



INFANT JESUS SISTERS

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Pentecost 2016

Dearest Sisters and Friends,

May the Holy Spirit bring new life and energy to you all on this feast of Pentecost! Once again we have the opportunity to be united across the world in our different nations, with diverse cultures and languages, as we reflect on the amazing gift of God's Spirit in our lives. Pentecost is a time for opening doors and allowing the breath of the Spirit to breathe through every aspect of our lives and mission.

For the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis called for every cathedral to have a special door, a 'Holy Door', representing the passage to salvation and to a new and eternal life that was opened by Jesus for all of humanity. It symbolizes an entry to God's mercy - the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet people. Mercy is "the bridge that connects God and humanity, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness." (MV 2)



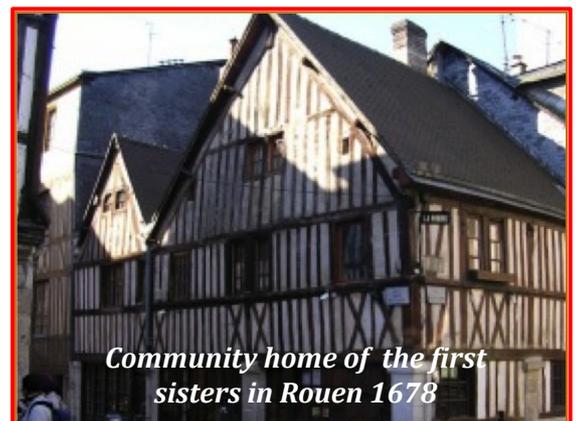
In the Gospel for Pentecost Sunday (John 20:19-23), we read that "the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were." When Jesus appeared to his disciples on the evening of his resurrection from the dead, he found them gathered behind closed doors, full of anxiety and fear. They were in hiding and wanted to be protected from what lay outside the doors; but Jesus ignored the closed doors and came in to stand among them. His first words were *'Peace be with you.'*

Doors allow for privacy as well as welcome. At times it is appropriate that our doors keep people out and at other times we open them to offer hospitality and welcome people in. Doors can create places of confinement or places of sanctuary. They can speak of welcome and safety. They can also speak of imprisonment and fear. For the disciples the doors were closed because of their absolute fear.

Jesus walked through the closed door and gave the disciples the mission to offer God's mercy to the world. Their mission was to be the same as his: they were to continue doing what he did. During this year of Mercy Pope Francis invites us not only to walk through a Holy Door into a church but also to walk out of the church to continue the mission of offering God's mercy to others.

Are we ready to walk out of the church and show God's mercy to others?

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Nicolas Barré invited our first sisters to open their doors to one another, which led to the first community in the Institute. He relied very much on the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the source of the life and mission of the first sisters. He wanted the Holy Spirit to 'take possession' of this small community so that the sisters would always be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Three hundred and fifty years later, who could have imagined how this first community would have grown and evolved into the Institute we know today! It has been and continues to be the



Community home of the first sisters in Rouen 1678

work of the Holy Spirit. At this time in our history we are more conscious than ever of being one community in the Institute, trusting in divine providence and in the love and support we receive from and give to one another. The Institute is a community that continues to hold its doors open to others – friends, colleagues and those who are drawn to its spirit and who wish to share all or part of its life and mission.

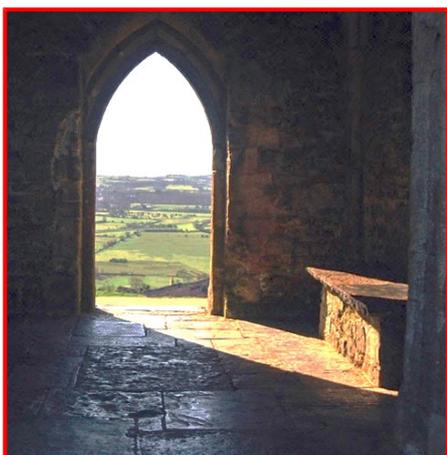
At Pentecost Jesus filled the disciples with new life, making them into a new creation and giving them the life of his Spirit. God has formed us into a community in the Church and in the Institute, into instruments for bringing life and love to our world. But what makes the Church and the Institute more than just a gathering of good people is God’s “breath” infusing us with the music of divinity. The feast of Pentecost celebrates that unseen, immeasurable presence of God in our lives –

the *spirit* that animates us to do the work of Gospel justice and mercy,
the *spirit* that makes God’s will our will,
the *spirit* of God living in us and transforming us so that we might bring life and love to our broken world.

God “breathes” the Spirit into our souls that we may live in love; God ignites the “fire” of the Spirit within our hearts and minds that we may seek God in all things in order to participate fully in the coming of God’s reign.

The disciples, who had been terrified, were filled with joy when Jesus stood among them on that first Pentecost evening. He then gave them their mission, “*As the Father sent me, so am I sending you*” (Jn 20:21). The presence of Jesus in our lives is always accompanied by peace and joy.

We also radiate our spirit of mission through peace and joy. By our word and example we invite others to share it. The gifts of the Spirit are not just for ourselves: they are to be shared. After the coming of the Holy Spirit the disciples did not stay in the room luxuriating in what they had been given. They threw open the doors and went out to tell the world how much God loves everyone and how he wants everyone to experience that love.



The Holy Spirit impels us to open our doors and go forth to proclaim and bear witness to the good news of the Gospel, to communicate the joy of faith and the encounter with Christ, who is the ‘face of God’s mercy’. The Holy Spirit makes us look to the horizon and draws us to the fringes of humanity in order to proclaim life in Jesus Christ.

How many doors will you pass through today? Or maybe you wish to welcome someone in; perhaps you long for a closed door to be opened. May the Holy Spirit open the closed doors in our lives. In a world where there is so much fear and anxiety, so much avoidance and separation, may the open doors of our daily lives speak clearly of the peace of Christ.

Kimiko, Maria and Noreen join me in wishing you renewed energy, joy and zeal on this feast of Pentecost.

With love and peace to you all,

Marie





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Pentecost 2015

Dearest Sisters and Friends,

Peace be with you all on this great feast of Pentecost! And may that peace extend to all those places in the world where our brothers and sisters are suffering because of war, atrocities or natural disasters. May the Spirit of love sent by Jesus be their source of courage and hope.

As the Easter journey of discipleship comes to its fulfilment at Pentecost, we are reminded once again that the Spirit of God is always with us and that we are never alone on our journey of faith. The Spirit abides within us and helps us to speak and live the truth. When we are centred in God, we can hear the Spirit murmuring in rhythm to the beat of our hearts. As with the early disciples, the Spirit gives us courage to speak boldly of God.

Just before his death in 1686, as the feast of Pentecost approached, Nicolas Barré prayed that the Holy Spirit would 'take possession' of the first sisters and that they would 'take possession' of the Holy Spirit. This prayer reaches down through the centuries and includes all those who feel drawn to the spirituality that we have inherited and are committed to living out today. 'Taking possession' of the Holy Spirit means finding a space within ourselves to allow the Holy Spirit to find a home within us. As St Paul says, '*Do you not realize that you are a temple of God with the Spirit of God living in you?*' (1 Cor. 3:16).

God comes to meet us in many different ways. In the person of Jesus it was as the close friend whom the disciples could see and touch, with whom they could share a meal and relate to in heartfelt love and intimacy. Now, since Pentecost, God comes to us in another way that is not limited by space and time, but fully present to everyone, everywhere – always! The Spirit dwells within our hearts and acts from deep within us. So although we never see the Spirit, we do experience movements of the heart that draw us towards God. That is enough to assure us that we 'possess' the Spirit or that the Spirit 'possesses' us.

Led by Nicolas Barré's devotion to the Holy Spirit, which guided the first tentative steps of the Institute, we have always been encouraged to turn to the Holy Spirit to be the source of our inspiration and courage as we responded to God's call. The Book of the Institute states very clearly, "*If we allow the Holy Spirit to take possession of us, the Spirit will gradually bring about the unity of our apostolic lives in which action and contemplation permeate each other*" (no. 14). The 2013 General Chapter document, which sets out our direction for these six years, also reminds us to consciously allow ourselves to be "inspired by God's Spirit" if we are to become "co-creators with God today". If we have the courage to respond wholeheartedly once again to these calls, who knows what wonders the Holy Spirit will bring about through us?

Whenever we open our hearts to receive and our eyes to see, we find that the Spirit is everywhere. We begin to tune into our inner promptings and to ask ourselves, *'Is this a nudge from the Holy Spirit?'* Life takes on a new colour and a new energy. We become free to dance with the Spirit!

Pentecost may be an appropriate time for each of us to ask ourselves, 'How have I collaborated with God's Spirit over the past year, or years? With hindsight, can I identify significant spiritual landmarks? Did I identify them at the time or only later? What did those landmarks teach me? How important are they to me now? Pentecost accompanies all aspects of our meandering journey of life. *Do I give sufficient time to silence and prayer in order to recognize the action of the Spirit in my life?*

As we open and stretch our minds and hearts, we begin to identify the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our lives and notice the unfolding of our personal journey to God. We can only do this when we take time out of our busy schedules and enter into the silence of our hearts. Silence can be a demanding presence. It can push us to probe and question many aspects of our lives and may even call us to respond to God in ways that we could never have imagined.

In this year of Consecrated Life and as we look towards the Council of the Institute in Bangkok in October, we once again call on the Holy Spirit to open us to all the possibilities that God is offering us. May we enter wholeheartedly into these opportunities for renewal and revitalisation so that we may recognise the energy and fire within as the Holy Spirit really does possess us.

The gift of the Spirit is God's greatest gift, inviting us into the heart of God and to share in the life of the Trinity. The Spirit is the spark of love that comes to us from the Trinity to set us on fire with zeal, hope and joy.

The Holy Spirit continues to bring forth and inspire new disciples in the Christian community. Mary is the first disciple, the model to which all other disciples aspire. Mary is truly a woman of the Spirit. She welcomed and accepted God's Word so that the Spirit was able to accomplish great things in and through her. She shines out as the perfect example of what the Holy Spirit can accomplish in human persons, if no obstacles are placed in the way of divine action.

The last glimpse we have of Mary in the New Testament is a heartwarming one. We find her in the midst of the apostles, praying with them and receiving the Spirit. As the mother of Jesus she takes her place in the heart of the community of disciples. She is the perfect disciple. She is, as the Eastern Church calls her, the 'icon of the Spirit'.

As we celebrate Pentecost this year, Kimiko, Maria, Noreen and I assure you of our prayer that God may send his Spirit anew into your hearts. Filled with that Spirit, may we renew our efforts to be a dynamic community of disciples, full of energy and zeal for proclaiming the Gospel. And, as a community, may we give a clear and unmistakable witness to the Truth and Love of God, revealed to us in Jesus our Lord.

May the Holy Spirit be with you all!

Maie

Sr Marie's Christmas Letter 2015



The Word was made flesh

Dearest Sisters and Friends,

A happy and a holy Christmas to each one of you, your families and all those you hold in your hearts. May we join with people of good will, of all faiths and cultures, to allow the light of Christ to shine in our world. May this light so penetrate the darkness that abundant joy may be spread *"to the ends of the earth"* (Ps. 19).



At Christmas we join with our sisters and friends throughout the world, remembering especially those who are living in the aftermath of violence and terrorism. The Peruvian scenes on our Christmas card this year remind us of the peace and tranquility that we find in the presence of Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus' birth takes place in the midst of the realities of our daily lives, whether in the silence of the countryside or in the noise and busyness of our cities. As we see on the card, Jesus is born in

respect for the earth and in our care of animals and all living things. Wherever we are, Jesus wants to be born again in our hearts and in our way of relating with one another. He is waiting for each of us to open the doors of our hearts to welcome him within us and among us.

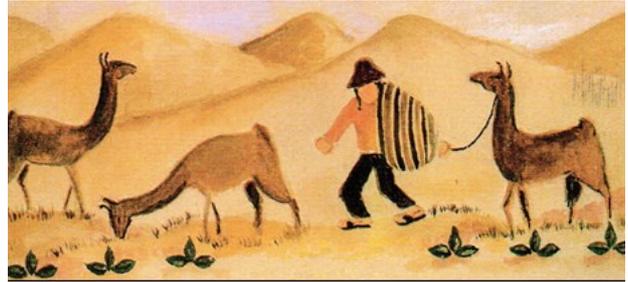
The mystery of God, who has come to dwell in our midst, leads us to reflect on the spirituality that is at the centre of our lives and mission and gives us strength to face the challenges that each day brings. Jesus present and alive among us is at the heart of this spirituality. *"The Institute has its origin in the very heart of God, who so loved the world that He gave His only Son ... so that those who believe in Him may not die but have eternal life"* (Bk of Institute 3).

"The Word became flesh, he lived among us" (John 1:4) – this is the mystery of the Incarnation, whose depths we never cease to ponder. God, who is Love, is with us. Through the birth of His Son, He shows us how to love, how to give ourselves to others each day in love and how to bear witness to the God of Love, who dwells among us. Nicolas Barré never ceased to contemplate the mystery of

God's unconditional love. This is what led him to call our first sisters to always remain near the crib of the Infant Jesus: *"Be sure not wander far from the crib of Jesus"* (FM 11).

- *In my daily life, what does it mean for me to remain near to the crib of Jesus?*

Nicolas Barré also urged the first sisters to have *"a great simplicity in everything"* (FM 11). The stable in Bethlehem, in its simplicity, was a privileged place of welcome and hospitality. Smallness and fragility were protected, cared for and surrounded by tenderness. We too are called to welcome smallness and fragility within ourselves, our communities and in the peripheries of society. As we pray at the crib, we encounter those who are near, those who come from afar and those of different cultures or religious beliefs. The crib makes us question our narrowness and our barriers, inviting us to be open to all.



In Jesus' birth in the stable, we contemplate the love of God revealed in the tiny, helpless newborn baby. We see the trust and faith of Mary and Joseph, who listened to God's words and found the courage to follow them. Even when we feel poor, downtrodden, lonely or ignored, the simplicity and trust we find in the stable invite us to have the courage to hope again and to believe in the fullness of life to which we are called. God gives us the gift of life, then guides us and nurtures us. He encourages us to find our strength, our purpose and our happiness in following His will. Yet for much of our daily lives we want to go our own way, find our own path, do the things that suit us and our lifestyle.

- *When we are aware of losing our way, what makes us turn back to the love of God who is always with us and within us?*

Next year we celebrate the 350th anniversary of Nicolas Barré's suggestion to Marguerite Lestocq and the first sisters to *'go and have dinner with your sisters who teach at the Carmelites, then invite them to have dinner with you at the Penitents and see if you can live in union with one another'* (ML 9). This simple invitation marked the beginning of community in the Institute.

At our recent Council of the Institute we celebrated once again the gifts of our unity and diversity. We deepened our commitment and responsibility towards one another as one community of sisters in the Institute, enriched by our many friends and collaborators. This coming anniversary year is an opportunity to reflect together on our understanding of community and how we live it today.

- *How are we called to 'live in union with one another' in our very different situations in the Institute today?*
- *With whom do I form community in my daily life?*

In his letter for the year of Mercy, which began on 8th December, Pope Francis recognizes that no one has penetrated the profound mystery of the Incarnation like Mary, whose entire life was based on the presence of God within her. May she watch over us during this Holy Year of Mercy and, with her, may we *"rediscover the joy of God's tenderness."* (Misericordiae Vultus 24)

As we gather around the crib at Christmas, let us be still and wonder at the depth and breadth of God's love for us. Let us gaze in silence and prayer at the baby who is Emmanuel, God with us. God has come among us, to be with us as a poor and human child. He invites us to be poor along with the poor and to reflect on what this poverty might mean for each one of us. Let us contemplate the love and simplicity we find in Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the angels and the kings. Let us allow the gaze of the Christ child to look at us with eyes of pure and unconditional love.

Kimiko, Maria and Noreen join me in wishing you all a very happy Christmas!

Marie.