

Sr Marie's Christmas Letter 2016

Christmas 2016

Dearest Sisters and Friends,

Now that the Year of Mercy has come to an end and the Holy Doors have been closed, we are encouraged by the Christmas story to keep our minds and hearts open to the gift of mercy that the Lord seeks to give us. Having received his mercy, we can then open our hearts to others.

With Pope Francis we have celebrated an intense Jubilee Year in which we have received the grace of mercy in abundance. *"Like a gusting but wholesome wind, the Lord's goodness and mercy have been poured out upon the entire world. Because each of us has experienced at length this loving gaze of God, we cannot remain unaffected, for it changes our lives."* (Misericordia et Misera 4 – Pope Francis' letter at the end of the Year of Mercy).



The image on our Christmas card this year invites us to delight in God's creation and the interconnectedness of all that exists. Mary introduces the infant Jesus to the wonders of the universe and creation itself. Jesus reaches out to embrace the whole of creation in both its wonder and its simplicity. The marguerite daisy, symbol of simplicity, is very familiar to us, members and friends of the Institute, and reminds us of the motto on the blazon, which is still used in many of our schools throughout the world, *"Simple in virtue, steadfast in duty."*

Relationships, openness and dialogue are at the centre of Christmas and close to the heart of Pope Francis. *"Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue"*, he urges us. Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. However difficult things have become in the realm of human life and relationships, we believe that they can change. The Messiah, saviour of the people, has come. Through this child wisdom and understanding, guidance and courage, discernment and holiness, will spill out over all creation, leading to peace and reconciliation. Natural enemies will seek each other out to form a peaceful and rich companionship. All of creation, including not just humanity, but also the world of animals, insects and plants, will exist in harmonious fruitfulness.



A recent image on the news was of a family: man, woman and children, with their donkey and cart, making their way out of Syria – a reminder of Joseph leading the donkey with Mary and Jesus. In recent years the number of people on the move from war and want has increased dramatically.

They walk with very little sense of where they are going, unsure of the welcome they will receive. In many of our countries, especially in Europe, people arrive on our shores seeking a better life. Like all immigrants they are on a journey of hope. They challenge us as individuals and as a society to match the hope in their eyes, a hope similar to that in the eyes of Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus all those years ago. If we really want to be a welcoming community, we must always ask the question, *"Who is being excluded?"*

Christmas is the dawning of a new age, a new hope that began with a fragile and vulnerable infant born in a stable amidst poverty, death, and darkness. This child was determined to be born, this God was committed to come among us, even and especially to the darkest, most crowded, miserable and unwanted places. This is where Jesus was born, small, vulnerable, but filled with life to light the world.

When have I seen new hope appear from a most unexpected place?

It is at the crib that we meet the tiny, fragile child, the Prince of Peace, who comes into a world that is torn apart by violence, fear and mutual suspicion. Let us come before the crib in our vulnerability,



humanness and inner stillness. The outward silence of Christmas night invites us to make silence within us. It is only when we uncover the quiet space within our hearts that we will experience something of the tenderness of God. Let us go into the inner room of our hearts. We may feel drained and tired from the cares and worries in our lives, from the unending violence in our world or because of the seeming hopelessness of the situation of the thousands of migrants who continue on their journeys towards a better life. Yet we believe in God's love and tenderness and his promise to be with us always. Thus, in faith, we welcome this child, Emmanuel, God with us.

The invitation of Christmas is that the Lord, in coming to us, wants above all to draw us to himself. He loves each of us, our hidden selves, more than we can ever know. In his sight we are beautiful. We may not think so, but he sees us with clear eyes. He sees deep into the soul given to each one of us by his heavenly Father and which is beautiful beyond measure.

Do I see each person, including myself, as God does?

Christmas brings us all back to the crib of life to begin again, aware of what has gone before, conscious that nothing can last, but full of hope that this time we can learn what it takes to live well and grow towards fullness of life. As we gaze at the crib we see the embodiment of God's loving humility, coming to us in poverty so that we may not be overwhelmed by God's majesty but drawn to God's love.

There is a child in each of us waiting to be born again. It is to those looking for life that the Christ-child beckons. Christmas is not only for children. It is for those who refuse to give up and grow old, for those to whom life comes anew and with purpose each and every day, for those who can let



go of yesterday so that today and tomorrow can always be full of new possibility. It is for those who live with joy and vitality whatever their age. Christmas is a never-ending feast, a celebration of change, a call to begin once more the journey to human joy and fulfilment.

What is the message of Christmas for me this year?

May the blessings of the Christmas season come to all of us and especially to those who have least among us. May the bells ring out and remind us, when we look at the crib, that Christ is born in everyone's heart, especially in those who feel excluded from society, the dispossessed and the lonely.

How can I reach out to those in need in my particular circumstances?

Let us open our hearts to Emmanuel, God with us, and respond to his invitation. Allow the life of our souls to breathe with a fresh grace that comes with forgiveness and repentance, a grace that enables us to go forward with new heart, new hope and new love.

Kimiko, Maria, Noreen and I send you every good wish for a happy and holy Christmas,

Sr Marie



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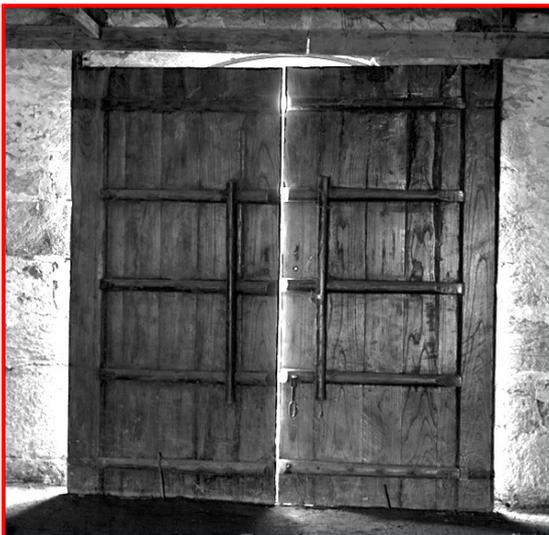
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Pentecost 2016

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)



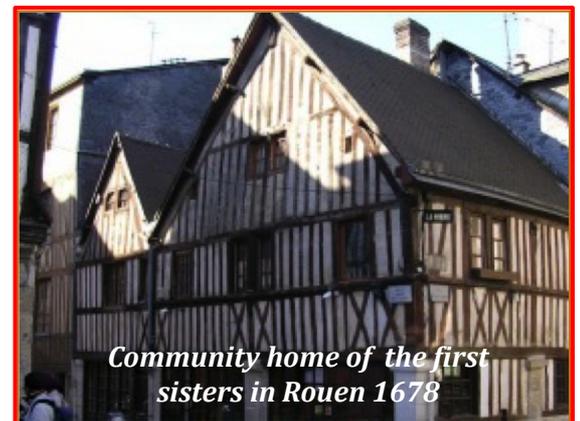
In the Gospel for Pentecost Sunday (John 20:19-23), we read that "the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were." When Jesus appeared to his disciples on the evening of his resurrection from the dead, he found them gathered behind closed doors, full of anxiety and fear. They were in hiding 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 work of the Holy Spirit. At this time in our history we are more conscious than ever of being one community in



Community home of the first sisters in Rouen 1678

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.

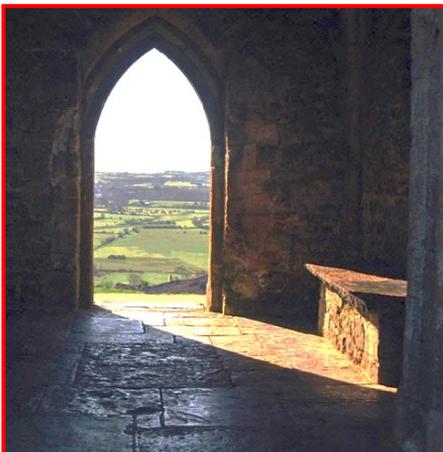
At Pentecost Jesus filled the disciples with new life, making them into a new creation and giving them the life of his Spirit. God has formed us into a community in the Church and in the Institute, into instruments for bringing life and love to our world. But what makes the Church and the Institute more 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

