



Very dear Sisters and Friends,

I hope these lines find you well and I am praying for that intention. Many things have happened since my last message to all of you in August. Among other things are our online visits and I marvel at the wonders that God is doing in our Provinces. As Advent is around the corner, it is good to be in communion journeying together and that is the reason for my writing this letter.

I begin with the simple question: How can we live the season of Advent meaningfully this year? The Covid-19 pandemic has introduced a new rhythm of life and taught us that not only are rapid changes possible but also they are an integral part of our way of life. Advent is the season that brings a new liturgical year. The word "advent", derived from the Latin *adventus*, means "coming" or "arrival." The theme of advent is thus all about waiting for the coming of Jesus; it is a time of joyful expectation and preparation. In the Liturgy, the Advent season reminds us of Christ's threefold coming: His past, present, and future comings. First, we celebrate His coming into the world two thousand years ago. Second, we give thanks for His continual coming to us through the Word of God, the Sacraments, and the events of our daily life. Third, we look forward to His second coming in glory at the end of time. This threefold coming is recalled when we prepare ourselves every year for Christmas.

The liturgical readings of Advent give us an overview of the preparation for the coming of the Messiah that took place among the people of Israel. The readings of the first Sunday of Advent invite us to "stay awake" (Mark 13:33). The readings of the following two Sundays focus on John the Baptist, the voice of the Lord crying in the wilderness: "prepare a way for the Lord and make his path straight" (Mark 1 and John 1). The Gospel reading of the fourth Sunday dwells on the Annunciation story, presenting Mary as someone who has won God's favour and who said YES to the project of God for the salvation of humankind (Luke 1).



The season of Advent raises a number of questions: How do we "stay awake"? How do we "prepare a way for the Lord"? How do we say YES to God during this season of Advent? In this context, *Fratelli Tutti*, the recent Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis, opens many doors for each one of us. The encyclical invites us to embrace "a social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity that is open to all" (No. 94). Pope Francis encourages us to reclaim our true identity as children of God and highlights the kindness that works miracles in our lives (Nos. 222-224).

During the pandemic, we have tried to respond to the many challenges by making adjustments and finding new ways to live and evangelize. Sustaining healthy interpersonal relationship in our communities or in our families remains a challenging task. Sincere affection and genuine care for one another in communities was a priority for Saint Marie Eugenie. In her own words: "Take particular care that nothing be allowed in their houses [communities] that hurts the charity [communion] that should reign among the sisters, that they never give way to hurtful words, malicious thoughts or harsh judgments. Let nothing lessen charity [communion] in any way."<sup>1</sup>

Our different personalities and diverse ways often divide us and lead to misunderstanding and conflicts. Relationships are broken because we hurt each other. Let us take a contemplative look at this common experience of hurting another or being hurt by another. When we are hurt by someone, we experience waves of anger or indifference. Sometimes we have negative thoughts about ourselves, which inflict more pain on us. Yet other times, we can experience a wave of compassion and blessing. In other words, when someone hurts me, I have distinct choices in my way of responding to the situation: (i) to become irritated with the one(s) hurting me and hurting them back; (ii) to blame myself, making myself a victim and hurting myself; (iii) to respond kindly by transforming the hurt into a grace of compassion. In the

<sup>1</sup> Saint Marie Eugenie, « Sur l'Amour dans la Congrégation » 26 June 1870 (*Instructions de Chapitre*, volume 1).

first two responses, we release a lot of negative energy, but in the third response, we envelope ourselves and the ones who have hurt us with positive and life-giving energy. When we respond with kindness, our spiritual energy is doubled within us and at the same time it is shared with the other. This third way transforms me as well as the other.

This is a way of answering the biblical invitation: “stay awake” or “make his path straight.” As we prepare ourselves for Christmas, as we clean our houses and chapels, let us also purify our hearts and make our paths straight, make our relationships more gracious. We can say YES to God by releasing positive energy and a wave of peace around us. Living in a world agitated by fear, frustration, revenge, and violence, let us take this third way – Jesus’ way, the biblical way, the prophetic way, and the Assumption way!

We often think this third way of responding is not meant for us, but only for extraordinary people. We can do this gracefully by being alert, growing in mindfulness, learning to respond rather than react. Mindfulness enables us to examine our actions with honesty and courage. Honesty will help us to know the right thing to do and courage will help us to do the right thing. We all have the strength and knowledge to do it, but sometimes lack the determination to do it. It is this determination and perseverance that make the difference between the losers and winners in a process of growth. I believe that this is possible for you and for me through the simple practice of what I call “a transformative meditation” and our daily Examen.

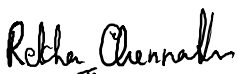
For Advent, this year, I would like to propose that we make a transformative meditation daily. We can do it by focusing on our breathing in and breathing out. Every time when we breathe in, we are breathing in the breath of God or the life of God or the grace of God. In the same way, when we breathe out, we are breathing out unkind thoughts, hurtful words, and negative energies. Doing this, we will experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Gradually, the breath of goodness takes over in us; the breath of kindness envelopes us; the breath of peace dwells in our minds, and the breath of love fills our hearts.

On our journey together as daughters and sons of Saint Marie Eugenie, I suggest the following three steps which might be of some help for our daily Examen.

1. Become aware of God’s interventions or of the movements of the Spirit during the day and be grateful for all your experiences both good and bad. Be mindful of your interpersonal exchanges during the day. Become aware of the moments when you radiated positive energy as well as the moments when you sent negative energy – without passing any judgement.
2. Ask God to fill your heart with God’s healing energy and the grace of compassion. Experience the wellness of transformation and enjoy peace from within. Stay in stillness or in communion with God until your heart is satisfied.
3. Conclude the Examen by embracing members of your community or your family in the arms of your heart and sending them vibrations of your care and affection.

So, sisters and friends, during this Advent, let us make efforts to shift our focus from ourselves to the good of the other. This shift empowers us to move away from irritation to understanding, from anger to compassion, from alienation to inclusion, and from indifference to cooperation. May trust-based, grace-filled relationships lead us onward during this season of Advent!

With all my affection and prayers,



Sister Rekha Chennattu, RA  
Superior General

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