me. (My Father, behold Your Son! Behold His prayer which I offer You as my own prayer!)** In this way I can be sure to be praying for the perfect fulfillment of the Father’s will even though it is unclear to me.*

There is much to ponder and put into practice in #2 Part II of our Constitutions. Here is the passage and I am quoting from the **English** translation: ***“They continue the contemplative aspect of the mission of Jesus who Himself contemplates and adores the Father, and offers prayers and supplications for the salvation of the world.”*** Jesus living in us, Jesus praying in us—this is the source of the efficacy of the prayers and supplications we offer, as well as our own contemplation and adoration.

So let us invoke the Holy Spirit through the powerful intercession of Our Lady of Advent, that all of us may grow to an ever greater awareness of the treasure we bear in our poor earthen vessels. Let us truly be Christ-bearers in whom Jesus lives and prays, works and suffers.

I conclude this part of my circular letter with another promise of my heartfelt prayers for each and every one of you, and on the part of the General Council I thank you so much for the prayers, sacrifices and cooperation you continually offer us. You are a source of joy, even when together we must struggle to drink the cup the Father offers us. In the end, what is important for eternity and for the glory of God is that “we live the truth in love and grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ—and from whom the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, ***brings about the body’s growth and builds itself up in love***” (Ephesians 4:15-16). In being authentic contemplatives who live and pray in Christ, may we truly build up our Monastic Congregation in love! Have a richly graced Advent!

Sent to you with my love and prayers in Jesus and Mary,

Mother Catherine Marie CF