

RELIGIEUSES DE L'ASSOMPTION
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10 March 2015
Feast of Saint Marie Eugenie

*"I want to say one word to you and this word is joy. Wherever consecrated people are,
there is always joy!"¹*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year we celebrate the feast of St. Marie Eugenie in the special context and grace of the Year of Consecrated Life. This circumstance leads me to speak more directly to the Religious of the Assumption, even if we are all concerned with this year. The circular letter of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CIVCSVA) and the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis have started us off so well that all we need is to follow the path with assurance, joy and enthusiasm.

In this letter, I would like to dwell on the thanksgiving and joy that are appropriate on a day like this, when we commemorate the entrance into the life of St. Mary Eugenie. Yes, it is good first of all, to praise the Lord for the one who was given to us as Mother and Foundress, the one who traced out the path with a charisma and spirituality that we share with the laity. We want to give thanks also for the relevance of her message which continues to energise us today.

Finally, we want to give thanks for our own lives, joyfully welcome our vocation anew, be radiant with it and let ourselves be converted to share the happiness of having been chosen as disciples of Christ so as to walk in the footsteps of Saint Marie Eugenie. This year is meant to be a showcase for the contemplation and better knowledge of consecrated life; it is meant for the whole Church.

1- "Let us be faithful, grateful, respond to the miracle continue it" ²

"To make something out of nothing is a miracle," said Marie Eugenie at the time of the celebration of the 45th anniversary of the foundation. She added: "Do you believe that our Lord has done this miracle for nothing?" And so she invited her sisters to gratitude, in fruitful fidelity to "continue" the miracle in their lives. Her invitation is echoed in that of Pope Francis in the year of Consecrated Life "During this year, it will be appropriate that each charismatic family remember its beginnings and its historical development, to give thanks to God who has thus offered to the Church so many gifts that make her beautiful and equipped for every good work"³.

¹ CIVCSVA, "REJOICE! A letter to consecrated men and women", *From the teachings of Pope Francis, February 2014*

²MME, 2 May 1884, "The Anniversary of the Foundation"

³ Cf. Lumen Gentium, n° 12, quoted by Pope Francis in his letter for the Year of Consecrated Life ,2015

The first grace of this year is therefore that of gratitude. God is passing; He has come and He will come again into the history of our Congregation and into our personal history. So let immense gratitude spring up from our hearts to the One who leads everything. Returning to this founding grace that gave birth to our congregation, we receive a light that will enable us to understand the work of the Spirit in our present choices.

Our personal vocation itself is part of this larger story. The memory of the call of God enables us to give thanks for our vocation; it enables us to marvel at the amazing initiative of God in our lives and awakens in us gratitude for the gratuitousness of God's call. For the life to which he invites us only makes sense as a manifestation of this *'superabundance of gratuity'* : this is the meaning of our religious life.

Yes, it is right to give thanks once again for our Congregation, but in a special way this year. It is good to take the time to reread the life of the Congregation, the history of our Province/ Region, our community, our own history and, giving thanks to God, to sing a Magnificat echoing this overwhelming Word spoken in our personal and community lives, like that of Mary: *"Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."* (Lk. 1:28)

It is right to say *"Thank you for yesterday and for tomorrow"* as gratitude is expressed in my mother tongue - and very probably in other languages. In faith and hope we indeed get the assurance that God, who gave us yesterday, will provide for today and tomorrow.

If we strive each day to discover reasons for giving thanks, we will no longer have time to complain and we will resolutely manifest that we place our trust in someone other than ourselves - in God, for whom nothing is impossible! We will re-clothe our lives in the "joyful detachment"⁴ of which Marie Eugenie speaks. For *"the joy of the soul lies above these contradictions, above these trials above these little matters which one can criticize and complain about; the joy of the soul lies in the hope that accompanies and guides love."*⁵

Happy there where we are, *"... let us not worry about anything, but in every circumstance, in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let our requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses anything you can imagine, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus ..."* (Phil. 4: 6-7)

2- "God alone gives the soul true joy, profound and lasting ..." ⁶

Pope Francis urges us to radiate the joy of being called. He had already called us to this joy in 2014, during the 51st World Day for Vocations, *"the true joy of those who are called is to believe and experience that the Lord is faithful, and that we can walk with him, be disciples and witnesses of the love of God, open our heart to great ideals, great things. »"*⁷

4 Cf. MME, 19 May 1878, *«Joyful Detachment from earthly things »*

5 MME, 5 April 1874, *« The Resurrection »*

6 MME, 30 January 1876, *«True consolation in prayer»*

7 Pope Francis, Message for the 51st day for vocations, 11 May 2014

Should we not be ceaselessly questioning ourselves about the origin of our joy: where does it come from? What is the source of that joy of which Marie Eugenie said that it is *"the happy and secret light that comes from within"*⁸ a source that should irrigate and beautify our lives? She reveals the origin of this mysterious source, *"God, God alone is my joy"*⁹ and *"joy is to belong to God, it is that God is in us and is pleased with us"*¹⁰.

Joy, well understood, is not the manifestation of inexplicable blissful exuberance, but simply the sign of the presence of God in our lives, this God who promised to be with us always, to the end of time (cf. Mt. 28:20). This joy is promised to *"those who have the courage to welcome it"* (RL No. 45). In fact, what inspires Marie Eugenie is especially Easter joy, *"a joy serious and deep, the joy of eternity,"* a *"joy of renewing us in the joy of our vocation"*¹¹. It is a joy of being more than of doing. It remains beyond and regardless of all that has necessarily an end, like our physical and intellectual strength. It can live in the heart of a painful experience because it is not related to what we are capable of doing. What weakens it is not the decrease in our strength, but rather the lack of faith and faithful commitment to live our vocation. So let us not hesitate to deploy our energies to *"keep (our) joy by interior fidelity to Jesus Christ and trust in him"*¹²

The seriousness of our joy could also come from the fact that we sometimes feel some guilt at showing it, given the complexity and suffering in our world. But what matters is that it opens in us a space for the joys and sufferings of those around us, and that our presence tells them that God loves them (cf. RV 7). Such joy, capable of traversing suffering, can only be the fruit of prayer and contemplation, which allow us to be attentive to all creation and penetrate human realities in depth. Only the hearts of the poor are capable of this.

Transformed by the inner work of gratitude – to God, others and oneself - that each of us can commit ourselves to live, then our communities, already places where it is sweet to express the joy of being sisters, will be even more so. We will cultivate the sense of celebration there, as a religious community and with others; a celebration that, far from overlooking the world's problems is necessary because of them: a celebration-feast. This festival helps us not to fall into despair before all the injustice and senseless and inexplicable suffering that undermine human dignity. It makes us lucid about reality and strong to face the consequences of evil by daring to take it on. It gives meaning to our commitment to the cause of justice and peace. For this, we must let ourselves be guided to the centre of our being, our personal and communal being, where we discover the Risen Christ, who is himself our feast¹³ and our joy.

8 MME, Letter No. 1862, 25 June 1847

9 MME, Notes intimes, N°208/01, March 1850

10 MME, 21 October 1877, « *Imitate the purity of Mary* »

11 MME, 13 April 1879, « *The holy day of Easter* »

12 MME, Notes intimes, N°156/01, 26 April 1840

13 Cf. Brother Roger, *Your feast will be without end*

3- "I cannot hold back this joy of being faithful to God ... despite myself it pours around me everywhere" ¹⁴

Our joy largely depends on fidelity to living our religious life authentically, and this fidelity is itself rooted in the reception of joy. The one and the other, our faithfulness and joy, are then a sign for those around us: when we acknowledge the joy that dwells within us, we become *"a splendid witness, an effective proclamation, companions and community for the women and men who are living history with us and seeking the Church as their father's house"* ¹⁵. And suppose that this year we were quite simply committed to witnessing better to the happiness of belonging to God?

Nobody asks this of us but He who has called us. But it is also the witness expected of us by our families, our friends, the people to whom we are sent. Everyone rejoices with us when we let it be seen *"that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness"* ¹⁶ If our choice in life is a choice that makes us happy, then we must say so, not only in words but by our whole being.

This brings us to the need to be attentive to what we feel when we consider the different aspects of our religious life. What thrills us most? From daybreak to sunset, from the meditation of the Word of God in the morning until Compline which concludes our day, do we find meaning in all that we live? What is the meaning of the liturgy that punctuates our days? What is the meaning of our vows and how have we chosen to live them personally and in community?

Religious life as a lifestyle remains a viable proposal that needs no other publicity than our lives, a publicity that should be given by our joy. Each component of our lifestyle as a Congregation has its importance in the practice of this art.

So our prayer, whether it is difficult or easy, is a channel of God's love, through which we show the world the source of our joy: *"Religious... are basically men and women of prayer, contemplatives ... that is to say, living people who never tire of waiting on God and receiving him when he gives himself (...), who dare to offer him the pain of the world and receive from him his gentleness which they in their turn will transmit to those around them"* ¹⁷. The joy of our heart is an indicator of our fervour in living the vows to which we solemnly committed ourselves on the day of our profession, fraternal life, mission ... because *"joy is proportionate to the fervour and the proximity of the one who is the joy of the soul"* ¹⁸.

14 MME, Notes intimes, N°241 B/01

15 CIVCSVA, « Rejoice », Letter to consecrated men and women, From the teachings of Pope Francis, 2 February 2014

16 Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter for the year of Consecrated Life, Part 2, 2015

17 Cf. UISG 156, p. 6

18 MME, 23 February 1873, « On positive delicacy »

4- "I wanted to give me not lend myself to Jesus Christ"¹⁹

According to Pope Francis, *"Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities"* .²⁰

If we engage in this year of thanksgiving and re-reading, we can find again or rekindle the fire of love that we chose for life and in complete freedom. This can lead us to live our values and traditions with greater vigour, pursuing the project of the Congregation with joy and zeal. It is a question of fuelling our passion in the present experience of our consecrated life, of finding the meaning of what we are doing and living.

"The only real joy is to love God above all things, to love the love that he himself wants to grow in our hearts. This is true joy, the joy of joys ...," said St. Marie Eugenie²¹. One can recognize her desire for us to experience *"the infinite joy to give God all that can be given to him"*²². Let us ask for the grace, in this year, to make of our consecrated lives, lives that are dedicated to God alone. Let us ask for the grace to know how to humanize the rhythms of our lives, our relationships, our gift of ourselves to the mission ... Let us be faithful to our "Assumption label"! Let us dare to combine the creativity that renews us with respect for the beautiful and healthy traditions that identify us. This also is to be of our time and to love our time without wanting to be like everyone else because we know well that the effects of fashion are transient and too changeable.

Let us find our joy in God's faithfulness and in fidelity to our charism. Let us attach ourselves to what gives us a deep and lasting joy, the joy promised a hundredfold to the faithful servant of the Gospel. Our life is given to God for Him to dispose of it as he wishes; our life handed over to Christ is for others, for the sake of the Gospel, the only good for which it is worth getting tired. For Marie Eugenie, to devote oneself to God, was basically to give oneself. *"I wanted to give me not lend myself to Jesus Christ"*²³: this beautiful expression which we love, speaks volumes about her understanding of the vocation and the call of God. Let us receive from God the joy of giving ourselves to Him all the days of our life.

Through this message, on this feast of St. Marie Eugenie, she who was the first stone, I wanted to return with you in a surge of gratitude to the source of our vocation as a Congregation. The grateful memory reminds us that the meaning of our vocation is joy and happiness, which must be reflected and shared in a

19 MME, Letter to Mgr. Gros, 1841

20 Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter for the year of consecrated life, Part 1, 2015

21 MME, 3 May 1874, « *To work at one's perfection* »

22 MME, 20 January 1882, « *To recite the psalms in union with our Lord Jesus Christ* »

23 MME, Letter to Mgr. Gros, 1841

daily commitment and willingness to live the gift of self. To express our joy to be with God and give our lives for others is our "profession" and our identity.

Let us take to heart the call to the joy the Church addresses to us, first of all by being a joy for each other in community and for everyone, in the mission and daily life. May all the texts of the Magisterium on the occasion of the Year of the consecrated life lead us to the adjustments and to the *"evangelical decisions that will bear the fruit of rebirth and be a source of joy"* ²⁴.

May this day be a time dedicated to the joyful celebration of what has been and what will be given.

With the whole General Council, I wish you a Happy Feast!

4 March, 2015

Sr Martine Tapsoba
Superior General

²⁴ CIVCSVA, « *Rejoice !* », Letter to consecrated men and women, From the teaching of Pope Francis, 2 February 2014