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Chapter – 10 March 2019

Very dear Sisters,



As the feast of Saint Marie Eugenie our Foundress approaches, it gives me immense joy to write this message to all of you during this season of Lent. It is a special time in the liturgical calendar for reflection, conversion, healing and reconciliation. We are preparing ourselves for the celebration of new life at Easter with a renewed heart and mind. Let us make it a period of grace to grow in inner freedom and joy, and to become truly daughters of Saint Marie Eugenie.

As expressed in the General Chapter 2018 document, we want to make **discernment** a way of life. Discernment is a biblical concept which Saint Ignatius Loyola has developed into a prayerful listening to God's word (an expression of God's will) and making ourselves free from within to enable a constant YES to God. It is a spiritual journey with God which helps us recognize the work of the Spirit within us, in our communities, in the Church and in the world, and to discern the project of God for humanity. Saint Marie Eugenie presents "conformity to the will of God" as one of the characteristics of the Religious of the Assumption. By way of returning to our sources, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect with you the thoughts of Marie Eugenie on "**conformity to the will of God.**" I shall then conclude with my own reflections on its implications for us today.

Saint Marie Eugenie and Conformity to the Will of God

In her Chapter dated **14th April 1878**, Marie Eugenie talks about "conformity and abandonment to the will of God" as a manifestation of our "perfect love of Jesus Christ". In the Chapter, she makes a close link between humility, love and conformity to the will of God. In what follows, I shall highlight her thoughts on conformity to the will of God which in a way brings together the three focus areas of our GC 2018 – discernment, communion and peripheries.

After talking about humility, she writes: "Another virtue which should grow in us though the love of Jesus Christ is **conformity to the will of God**. It is a fundamental virtue with the particular characteristic that it produces **peace, freedom and detachment**. It is one of the virtues that should radiate from a Religious of the assumption."

Marie Eugenie continues in the same Chapter, "Of all the characteristics of **holiness**, the one which I desire the most for you is that you be so rooted in the will of God, that always and in all things, you love, you seek, and you bless this will. This becomes abandonment into the hand of God, and it is the surest, the most complete and the most perfect union that can be established with God and His creature. ... When a person is entirely established in the will of God, she desires nothing more. God possesses her and she possesses God."

Conformity to the Will of God and Its Implications

We live in a world wherein hate propaganda, violence, populist nationalism, displacement and corruption lead many innocent people to unjustifiable **suffering**. The conclusions of the recent Vatican Summit on protection of minors left us with mixed feelings of disappointments as well as rays of hope. But one thing is obvious – there is much suffering in the Church which could have been avoided if we had been alert and had the courage to address these issues with honesty and transparency. From another angle, the more I listen to the Sisters, I feel that sometimes there is unnecessary personal suffering, since we lack healthy inter-personal relationships in our communities. This deprives us of being the best version of ourselves and giving our best for God’s mission. In this context, what does it mean to be in conformity to the will of God?

What is **God’s will**? How do we discern it in our day-to-day life? It seems to me that what makes us free, enhances life, fosters **communion**, builds up communities, and what is in favour of the fragile and **peripheries**, and what protects our common home will always be in conformity to God’s will. My experiences have taught me that conformity to God’s will liberates me and gives me **true Joy and peace**. Sometimes we equate **true joy** with personal achievement or successful mission. At other times we equate joy with good health or personal comforts. These things do give us momentary happiness but they will never satisfy the deep longings of our soul. Marie Eugenie taught us that we can experience **true freedom**, inner peace and lasting joy when we yield to God’s plan, making our choices in conformity to God’s will. We gradually develop this **inner freedom** when we create space within for others and God. Sometimes, we are so preoccupied with ourselves (our well-being, health, comfort, happiness, mission, achievements) that there is place neither for others nor for God. Our inner freedom is not a static reality; it is dynamic and constantly evolving. We have to work on it every day to make it an experience of our daily life. With this inner freedom and trust in the guidance of the Spirit, we can **detach** ourselves **joyfully** from our personal choices, and enter into a process of **discernment** in line with the choices of God.

Sisters, let us drink deeply from our rich heritage by meditating or praying with this text in silence, in the presence of God.¹ As we know, life is full of imperfect things and imperfect people, and our communities are NOT different. Let us accept imperfections (our own and those of others), respect differences, deepen relationships, and celebrate life. I personally believe that the authenticity of our God-experience and spirituality is revealed by the way we handle challenges, opposition and difficulties. This reveals the seeds of **holiness** that we have as human beings created in God’s image and likeness. We can change our lives and that of our communities by changing our attitude from passive negativity to creative engagement.

As we celebrate the feast of Saint Marie Eugenie, my dream for all of us is that we have a restless discomfort about our superficialities and passive indifferences, so that we may dare to question ourselves and turn to God with **humility**, trust and openness to **personal conversion**. Let us count our daily blessings and focus on the goodness and generosity of others. Without a sense of caring and belonging, there can be no sense of community. Let doing good for others become a way of life, a source of joy. Let us give up resentment and


¹ Kindly read the whole *Chapter of Saint Marie Eugenie dated 14th April 1878* (also *Rule of Life, No. 32*).

become more forgiving. Let us give up pettiness and become more noble Sisters in the community. May God bless us with compassionate hearts towards those who suffer from pain, loneliness, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, especially the migrants and those on margins, so that we may reach out in solidarity to comfort them.

This year, among other things, shall we celebrate the feast by having a **SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION** with Marie Eugenie? How can we “possess God” and “be possessed by God”? How can we become free from within? How can we open ourselves to personal conversion and become joyful Sisters? How can we make discernment a way of life and become good news for our community? How can we make our choices in conformity to God’s will, always in favour of the poor and suffering?

During this **LENT**, let us make time to listen inwardly and expand our awareness of God’s interventions in our lives. Let us fast from attitudes that isolate people, words that hurt others, actions that divide communities and decisions that destroy our common home. In the words of Pope Francis, “Let us not allow this season of grace to pass in vain! Let us ask God to help us set out on a path of true conversion. Let us leave behind our selfishness and self-absorption, and turn to Jesus’ Pasch. Let us stand beside our brothers and sisters in need, sharing our spiritual and material goods with them. In this way, by concretely welcoming Christ’s victory over sin and death into our lives, we will also radiate its transforming power to all of creation.”²

In communion with the General Council and the community of Auteuil, I wish you a Happy Feast of Saint Marie Eugenie!



Rekha M Chennattu, RA
Superior General

² *Message of the Holy Father Francis for Lent 2019, 26.02.2019*
(<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2019/02/26/190226d.html>).