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COMPANIONS OF THE ROAD WITH MARY

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FOREWORD

This Supplement wishes to be, above all, a homage to Mary.

A homage of gratitude offered by the World Federation of Christian Life Communities on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of its existence. It was on July 2nd, 1953 that Pope Pius XII, in a handwritten letter, gave his approval to the new Federation. Through this document the Pope encouraged, once more, renewal by means of the Exercises:

"Do not forget that all those...who return to the authentic Exercises draw from this very pure source inspiration, light and strength..."

The author of these pages, one of the leaders of the World Federation, has drawn abundantly from this source which is, in the opinion of the General Council of Rome (1967), "specific source and characteristic instrument of our spirituality" (GP 4). She did not choose to write a study but a series of meditations and contemplations, addressed to the members of CLC who have knowledge and experience of the Exercises. The chapters faithfully follow the major steps of the Exercises and, thus, the path each one of us is invited to take in and through a growing gift of self.

This Supplement is, at the same time, a witness of our love for Mary.

Not only the personal witness of the author, but also the witness of all the Federation that moves always more towards the building of a real world community.

We are happy to have this opportunity to express publicly the truth that in our life Jesus and Mary are inseparably linked. The misunderstandings that began in 1967 with the change from our traditional name have not totally disappeared.

Nevertheless, what was done by the General Council had been done before by others with full responsibility and guided by the desire to give a better service. The groups of laity founded by the first Jesuits used a great variety of names, adapted to each situation. The well-known group of Leunis chose that of the Sodality of the Annunciation because it was the title of the chapel of the Roman College. After the suppression of the Society and above all during the 20th century, a large number of groups had to choose their own names to avoid confusion: the name Sodality of Our Lady frequently having lost all relation with Ignatian spirituality and suggesting a reality totally opposed to its authentic identity. Impelled by this motive the General Councils of Newark (1959) and Bombay (1964) introduced the question and the Council of Rome (1967) voted to change the name by an overwhelming majority.

It is clear that it had never occurred to any one, in any way, to impoverish the love that unites us to Mary our Mother. On the contrary one who reads the General Principles, approved by the same Council, will find a greater richness and depth in that love. As in the Exercises, Mary is "the model of our collaboration in His mission" (GP 8). The mystery of the Annunciation-Incarnation is the point of departure, the foundation and the heart of the General Principles. In 1968 the Holy See confirmed our conviction that "the new name would express better the reality and dynamism of the association without lessening its specific elements in any way". Is it necessary to add that the text of the General Principles is, besides, in the most complete harmony with the documents of the Second Vatican Council?

This Supplement is, finally, an inspiration

The pages that follow would like to lead us to prayer,

to contemplation of Mary, to admiration of the "unity of her human life in all its dimensions with the fullness of her Christian faith" (GP 3). And this in order to help us grow in our own unity of life, goal of the first Sodalities and goal of our Communities today.

The union of Mary with Jesus in all things, presented with such simplicity in these chapters, is moving. The tone is serene, the observations direct and lucid, the desires always vast and limitless. And there are many other things!

The union reminds us of a truth not always sufficiently perceived: if it is sure that we can go to Jesus through Mary, it is still more certain that we cannot penetrate the mystery of Mary without Christ, the light of the world who illumines all mysteries of faith. Marian devotion, for example, is inexplicable without the light of Christ, without the vision of our incorporation in Him.

In the mystery of the Annunciation Mary received the Word of God and in Him, inseparably united, humanity, all persons, sons and daughters in the Son. Through Christ we are already united with Mary, but each one is invited to accept her freely, consciously and, above all, with love. This is our devotion to Mary (the gift of self). The Principles presuppose this gift when they speak about the inspiration "to give ourselves totally to God in union with Mary" (GP 8). Orientations, precisely because "principles" and because "general" cannot enter too much into the concrete. Filial love, unquestioned and wholly accepted is one thing. Quite different is the concrete expression of this love which varies and differs according to cultures, countries, times, places and personal vocations.

Today ten years ago, on March 25, 1968, the General Principles and all the changes were approved. The letter written in the name of Pope Paul VI by Cardinal Cicognani, ends like this: "I am also happy that I can communicate this approval to you on the day of the Annunciation, the traditional feast of the Sodalities of Our Lady throughout the entire world, and the mystery that summarizes their spirit since the beginning and that inspires also the General Principles. I hope the most Blessed Virgin inspires the members of your World Federation to be ready to listen and to accept the Word of God in the different situations of their life, each time more generously and each time more promptly".

Rome, March 25, 1978

Louis PAULUSSEN, S.J.

Since the spirituality of our groups is centered on Christ, we see the role of Mary in relation to Christ; she is the image of our own collaboration in his mission. Mary's cooperation with her Son began with her "fiat" in the mystery of the Annunciation - In carnation. This cooperation, continued all through her life, inspires us to give ourselves totally to God in union with Mary, who by accepting the designs of God became our mother and the mother of all men. Thus we confirm our own mission of service to the world received in baptism and confirmation. We venerate the Mother of God in a special manner and we rely on her intercession in fulfilling our vocation.

(General Principles n. 8 of
the Christian Life Communities)

Abbreviations used:

Sp.Ex. : Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius
GP. : General Principles of the Christian Life
Communities (CLC)

I - THE CALL TO SET OUT

Yahweh said to Abram : "Leave your country, your family and your father's house for the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name so famous that it will be used as a blessing".
(Gen. 12: 1-2).

The call was clear. An invitation to leave behind that which, up till then, formed an important part of his life: his country, his family, his house. To leave it for an unknown destination. For another country which would become the country. The destination would be specified: "the land that I will show you". And the effort would be assured of the divine blessing. God called man to set out for the promised land and his call was accompanied by a promise, that of an outpouring of grace upon him who answered the call.

The word of Yahweh reached to the heart of man, to that center where faith and respect for God were alive. Touched in his very depths, the man understood... To the call and the promise, faith and obedience responded. And the divine contact, at work in his deepest soul, hastened the maturing of that faith and obedience in view of the great enterprise that lay ahead. The man was upright, and he acquiesced. And his life received its decisive orientation. From then on what mattered it that the road was unmarked, the morrow uncertain, the goal unknown. He risked his life on the word of

promise, he left, he set out. And the blessing of God remained upon him.

Father of a numerous progeny, father of those who believe, Abram left to the generations that followed him the portrait of one who has been chosen by God, the profile of his vocation: called to set out toward a destination that would become clear as he journeyed, overshadowed by a blessing that transformed itself into a dynamic force, it is faith in God that gives birth to the "yes" and that expresses itself in the hope contained in the response.

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What an inspiring history! It reveals from the start God's solicitude for man; it opens up to us the vast plan for the gathering together of humanity that calls for the participation of man. And it lays before us the happy response of Abram, one that portrays the distinctive traits of man's initial positive acceptance.

Man will be a pilgrim, traveling toward the encounter set for him by his creator. Time will be given him, and with time, grace. Without doubt the enterprise begins with a leave-taking, a rupture. But must one not be emptied within so as to lend a more attentive ear to the voice that calls? This leave-taking, this rupture, they are not a dead end. No, they are the decisive step that sets one on the road. What is needed now is to take the road, to trust time, to abandon oneself to grace.

The call is toward the future, toward a becoming. Each step on the road and each moment that passes brings to man a change, something new. For the journey shapes him. It makes him become what in fact he is. If he halts, the grace-laden time passes, while he remains closed in by his poor illusions. If he tries to go back, or to leave the road, disturbance fills him within. For the call is toward the future, toward a becoming. To give up following it would be to put himself on the sidelines and in the end to withdraw from the current of life.

But where does the road lead, and what are its twists and turns? Toward "the land that I will show you"! Do not seek to know where grace is leading you: its light lights up the road by sections. And always you will notice that

this clarifying will be there to show the way for the next step where he awaits you. The route is unveiled as you go. Do not try to skip some of the steps, it is step by step that you advance. Each step consolidates your journey. None of them is useless and each one bears within it the gift of the present moment. It is in patience that you are called to adhere to each moment, but without ever clinging to it. For the road is a passage from one stop to another.

The call makes one's inner heart vibrate with attentiveness, and things appear in a new light. In our apparently humdrum existence, one reality reveals itself. A presence shows forth, one that gives life, one that is life. Your sensitivity is heightened and you discover with amazement that one same current of life animates everything. You have just recognized your God and your Lord.

It is then that, deep within yourself, things begin to move. Your callous, encumbered, closed heart at last begins to open up to expectation and to desire. What is within you reaches out to what will fill it and nourish it. You have come to understand that it is by God that you live. And all of a sudden your outlook on things changes. God is drawing you, and this attraction stamps a different course on your life. It gives to your existence a precise direction, a decisive dimension. It makes you live. It is in the relationship with your creator that the road will become clear, where each of your steps will be covered with blessings. What does it matter then whether your road takes you to distant horizons or within the framework of your habitual environment, whether it carries you to far-off missions or keeps you where you are? For in either case it is the same journey you are invited to undertake.

The vision is a grand one. A God who draws us, who covers us with blessings, and who lets us perceive the reality that surrounds us in the light of his love. Every living being has there its place, everything is included, nothing is irrelevant. All things converge toward a future that he is building. And each one's road is but one stone in the immense mosaic of humanity gathered into God. Would you prefer to stop to see where the road-signs point? Your presence to your creator does not require you to stop. Quite the contrary, it invites you to take the road. It is to an active participation that it calls you. The grace received must be radiated, the light reflected, the love diffused. It is faith that sheds the light needed for the first steps and assures that the effort continues.

But at the same time that your awareness catches a glimpse of the vast horizon whence life wells up, you are faced with the choice that this presumes. At the same moment that you gratefully uncover in your existence the hidden signs of a love that calls, you already see the main lines of the option it asks of you. For the call is addressed to the total person. Nothing is excluded from it; everything is linked to it. Nothing is a stranger to the call, neither yourself nor those around you nor your relationships nor the events that touch you. Every facet of your existence is placed under the same light. Nothing can be withdrawn from it, shielded from it, subtracted from it. It is to your freedom as creature that it calls.

Your freedom as a creature? Suddenly you divine how far as yet you are from that. Are you even sure you know what freedom is? The concept of it that you have fashioned, does it correspond to what is here at stake? And yet, your response - even if it be generous - does it not seem to be conditioned by this essential attitude? You sense then that you are invited to an experience, an experience that lies before you. What you have recognized, this you are called to live with every fiber of your being. The road lies there, before you.

Then it is that, like the infant risking its first steps, and seeking the support of its mother's hand, your gaze turns toward Mary. You know already that your own faithfulness is vacillating, unsure. You wonder whether your own response will be unconditional. You fear the weakness of your own good will as much as the imprudence of your newborn enthusiasm. And you prolong your gaze toward her. You reach for her hand, and find it stretched out toward the road where he awaits you. Already she is walking before you in that direction. And all of a sudden you grasp, as a son or daughter, that she has been given you to show you the way.

II - AMID THE DARKNESS, THE BEACON OF FREEDOM

Yes, the route lies there before you, its outline marked simply and sometimes blurred. You know well that for you it is one with the invitation of your Lord. He loves you, so he does not compel your answer. He waits for you to accept freely your vocation, to write out its history day after day. He solicits your FREEDOM.

The drag of the too-human fetters its thrust, and sin slows its course. Is that not what you seem to see in the world that surrounds you? Do you not read this same resistance in the wide-open book of the whole of human history? But at a stroke you discover, your heart cramped and your being helpless, that sin is not only elsewhere, it is in you too. You are not only victim, you are also sinner. The call to life that leads you to set out must, in order to be achieved, pass by way of a change of heart, so as to recognize at last and to taste the fulness of his grace.

Every faithful adhesion to the call on your part impels you to look to Mary, who, when the "fulness of time" had come, offered to God the fulness of her response. A quite young daughter of this chosen people, the depository of the blessing promised to Abraham. A quite young girl, grown up in a family of believers, in the midst of a people who awaited the fulfillment of the promise. The texts of Scripture had nourished her prayer. They had formed her heart. She recognized in them the history of salvation.

And in this dialogue between God who calls and man who responds, as witness the calls recounted in the Bible, she had perceived the immense love of a Father, the unique design of a God rooted in love for his People.

From the start, set apart and prepared by his grace, she is there, present to the Presence. Her recollected attention focuses on the one thing necessary. Her life is a relationship with God and her prayer is its expression. She shares with her relatives the concrete existence of a town of Galilee, one with its people in their joys and in their sorrows. With them she awaits the appearance of a saviour. But the grace of God has prepared in her the specially favored terrain where, the moment come, the hope of the world can germinate. Free of all sin, her whole being is turned towards God, desirous of encountering him, but aware that all grace is God's initiative. Human pride, the arrogance of man, the false gods that these two have fabricated, have no place in her. She knows she is a creature, and that the fulness of life reaches her in and through her attitude of dependence on her Creator. Daughter of Israel, she knows the history of her people, with its backsliding, its falls, its leaps forward. Her heart of flesh pulses in union with the promise her people have received and suffers in the betrayals of which they have been guilty. Already her heart is poised between two worlds, the earth from which she comes and the heaven whence comes salvation. Already, though she doesn't as yet know it, she is being readied to be a mediatrix.

In the struggle you are involved in, in the discouragement you undergo, in the rebellion that grips you, in the pride that hardens you, look to Mary. Present... Attentive ... Recollected... In contact with her, you will measure what you lack. What you find in yourself is, instead, absence, dissipation, emptiness. Your initial enthusiasm, like an arrow broken in many places, lies there, a mixture of promising beginnings and hopeless relapses. You see now another side of yourself, different from the one you prefer to show the world. You realize that there is in you another face. You find yourself divided. A generous inspiration finds itself arrested by the grinding of wheels that are not ready to serve. It is to a conversion of your whole being that you are called.

A heaviness weighs you down. The good will and the enthusiasm of your first efforts cannot make up for the deeper disorders that appear as you move ahead. In fact, they only make them stand out more. Now is the time you

must face them. Without seeking to camouflage them, without seeking to blame them on someone else. It is the moment of truth! You discover that your freedom is paralyzed. You have just touched the depth of your own helplessness.

Even if you would like to tranquillize yourself, to divert your attention, to search for an escape, to reassure yourself by "more reasonable" rationalizations, the truth is there, before you, and must be recognized. Your freedom? It must be reconstructed.

How simple it is then to address yourself to Mary, "so that she may obtain for you the grace from her Son and Lord" to feel the disorder that disperses your energies, to know the sin that paralyzes you, to discover your compromising acceptance of the hollow and vain attractions that keep you estranged from him. The grace to discover all these, to know it interiorly, to turn away from it. Yes, how simple it is, at the feet of her who was chosen to give to the world its Saviour, he who would save it from human helplessness, to place there before her the offering of your still captive freedom. Like a lighthouse beacon which directs to safe harbor many ships and even quite fragile craft, Mary conducts to her Son the destinies of each of her sons and daughters. It is so simple to speak to her, or to be silent. Simple to pray to her or to look at her. Simple to entrust to her this hesitant faith that yet carries within it the echo of the original call. Simple to lay before her the somber gray of one's horizon. Simple to expose oneself to her kindly gaze and, with her, to start anew on the road where the Lord awaits you.

Laid hold of by the Lord, your courage cannot fail you. Have you not just now abandoned, into the hands of Mary, the reality of your existence, awakened under the healthy shock of the truth? It is recorded - and this example ought not to leave us indifferent ---

"He continued his journey toward Montserrat, dreaming as was his habit of the great things he would do for the love of God. And as his imagination was quite filled with accounts such as those about Amadis of Gaul and others like them, it occurred to him to perform deeds of the same kind. So he resolved to keep a vigil of arms all night, without sitting or lying down, but rather sometimes standing and sometimes kneeling, before the altar of Our Lady of Montserrat, where he had decided to leave behind his worldly clothes so as to put on the arms of Jesus Christ."
(Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola)

"To leave behind his worldly clothes so as to put on the arms of Christ." That is, to strip himself of his own being in order to allow himself to enter into the transforming grace of salvation. And where, in whose presence, and with whose help could he best make such a decision and carry it out if not before Mary, chosen from all eternity, a sign given us by the Lord himself?

You for whom the things you must give up impede the step you need to take, you see her loving attentiveness. You whose wounds that need healing enfeeble your steps, you see her tender care. And when trials beset you, and bursts of pride alternate with falls and discouragement, allow yourself to be enfolded in her solicitude.

She walks the road with you. Her presence opens in you the breach by which the Lord wishes to enter. She opens you up to the work that he will do within you. "Every branch that does not bear fruit he cuts off, and every branch that bears fruit he prunes so that it may bear more" (Jn 15: 2). The trimming of the vine, is it not done in advance of spring, when the weather is often yet cold and the soil still hard? Don't be surprised by the squalls that accompany the operation. They are the final gasps of winter. The drops of sap that glisten on the end of the cut twig are already announcing the blossoms soon to come.

"A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman" (Apoc 12:1). Above the blows and shocks that a humanity working toward its own rebirth is prey to, above the slow work of conversion operative in each human being, appears this "great sign". Like the lighthouse beacon that, through the thick darkness, points the way to the land of freedom. Its light illumines everyone, its rays shine out for each. And this in proportion to her love, which watches over all of humanity and which draws each toward his own unique, personal vocation.

III - THE "YES" TO LIFE

The vast picture of humanity as it appeared could only call forth sadness and grief on the part of him who out of love had created it. A distressing panorama, ravaged by sin, presented itself to the gaze of "the three divine persons" (Sp. Ex. 102). There was unanimous readiness of the three to fulfill the demands on their love, and to go as far as the supreme requirements of sacrifice called for. The Son would become incarnate. He would save humanity. Our God in three Persons had just resolutely opted to take up his abode among men.

There below, in a country long marked out in a special way, in this Galilee town called Nazareth, we see the small house of her who had been chosen. God's message will touch a soul at prayer. And the message will be heard, for hers is a heart accustomed to silence and to faith, and so ready to welcome it. Everything in Mary is openness and welcome.

"Hail, you who are filled with grace, the Lord is with you. Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you will give him the name, Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give to him the throne of David his father. He will reign in the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never have an end".

An unexpected greeting, an amazing message has just come to her, in whom "the expectations of the centuries found their purest expression". It is the announcement that salvation is on the verge of taking place.

"How can this come about, since I am a virgin?"

No doubt surfaces, not even any surprise. But a question, weighted with a boundless confidence in the ways of her Lord, already foreshadows her positive response.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. That is why the infant born to you will be holy and will be called Son of God".

The Word will become flesh by the power of the Father and the will of the Holy Spirit. The work of salvation is the work of the entire Trinity. The three persons take part in it. It is a gift without reservation: in the heart of Mary the Trinity will make its dwelling. And the message has linked to it a tangible pledge, a sign of the infinite delicacy of God's love: "And, behold, Elizabeth, your kinswoman... for nothing is impossible to God". And then Mary says:

"I am the Lord's servant. Let it be done to me according to your word!"

To the willingness of the Trinity makes echo the YES of humanity in its most exalted member. A woman, ever present to the reality of God, has just recognized his passage. She has welcomed his message, and at the same time received her mission. Her yes, welling up from the very depths of her being, seals the alliance. She will be the instrument through whom salvation will touch humankind. She will be the one by whom the Light will shine out. In her God's initiative and man's acceptance are joined, and so the Incarnation takes place. In her reply are fused the gift of her human person and the faith that fills her existence.

Her yes is a faith-response. She is called. And she should respond. It is a total yes to her Lord. It is the placing of herself in the hands of God. It is the accepting of her vocation, whose meaning and consequences the passage of time will trace out concretely. There is a unity between the person that she is and the mission that she receives. The uniqueness of her person and her participation in the mission, "being" and "doing", are now forever one.

Her yes is a love-response. Touched by the Love that gives of itself, she becomes love that receives and that

transmits Life to the world. In her is brought about the union of God who saves and humanity that is saved. The mission that she receives links her to the salvation-history of the world. Mary becomes the hyphen between heaven and earth, the earthly spot where the source of life has now welled up, and from which it will pour out in floods upon humanity, for in Mary there are no obstacles to block its passage. She is total availability, total "disponibility". She is the Lord's servant. It will happen to her as he said it would.

The Nativity shows, in a way that can be seen, the salvation brought to men. It sheds light too on the road that leads to Golgotha, on the opposition of the world, on the rejection of "the established powers". "There was no room for them in the inn." The Incarnation is the first phase, the first moment, of the Redemption. For Mary the joy of her motherhood is already accompanied by a quiet questioning on her part as she silently meditates on the signs and the features that accompany the event. Her welcome to the Son already is preparing her for a wider motherhood. Her first "fiat" takes flesh; it, too, begins to receive the distinctive traces of Him at whose service it has placed her. Salvation has just been brought to the world. God's initiative, revealed in the secret dialogue between them, made known in the commonplace occurrence of an ordinary human event; this has marked her who welcomed it with the silence of adoration, acceptance of his way and effacement before his work.

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Do you see why Mary is proposed to you as the "image of our own collaboration in his mission" (GP 8)? Do you recognize in the initiative of God and the acceptance of Mary the distinctive marks of all sending, of all mission? In the Incarnation, which imprints upon the history of humanity its true course and destiny, there appears in Mary the profile of human response and human participation.

She does not anticipate events nor forestall them. Her life, made up of faithfulness to the ordinary, is, in its totality, placed under the gaze of her Lord. Prayer radiates and sheds light on her entire existence. It is there she prepares and maintains her attitudes of openness, of acceptance, of availability. More than that, prayer is for her a special relationship which sheds light on all things and which gives to the commonness of appearances their weight in eternal values. Look at her!

The Lord is knocking at your door. What matters the way he knocks, whether it be a discreet invitation, a "gentle breeze", or a call that brooks no hesitation. It is to the "fiat", the "yes", that you are invited. It is to the gift of your person that you are called. It is to the salvation of humanity that you are associated. Your life is being tested. It is to a global commitment that the Lord calls you. He asks for a more radical adherence of your entire being. Love calls for love. It integrates all, it excludes nothing. It is the way that leads to Life, the foundation on which the Kingdom will be built.

Don't try to guess where that will lead you, or the demands that your "yes" will involve. Look at Mary. From her you will learn the response the Lord awaits, the response that will associate you, even you, in the mission of her Son. She speaks only to say yes and to humble herself in the presence of her God. "I am the servant of the Lord". It is an acceptance of the divine initiative. The consequence follows: "let it be done to me as you say". It is a global "yes" which will spell itself out and achieve its results through adherence to the Person and to the mission of her Son. It is a gift of self, decisive, in and through which the love of God will penetrate so as to illuminate the world and touch the hearts of men.

She feels it, she knows it, and her joy bursts forth. It is a thanksgiving. "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has cast his eyes on his lowly servant". Salvation is being accomplished. God is visibly at work. His People have found grace, and are journeying toward their Lord. Thanksgiving, for "his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him, and holy is his name".

And when the time comes for you to make the gift of your being, to the Son to follow him, to the Father to serve him, address yourself to her. Entrust this poor offering of yourself to her. Place in her hands this will to make communion with the will that gives life to and draws to itself all people. Recommend to her protection the decisive step that is asked of you. Then, sure of and strong in the knowledge of her support, give yourself, humbly and joyously, to what He will ask of you.

IV - THE OTHER SIDE OF THINGS

Shepherds and wise men followed each other, witnessing the other face of the event. Under the impulse of the revelation received, they had recognized in the Infant of the manger the Saviour, Christ the Lord. Their presents, the worship of their faith, the gift of their joy, had left "wondering" all those who heard them. Simeon, moved by the Spirit, was still more precise: "my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared in the eyes of all peoples". Anna will speak of the infant to all who await the deliverance of Jerusalem. The humble and the men and women of God see and believe. And in spite of their differences of state, culture and age..., there stands out the unique essential on which all their words agree, their faith converges: this infant will gather together all humanity.

Wonder, praise, joy, thanksgiving --- these are the feelings of these first witnesses. "As for Mary, she carefully kept all these memories and meditated on them in her heart!" These different words that she heard prolonged and confirmed the original message she had received in the secret of her heart. Before these marvels of the Lord, her heart remained silent, she contemplated. In this infant as he grew up, God's greatness and his way of doing things were shown. What an ineffable mystery: creative and redemptive Love, near and present to her in her daily existence, showed to Mary the path of God.

The meditating in her heart of these recollections and

the contemplation of her child caused to mature still more her already keen understanding of the Lord. The same attentiveness, the same respect, let her gather, as day followed day, the signs of his presence. Child of her flesh and yet Other, her attachment to Jesus readied her for a still deeper union. Her first "fiat" repeated itself and shaped the direction of all her life.

The way of the Son, "a sign of contradiction", became that of the mother. Does not unity mean sharing? Had not Simeon prophesied, "And your own soul a sword shall pierce"? Soon it will mean fleeing along the roads that lead to Egypt. Already there is a point of conflict between Christ and evil. Already is being traced the shadow of the cross that, following her Son, will be the lot of Mary and of all those who give themselves to God for the service of the Kingdom. And in her heart, where each new event leaves its work, is being forged her union with the mystery of her Son, her conformity to his existence.

Each word, each gesture, each fact reveals, in the light of this Infant, the otherside of things. What is seen is but the smallest part of what is at stake. For the heart that meditates, for the soul that prays, the reality of the ordinary opens up to reveal what lies beyond. The limited dimension of things acquires thus its real significance. An interior gaze makes up for the deficiencies of an exterior sight always quite limited. An attentive ear captures the new resonance that beats deep within the heart and draws upon it. A new reality breaks through the thousand trifles of daily living, the quite ordinary tasks, the simplest encounters.

But this reality reveals itself by shaping and conforming the one whom it touches. "Did you not know I must be about my Father's business?" After three days of anxious searching, Mary received but this lesson from her Son. A reply that pains. And yet, a reply that must be assimilated in order to become the key for reading and interpreting everything. The priority is clearly underlined: that first of all he must be busy with his Father's business. No doubt Mary always knew it, but now she learned that the Father's service might involve something painful even to his closest relatives. "But they did not understand then what he had just said to them. Then he went back with them and returned to Nazareth. And his mother carefully kept all these events in her heart". It takes time to understand.

It is always in calm reflection on events and in con-

templation of Jesus that one assimilates the new step that the Lord asks. Mary opened herself without reserve to the words of the angel. Now these become - each event aids the process - the very orientation of her existence. The same fidelity prevails at every moment. She "keeps carefully" and "guards faithfully" her recollection of all these events in her heart. Her original "yes" and the offering then of herself find in these events their ultimate shape and configuration. The pain she experiences, is it not already a sign and a oneness with the sufferings Jesus will endure? The road of God is the path of redemption. First taken by the Son, he associates his mother in it. The steps of Mary follow the traces of the steps of her Son. With him she slowly discovers the true face of things, enlightened by the grace of God.

And when comes the time for good-byes, when Jesus leaves Galilee for the Jordan, Mary once again acquiesces to the will of the Father. Her Son she offers for the mission that is his destiny. Her response is as always: one of faith in the work of salvation he is carrying out, one of love for the mercy he is according to his people. Once more, she effaces herself, pondering in her heart the course of things, faithful to the Spirit who leads her. She takes up her life again, absorbed in the thousand and one tasks and encounters that form its fabric, free to continually discover there the thread of saving love. Mary continues to be the precious auxiliary of the divine will.

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Day after day the call of the Lord is rendered concrete in your life. Family, work, civic concerns.... All the places that demand your presence offer you at the same time the unique occasion of communing with the reality they convey. They demand from you a deep involvement and an ever new apprenticeship in freedom. They demand that your gaze be purified, that your ear detect in and through the noise and the hurly-burly, the vibrations of grace at work. For what is involved is the adherence of your heart to the will of God accomplishing itself in the concrete as the days pass. With whom will you learn better how to do this than with her who was totally present to the unfolding of the divine plan in Jesus? With her, who has shown you the road to take, as she kept and meditated all that was happening, in the very presence of the person of Jesus.

The magnetic pole of your life, its measuring rod, is the person of Jesus Christ. And who can better introduce

you into this deep understanding of Jesus, if not his mother? To whom better than to her could you entrust your feeble efforts to respond and to correspond to that which is asked of you? The attachment you show to her Son has been tested in a daily fidelity. Now he invites you to a deeper union, a more entire conformity. Take note of Mary's example and contemplate in her the way that he wants you to follow.

It is the way of the perfect response, leading to a commitment to his Father's business, leading to the only response he desires, laying you open to the decisive choice he is expecting from you. The way of true collaboration which, effacing itself, adheres to his mission. The way of a growing faithfulness to the reality which throbs underneath the appearances of quite ordinary things.

V - AN APOSTOLIC LIFE

It is question, you are well aware, of a long journey of which you are not master. Your road, though now you have a better idea of what it will be like, always leads through not a few rough spots. Things become twice as thorny and a number of interior resistances manifest themselves. The light that makes clear the goal sheds on the road leading in that direction one single beam. The call of Christ to be his disciple is also an invitation to follow his path. It is to a radical option that you are called. All the same, the attraction you feel is very often mixed with aversion and repugnance. The approaches are not gained by will power. It is by prayer and contemplation that they will allow themselves to be traversed.

You are faced with a decisive choice, and so it is the dispositions of your heart that you must first make sure of. In a meditation that he suggests for this purpose St. Ignatius invites you to address yourself to Our Lady, to her Son, to the Father, asking of them the grace to be received "in the highest spiritual poverty and, if the divine Majesty should be served by it and wishes to choose and receive me to it, also to actual poverty; bearing humiliations and injustice so as to be able thereby to imitate him more, provided that I can do so without doing wrong to anyone and without displeasing his divine Majesty". (Sp. Ex. 147). It is a grace that is given, and only your freedom can dispose you for it.

In the face of such a radical option, it is almost instinctive to turn toward her who is "the image of our collaboration in his mission" and to entrust yourself to "her intercession in fulfilling our vocation" (G.P.8). To contemplate her and to pray to her. Faced with this invitation which asks of you to be poor, look at Mary. At the

moment of casting off into the deep from the familiar shores that were yours, ask her in humble supplication for the grace to conquer the barriers and resistances that are felt to your freedom.

A single "yes"--and which was never in any way retracted--develops and deepens in her in and through the events which conform her to God's will and way of acting. The dispositions of her heart, sustained through all her days, insure the consonance of her life with the work of the Spirit. She no longer belongs to herself. She has given herself, and this gift of herself molds her in her participation in the work of her Son. Open to the Word, she is open too to the action of the Spirit. Each event that marks her heart furrows in her soul a greater emptiness of self, a more profound attitude of listening. Her capacity for acceptance emerges heightened so that it approaches the boundless measure that is that of her child. Everything in her has become him. It is a total unselfing in order to make place for the only love that counts, a love that includes all of humanity. It is the road that he was the first to take.

To say yes to the struggle that is involved in this fundamental option for life and for Christ, to lay yourself open to the mission that he destines you for, invoke the help of his mother. With her, address yourself to her Son. It is not you who will make yourself poor, it is he who will thus shape and fashion you. As you take one by one the steps that finally cut you loose, learn from her how to contemplate her Son and to walk like him in the light of full day.

Allow yourself to be personally challenged by the word that the Son communicates to you and, by listening to his mother, learn to welcome in you the Kingdom that he is building in you. Hear her say, "Do whatever he tells you". And as long ago at Cana, count on her intercession.

Submit yourself to the Spirit who is working and transforming and preparing in you a soil able to receive his grace. It is to a permanent commitment that he invites you, a definitive gift, made in response to his call. To a yes that is the consecration of your life. To a "yes" without limits that puts you at his disposition, to serve there where his hand will lead. What he asks of you is a freer and more conscious adherence to the way that he has made known to you.

Years have gone by since the day when by chance--but was it chance?--his presence became more real for you. He drew you along a certain path, one of the many paths trodden in the Church by countless witnesses of his love. For you, it was the Ignatian way. It is there he was waiting for you. It is by that way that he desired your collaboration. In it were linked together your vocation and your mission. You found yourself on this road with others, and together we have traveled the road. Together we have made discovery of this "way of Christian life" which was to "aid us to give ourselves always more generously to God in loving and serving all mankind in the world of today" (G.P. 1). Together we searched, together we attempted to faithfully live out what is meant by Christian Life Community. But in the measure that you advanced on the road, there appeared more and more clearly the "pearl of great price" for which one must leave everything.

In the face of this call become so clear, you made the act of your definitive commitment, in which was merged for you the unconditional gift of your person to the Lord, admission into this specific community that is the Christian Life Community, and commitment to its specific way of life. It was both the culmination of a humble and ardent search, and a new departure, a being sent on mission in and through all the situations of your life as a lay person.

Does it surprise you that such an election, such a decision has, from the very beginning, been placed under the protection of Our Lady? That in her "fiat" there has been recognized the model of our collaboration in his mission? Having said yes to grace, she conformed herself to it in everything and so cooperated in the salvation of humanity. The gift of God, welcomed and accepted by her, bore fruit, and brought with it other graces. It is to a contemplation in faith that we are invited, so that there may become traced in us and in our mission the distinctive characteristics of her example. So that, with her, we may participate in the work of her Son.

The apostolic life of Mary has much to teach us. It is in observing her that you will learn, little by little, what is asked of you. Her mission she received from God. She did not take it up on her own. She received it at the time fixed by God, when the moment had come. Her entire life is ordered to that which the Lord asks. She awaits with patience, she carries out her task in fidelity, she effaces herself before the work of salvation that she is

placed at the service of. Her mission she achieves silently, tenaciously, serenely, fully inserted into the life of her people and into the social and political context of her country.

More than that, in her is accomplished in a profound way the unity of an existence interiorly united to God and exteriorly consecrated to his service. Her mission is given her in the secret of her heart, in prayer. This mission will be made fruitful by the work of the Spirit in her. She will carry it out by conceiving a child, by the tasks and concerns of every day, by a life and work similar to that of all the women around her, in a country under foreign occupation. The germ of faith takes root in the concrete, in daily existence. How often are we not weighed down by external activity and cut off within us from the source of what gives it life? Or, on the contrary, take refuge in a tranquil "contemplation" that ignores the proclamation of the message of God. In Mary there was none of either. Open to the divine will and to the Spirit's action, her life at each instance captured the divine inspiration and echoed it in the hard efforts of the apostle. She is contemplation in action and action in contemplation.

Her Son, had he not confirmed this indispensable unity? "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice". To hear, and to put into practice.

His mother, who had come to visit him, heard too, heard in fact from the lips of her own child, this recalling of the absolute priority of God: my mother, my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice. And she receives this statement with that same attitude she has always had, of acceptance. The demands of the apostolic vocation relegate to second place even the most legitimate ties of affection. Respect for the mission of her Son leaves its mark on her own vocation. She effaces herself.

No apparent success attended her service. The road is sown with traps laid for her Son: lack of understanding of his message, people whose aim was to eliminate him. It is already the way of the cross. Nonetheless, in spite of the disconcerting ways of God, Mary remains faithful to her response, dedicated only to the accomplishment of the task entrusted to her. It is a faith-response, a love-response, to the gift of grace that has laid hold of her. "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word!"

VI - AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

The hour had come when the Son of man was to be glorified. Lifted up from the earth, he would draw all men to himself. While he had foretold it, none of his disciples had imagined the horror of this spectacle, which was something they could not understand. Everything seemed to be finished. And yet this was exactly the moment when the plan of God would be effected. A cross raised above a deliberately hostile world held wrapped within it the seeds of the resurrection. The grain of wheat had fallen into the earth, it was dying, it would bring forth much fruit. The passion of Christ had just opened the sluice-gate, whence escaped a rushing torrent of mercy, the love of God for all humankind. But how can one grasp this? What human reasoning could pierce the mystery that was being accomplished?

During three long hours, standing at the foot of the cross, stayed the mother of Jesus. She had just encountered her Son again. For the last goodbye. Three years had passed since the time when, going down to the Jordan, Jesus began announcing the Good News. Three years during which she carried in her heart and in her solitude the mission of her son. Three years during which each day that passed deepened her acquiescence to God, during which each step united her more closely to the work of her Son in silence and effacement. The humble discretion of Mary is a response to the touch of the Spirit, revealing to her day after day where, when, and how to take up her vocation and her mission.

The events of the final days aroused in her heart both pain and concern. The vice of jealousy and of human cruelty inexorably closed in on her child. Her own path, which followed that of her Son, began to point towards the same Calvary. The sacrifice of the Son was being consummated, and it brought with it the involvement of the mother.

The Son is there, in the suffering of agony. Near to her, and yet how far! Entirely abandoned to the will of the Father the Son gives himself up. It is the complete gift, the sacrifice of his life, atonement in lieu of sinners. The Son pays even to the last drop of his blood. The Son dies beneath the eyes of his mother. Present yet helpless, Mary accepts in her heart the farewell of death, the rending last goodbye. A sword pierces her heart.

A new event--the most painful of all--penetrates a heart that has been the depository of so many memories. It is not added to them, rather it casts light on all of them as it burns with the fire of supreme sacrifice. In its light every word, every gesture, every question, acquire their true meaning, their real dimension. So with the message of the angel: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." So with the prophecy of Simeon: "A light to enlighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel." These and others at this moment are laden with the measure of the grandeur and the glory. They are evidences of love. Had he not in this regard already explained: "There is no greater love than to give one's life for those one loves"? The words of Jesus, carefully preserved, reveal to her, now in the shadow of the cross, the key to their deepest meaning.

This last contemplation of her Son nailed to the wood of the cross associates her in the Passion. It is an experience of the Passion. Indissolubly linked with the person and the mission of Jesus, she shares the same destiny, one reserved for those who love. Mary lets the suffering, the solitude, the outpouring of God made man penetrate within her, so that she herself becomes suffering, solitude and outpouring, becomes a true servant of God. Love means communion. One with the Son in his total abandonment to the will of the Father, Mary offers to God her ultimate "yes".

Is it, then, the end of the mission? No. Standing at the foot of the cross, Mary receives from the mouth of the dying Christ the precious legacy which links her forever with the universal mission: "Woman, behold your son". She becomes by a new title what she has been since the Annunciation. Mother of God the Son, we see her now as mother of all the sons and daughters of God. Her motherhood expands to the dimensions of the people who have been saved. A new link binds her to "her own". At this moment when the earthly life of her Son Jesus is being completed, Mary becomes the bright image and all-pure model of the new Church being born. She both incarnates it, and

is its support. Far be it from her to indulge in the grief that is self-pity. The sacrifice of her Son unites her to his brothers and sisters, it establishes round about her the community of the redeemed. It makes her their mother, and draws her to care for them and to watch over them.

"Son, behold your mother". Look whom I am giving you. She will be your mother. With her you will learn to come to me, for it is I who am bringing you to her, so that you may come to know me better. You will entrust your road, your path, to her motherly tenderness, she will guide your steps so that each of them responds to my expectations. You will learn from her what is the love that says "yes", the love that serves, the love that gathers round me all the children who are dispersed, that they may return together to the Father's house. Through contact with her you will come to appreciate my light, which is the transference of Life. You will share the suffering that is mine and you will be linked to the redemption of the world. You wish to cooperate in this redemption? See then in her the model of the collaboration that I look for.

The road leads you to the Golgotha where I continue to be hungry and thirsty and a stranger and a prisoner. Where I continue to be tortured, insulted, exploited, forbidden, the victim of drugs, shot, hung up... Human faces disfigured by blows... Faces masked or leering revealing the marks of sin... Oppressed multitudes that die... Multitudes silenced, with the spirit gone out of them... People torn by disunity... A creation in chains that holds me prisoner, crucifies me.

It is there, in my footsteps, on the roads of the world, that I await your love that will say "yes", that will serve, that will gather together my scattered sons and daughters. I wait for you to take up the struggle, to throw yourself into the jungle, with love your only armor. Wait for you to be ready to be broken so that the kingdom may come, that the will of the Father be done on earth as in heaven. Remember, it is a total gift that is involved. Draw on the involvement of her whom I am leaving you and find there the inspiration to give yourself totally to God in union with her. Her who by accepting the designs of God became your mother and the mother of all. For every person you will meet is my brother and sister, and so too her son and daughter.

VII - IN THE LIGHT OF EASTER MORNING

Only yesterday you found yourself beside the tomb, o Mary, in grief and in tears. Sad, but not despairing. The ways of God, however disconcerting they may be, are still the ways of God. No doubt, no bitterness dwells in your heart. Your lack of understanding in the face of apparent defeat is consumed in the fire of the sacrifice that, in union with your Son, you make and address to the Father. With him you repeat, "Father, not my will but yours be done".

But what is it that stirs as the new dawn breaks? What liberating message is it that this springtime stirring carries with it? What is this new wind that is sweeping through the world? This dazzling light that rolls back the darkness?

O Virgin Mary, always present, who never once transgressed the way of your Lord! You who in your unshaken fidelity knew how to yield to all the movements of the Spirit! It is to you that this morning in its brightness brings response. Unutterable joy, profound peace, that surpass all doubt. The certitude of the Presence. It is he, the Risen Lord. The First to be associated to the plan of God, privileged witness throughout the long darkness, you have just discovered the moment of victory. You have just seen Him.

Going before you, he points out the road to follow. The Kingdom is to be constructed, the message proclaimed,

the brethren assembled. Life has conquered death. The Spirit breathes, it is he who animates persons and things. You know that you cannot contain him, that he leads...and shows the road to follow. Filled with grace from the beginning, you were the first too to perceive the light of the Resurrection and to receive the supreme consolation.

Soon Mary Magdalen comes to confirm that she has seen him. He has called her by her name and sent her to the brethren. The pilgrims of Emmaus have recognized him in the breaking of bread. The disciples all together have seen him. "Peace be to you!" From all sides the news spreads. He is risen. He has appeared. They recognized him. You, Mary, you know it already. You hurry to them, as once you hurried to Elizabeth, to share their joy. You will stay with them, in the midst of them, the visible link of the unity your Son has forged. The community of brothers and sisters, of those who believe, is born.

As we watch you, Mary, on this Easter morning, what an example you give us of the way to live this new life! Led by the Spirit, all of life expands. The new man rises, the new world sees the light. And in you, they contemplate the new creature. They see in you the gifts that the Spirit concedes to those who allow themselves to be guided by him: peace, joy, unity, brotherly love, the apostolic spirit. And to you they entrust this source of life that they feel in themselves.

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Peace be with you! It is the greeting and the gift of the risen Lord. A peace that the world does not know how to give. A deep and simple peace. One that is the hallmark of a being united with God. A gift and sign. Gift of the Spirit who communicates himself, of the love that gives itself. Sign, because an echo of this profound existence in union with the risen Christ. A peace that remains, not just in recollected prayer but at the very heart of your existence, punctuated by its obligations, jostled by events. All day long you find yourself called on to make choices. No area of your life is without them. If your decision is made in accord with this presence of God in you, if your way of acting is in harmony with the choices of Jesus Christ, then the peace remains. It tells you that the way you are following is the right one.

hand, inserted into the mystical Body which has received the commission. The Lord goes before you on the roads of Galilee...

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"Each of our groups is a community in Christ, a cell of his Mystical Body, whose members are bound together by their common commitment, their common way of life and their filial love for Mary" (G.P. 6). It is to her then that you spontaneously look, to ask of her to live this commitment in fidelity to the Spirit. To ask that he may continue what he has begun, shaping us more and more to the demands of the Kingdom, following Christ, toward the Father, in communion with his Church.

VIII - THE COMMUNITY OF THE BRETHREN

With them, you find yourself in the upper room where with one heart "all remained faithful to prayer". These are they whom the Spirit will soon clothe with power from on high. These are they whom he will send out to make disciples of all nations. You, Mary, the Spirit laid hold of long ago, even to making your life the very history of his work, to making you the perfect image of human collaboration.

You find yourself there, Mary, among them, as a luminous symbol of the mission that awaits them. The risen Son is present, he too, present in the mystical Body that he is building. It is to the community of the brethren, guided by the Spirit, that he entrusts the task of making him present in the hearts of men and women, of recognizing him in the march of history, of discovering him in human situations. The Church which he has just now founded is a community of men and women called by him so as to live with him, according to the personal vocation given to each, and to be sent into the world to work for the kingdom. A community of brothers and sisters open to the action of the Spirit, who is busy sowing the seed of the resurrection.

It is this Church, Mary, that you sum up, that you incarnate. You were left to it so that it might learn by studying you how to be the servant of God. That it might be, in imitation of you, an acceptance and a welcome of every divine initiative. That it might meditate in its heart the signs of his Presence and preserve his insertion in the world of mankind all through the centuries.

Does the Church need at times to question itself about its mission, about the particular tasks it is called to do in each age? If so, it finds in the contours of your life the elements and attitudes of the answer to be given. Like you the Church is mother, bearing Christ to the world it is immersed in. So it meditates your path, from the Incarnation to the Redemption wrought on the cross, from the Resurrection to the birth of the infant Church. It is a path that reveals the Lord and manifests to humankind the strength of his love. A path, Mary, where you are present, and where you share his destiny.

As you, the Church is filled with grace, the grace of salvation that, in and through this community of the brethren, seeks to reach all people. A visible sign it is, making known to the world the design of the Father for the salvation of all, the call of Christ to follow him. A community united by the Spirit "in love and action". Where then will it recognize better the profound meaning and dimension of this love and action, this communion and service, than in you, o Mary?

What witness is more credible than that you offer? What better example could there be to give inspiration for the road it must travel, and to mark it with the manner and the approach that is pleasing to God? An approach, a way of being and serving, that is the fruit of the Spirit and that reflects the bright and clear ideal of humility and of poverty.

A way that leaves one open to the grace of the Lord, as, making its way through space and time, the Church finds itself exposed in turn to buffeting, to calm weather, to persecution. What a standing invitation to allow itself to put off its own will, to put away all self-centered love, so as to be conformed and united more and more to the Son of man and to become a supple instrument in his hands. To have at heart such a concern for humanity, for men and women, as to find an apostolic challenge in every human presence and activity.

But, Mary, you are also she who protects the Church of your Son all through its history. You know that it cannot but be a sign of contradiction among the peoples of the earth. That it cannot but share the destiny of your Son. Like him, living on earth and yet having no lasting dwelling place. Seeing the crowd rushing up and seeing it fall away. Being an object of contempt and even of hatred.

You know that its road will be rough. That its Lord shapes and fashions it by a thousand trials, so that more and more his true face may appear transparent and his true nature be reflected in it. But you see too that which, in this body as it grows, suffers and shares in the Passion of the Son, on its way to the resurrection. Invisible yet present, you accompany. With the same effectiveness and the same self-effacement.

You see the whole Body, you see each of its members. A community born out of the supreme sacrifice of your Son, and the depository of his saving grace. A sublime reality, but how poorly reflected in its members taken as a whole, so limited by their unbelievable human weakness. And yet, a community that is the bearer of the new covenant, a community marked by a divine predilection, a community "baptized in the Holy Spirit." A community so loved by your divine Son that he has linked himself forever to its human weakness in order to save it and to draw it into the thrust of his victory.

As we contemplate your Son, linked with this Church, we measure--only too well--the extent of our misery, the inadequacy of our response. We understand still better why, on a day so heavy with its gloom and its weight, you were named our mother and given to us as such. It was that, following in your footsteps, we would learn to live and serve as sons and daughters.

Our worst fault and our most habitual one, might it not be our lack of love? So preoccupied with ourselves that we go so far as to forget who is our reason for living. So filled with a ridiculous smug complacency that others cannot but vanish from our horizon. Enclosed within our fortress after having carefully bolted all the exits. What should be the channels of grace have become dikes, obstructing all passage.

This community of the brethren was founded to be the visible sign of the unity restored in Jesus Christ--and yet, how often has not the spirit of discord prevailed among us? The leadership of the Church systematically called in question, the ministry of the shepherds subjected to negative criticism, the complementary nature of members and local communities misunderstood... The absence of dialogue, the refusal of collaboration... Legitimate differences have become insuperable barriers. Love, growing silent, has yielded to rivalries, to fierce struggles. Blows from within have added themselves to storms that beat from outside.

"Union with Christ leads to union with the Church" (GP 5). And union with the Church leads us to Christ. The way of life proposed for us is verified in, and authenticated by, "sentire cum Ecclesia", a sense of the Church. It is a gift of the Spirit to him who follows faithfully in the footsteps of Christ. Any failure, any deficiency, any indifference in this domain enfeebles the missionary sense, the unity, the effectiveness, of the whole community.

We have written in our General Principles that "we rely on her intercession in fulfilling our vocation". It is a way of saying that we count on you, Mary, to live and to act as sons and daughters of the Church, inspired by love.

OUR LADY OF THE WAY

The road gradually opened out. It entered into time, yet transcended it on every side. Immense universal diffusion, veritable and infinite liberation of humanity. The road taken by the Saviour of the world. The road taken by the Word of God. The road of his humanity; a humanity made possible by love and lived on the one soil capable of making it fertile: in poverty and self-giving.

You saw him take that road, Mary. And you took it with Him. Each of its stages became a stage of your own road, to the point of blending yours completely with his. You were the first to walk after him, first to understand the way of God, first to utter the yes of a saved humanity.

He went down that road. You let him go, so that the will of Him who had sent him would be fulfilled. And you accompanied him trudging through the foothills. How docile, how faithful an instrument, diminishing so that he would increase, disappearing so that his Kingdom would grow. When the Apostles pray together in the Upper Room, you are there. Present, but discreet. They will receive the Holy Spirit and set out, proclaiming the Good News down the highways of the world. You, Mary, effaced yourself before those new

sons, bearing their mission in your heart and your prayers. Mother of eternity, you accompanied them down all their roads, perfect exemplar of the way to follow.

After them will come other witnesses to the faith. An immense people will arise, nations of the East and the West will set out for the light they have glimpsed. The redeeming grace will not cease to stir individuals and entire peoples, amid all sorts of difficulties, despite ever so many obstacles, to start them on their way. You, Our Lady of all times and all moments, make it your task to prepare and guide, to alert and strengthen, so that all will hear the call, will advance toward your Son and work for the coming of his Kingdom. But above all, to the extent that they want to, they will find in you the example of a genuine participation in the liberation of mankind.

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In the autumn of the year 1537, Saint Ignatius arrived in Rome. The following year, on Christmas Day, he was ordained a priest. He frequently celebrated Mass in a parish church near where he lodged at the time, in the parish of the Astalli family, where there was an altar consecrated to Our Lady of the Way (Madonna della Strada). There too, Francis Xavier and Peter Faber used to offer the Holy Sacrifice during the time they were in Rome, that is, till 1540. On June 24, 1541, Pope Paul III gave that little church to the Society of Jesus, which he had just approved some nine months earlier.

Besides Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, Peter Faber, all the first companions will come here to venerate the picture of the Virgin : Peter Canisius, Stanislas Kostka, Francis Borgia, and so many others. Blessed by the Madonna della Strada at that altar, they will say farewell and set out for India, China, Japan, the Islands of Oceania, Brazil, Paraguay, Canada, the shores of Africa. Amid endless fatigues and perils, the vow they pronounced at Mary's altar will uphold those apostles who set out down the high ways of the world to make Jesus Christ known and bring his message of salvation to new peoples searching for the light. A life of sacrifices ending in martyrdom sometimes. A poor life with no other consolations than the crucifix, the picture of the Virgin that they carried and the living memory of their community scattered in the service of the Church. But a life enriched by the divine blessing pro-

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Doesn't our desire to be faithful to the CLC way of life bring us, in a privileged way, toward Mary? "We venerate the Mother of God in a special way, and we trust in her intercession to fulfill our vocation" (GP 8).

All along the route, at each crossroad, you meet Mary. She knows all those highways, because she trudged them herself. She preceded you and waits for you at the end of the road. She offers to accompany you. She invites you to travel the road together. So that your journey will resemble, be identified more and more with that of her Son. Whatever your way of addressing her, whatever the form of your prayer, it will open up a space for the Spirit to act. Your prayer will commit you. Venerating her is to commit yourself to move, to be dispossessed, to give yourself. No one ever went so far in giving himself to her Son's mission. No one was ever so pure, so that the work of the Spirit could be seen radiating forth. No one was ever freer to collaborate in God's plan without being presumptuous, without being afraid. Nor was anyone ever more in love with the justice of God, more loyal to an oppressed people. Indeed, Mary's whole life becomes the way for the Kingdom of God to enter into human history.

"He has shown the power of his arm,
he has routed the proud of heart.
He has pulled down princes from their thrones
and exalted the lowly.
The hungry he has filled with good things,
the rich sent empty away.
He has come to the help of Israel his servant,
mindful of his mercy.
--according to the promise he made to our ancestors--
of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever."

To go with Mary is to follow the direction of her life. A poor life, one of solidarity with the poor and oppressed, a life docile to the Spirit, who molds it till it becomes like her Son's. Then service, availability for others, the sharing of efforts can become open channels for the gospel message. That message can answer the hopes of men, their aspirations of living with their heads erect. Then the announcement of the gospel can reach the hearts

of men, and through those hearts can free from sin whatever they have defiled : human relations, systems, institutions, structures. Like Mary, and following her example, the response of men can become a participation in their own liberation. God took the initiative. He does not cease making his call heard in the circumstances of today. But when he gave us Mary as our Mother, he was good enough to leave us, in her, the perfect model to imitate with our human response.

"We trust in her intercession
to fulfill our vocation"
(GP. 8)

doesn't that suggest simultaneously a plural and a singular? A plural: the CLC members scattered in the various countries of the world? A singular: the one, identical vocation that they share and that binds their community together?

Together, we have been called. Together, we must respond. And we entrust the togetherness of our world-wide community to her intercession. For our community too is on the road. Called to keep moving on, with our ears attentive to catch the voice of Him who calls, our eyes scrutinizing the signs through which He speaks. Like each of us, our community is called to a transformation, a conversion, an encounter with Jesus Christ, to witness to him along the roads and pathways of mankind.

May the response of all of us who are "Companions of the Road with Mary" in today's world become more and more like hers : "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me".

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