



Infant Jesus Sisters

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Dearest Sisters and Friends,

We rejoice with you all on this great feast of Pentecost! May the gifts of the Holy Spirit keep us open and free in our response to God. May we all allow ourselves *“to be guided by the Spirit like a feather being carried along by the wind”* (N. Barré Letter 9).

Nothing could have prepared the disciples for the magnificent outpouring of God's grace on that day of Pentecost. For the first time in their lives they listened to the best, the most courageous, the most human part of themselves and they began to say and do things they never thought possible.

In the Gospel of John we read, “On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, ‘Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink’” (Jn 7:37). And John comments, “He said this in reference to the Spirit.....” (Jn 7:39). The first condition for receiving the Holy Spirit is desire, compelling need, thirst.

Are we thirsty for the Holy Spirit or do we have instead an unacknowledged fear of what might happen if we allow the Holy Spirit to touch us? We sense that if the Holy Spirit comes, he cannot leave everything as he finds it. He could even make us do “strange” things that we are not ready to accept. The Holy Spirit always takes us by surprise. Whomever the Holy Spirit touches, the Holy Spirit changes!

Pentecost is a very significant moment in the life of the people of God. Suddenly new life bursts forth in the most unlikely of places - in the midst of a group of frightened, ordinary men and women. If the disciples could have chosen the way the Spirit manifested himself, they would never have chosen to begin to speak in unknown tongues, exposing themselves to the ridicule of the people around them, who said “they have had too much wine” (Acts 2:13). And yet this was the way it happened. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to take away our fear. Let us say, “Come, Holy Spirit! Come now, come as you wish”. Let us open ourselves to this breath of life and let it touch us and renew us!



At the heart of Nicolas Barré's being was a radical search for the action of the Holy Spirit in his life and in the lives of the people around him. He strongly encouraged the first sisters to be attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, an attentiveness that remains part of our heritage.

Next year, 2012, we will celebrate 350 years of mission since the birth of our Institute in Rouen in 1662. It was then that the Holy Spirit inspired Nicolas Barré to gather together some young women, who shared his insight and compassion, to respond to the great deprivation he saw among the children and families of his day. Four years later these women also responded with a wholehearted “Yes” to the suggestion to come together to live in community but the mission and life of the Institute had already begun, which is what we will celebrate next year.

It has truly been the work of the Spirit that the Institute has grown and flourished for three hundred and fifty years through many different historical and cultural changes. Its spirituality has touched the lives and hearts of many people all over the world and continues to find new ways of expression through the immense needs that continue to challenge us today.

It often seems as if we are living in a time of chaos and more than ever we need to be aware of the action of the Spirit hovering over the waters and calling forth life. A time of chaos demands risking. It is not a time of inactivity, of waiting. The call today is to risk acting to the best of our ability, knowing that only this will allow a better future to unfold. An urgent challenge is to rediscover in this world a sense of our hope and life that is founded on Jesus Christ, incarnate and risen.

*What do I notice happening in our world today that is changing the way I live my life?
What energises me and gives me hope as I look at the world today?*



Reflecting on all the dramatic and natural disasters that have been happening in recent times, there seems to be an increasing need for people to find HOPE in order to survive, in addition to the immediate need for practical and human support. Hope is also often lacking for those who are living in a permanent state of deprivation and misery. Much wisdom and imagination is called for to enable each other to discover the hope that rejuvenates and brings life.

Hope in the midst of darkness: this is the hope that the Spirit grants when we are poor, when we weep, have lost everything, are persecuted for the cause of justice, have a clean heart, respond to violence with tenderness. It is the hope of the beatitudes of Jesus. It is the hope of those who suffer with others and for others. For “*what you did to one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me*” (Matt 25:40).

What can we propose to those who desire hope?

Hope is a present reality, not a vision of the future. Hope is based on an understanding and acceptance of one’s current reality and an openness to an unfolding future. Hope is the ability to see the creating, loving, saving real presence of God in the other person, just as in Peter’s visit to Cornelius (*Acts 10*). Sometimes we are surprised to recognise the Spirit within our everyday encounters, when we wonder ‘who is visiting whom?’ Peter visits Cornelius but he is also visited by him, and together they are visited by the Holy Spirit.

With the experience of hope come certain beliefs, feelings and actions: a sense of being empowered, having strength from within, feeling supported in goals and dreams, and having the ability to seek help when necessary. Hope matters, and “the one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of new life” (*Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi*)

Hope is creative passion. It gives rise to questions, new perspectives, it impels us forward. Hope has been poured into our hearts by the Spirit who has been given to us. Hope is a gift which must be welcomed and cultivated. We want to give hope its voice and let it speak through us. Hope moves those who contemplate it and gives them meaning and reasons to live.

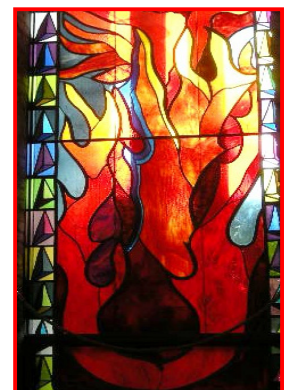
Wherever the Spirit is present, there is hope, there is growth, love, service and humility. Those who are recognised as disciples of Christ are those who undertake to live in the movement of the Spirit, who are open to the life of the Spirit within. We cannot confine the action of the Spirit. As Paul says: “*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*” (2 Cor 3:17).

Next year, as the Infant Jesus Sisters celebrate 350 years of faithfulness to the call of God, let us all, sisters and friends, accept living in the movement of the Spirit that we may discover an inner freedom that perhaps we never knew before.

Each country is invited to celebrate and mark this very significant anniversary in whatever way seems appropriate.

Masako, Marie Agnès and I will be united with you in prayer this Pentecost as we invite the Holy Spirit, the fire of God’s love, to inflame our hearts with renewed courage and hope,

Marie



Note: Photos of the stained glass windows in St. Ignatius Church, Yotsuya, Tokyo, were taken by Marie Agnès.