

“Mary’s love and the love of the Church is a concrete love! Concreteness is the quality of this maternity of women, of nuns. Concrete love.”

Pope Francis, 16th May 2015

Restoring the world’s spiritual equilibrium: a Benedictine Sister at prayer in Ukraine.

Dear Friends,

Easter is a feast of new birth, a feast of new life. That is why there is a profound connection between the Paschal Mystery and motherhood. The Church, which was born of the Passion of the Redeemer, is called to be entirely maternal. But in order to be so, she needs the radiance of womanhood. It was the Woman, Mary, who stood beneath the Cross and so became Mother to us all. It was the women who were first at the tomb of Christ, who saw the Risen Lord and so became apostles to the apostles. The Marian dimension of the Church preceded the Petrine dimension.

The power to confer new life is part of the nature of womanhood. This may be in a physical sense, or it may be in a spiritual sense. A woman can be aware of the innermost heart of the person, homing in on the concrete realities of life; she thinks and feels intuitively, but can also be very practical. To shelter, protect, preserve, nurture, foster growth, share life – this is the natural, maternal attitude of a woman’s heart and soul. That is why the great martyr Cardinal Mindszenty used to say, “Whenever I see a cross, bedecked with flowers, I see in it

an image of a woman’s life. The life and vocation of a woman embraces roses and the cross alike. She lives for others and seeks their happiness, even at the price of her own blood.”

Any discussion of the dignity and role of women in society and in the Church has long been a burning issue. The emancipation of women is a fact of our times. In the past women were often robbed of their dignity,



“Without the genius of woman, the Church as Mother cannot bear lasting fruit.”

their true virtues unknown, excluded and even forced into servitude. There is no longer any question of returning to the old stereotype of the woman as entirely dependent on the man. Yet nonetheless, the true genius of woman should not be lost in the name of “liberation” from “male domination”. The emancipation of women is often simply equated with the elimination of gender-based differences and with sexual liberation. But this is not only to lose sight of the true value of womanhood, but even, it seems, to poison its life-giving qualities at their root,

thereby causing a spiritual pandemic. In this edition of the Mirror we will focus on the vocation and work of the women religious, identifying the true “genius of woman” without which the Church, as Mother, cannot bear lasting fruit. In their vocation of bridal espousal to Christ they do not lose their womanhood, but rather in a special way render it fruitful. Their wide-ranging ministry of service – of solemn prayer, works of mercy, propagation of the Faith, caring for children and young people, silent adoration – enfolds all the human family in the love of Christ. They are our universal mothers and sisters. We thank God for these exceptional women, and we thank you for enabling us to support them around the world by your prayers and sacrifices.

My warmest wishes and Easter blessings to you and all your families

Your grateful friend,

P. Martin M. Barta

Fr Martin Maria Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant



A Fortress of Prayer in Bukavu

“Behold, the handmaid of the Lord.” (Lk 1:38)

Our blessed Lady heard the Angel’s word and answered in all simplicity, surrendering to the will of God.

This contemplative surrender brings about the conversion of the world. The silent abandonment of the contemplative restores “the spiritual equilibrium in the world”, according to Father Werenfried. From its earliest days ACN has relied on the prayer of these religious houses, initially in Eastern Europe and now on every continent. In Bukavu, in the

Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Trappist nuns pray daily for ACN. There are 22 of them in the convent of Our Lady of Divine Light, many of them young women. They survive by rearing chickens and growing vegetables, and also thanks to your generosity. We have promised them **£25,400** this year for their apostolate. In this region, marked by war and hunger, we can see what Father Werenfried meant when



An oasis of peace: the Trappist nuns in their convent garden.

he spoke about contemplative convents as “spiritual fortresses”, “making visible the sacred and spiritual in a world that is losing the sense of the sacred.” ●



Giving joy: Sister Maria Fernanda in the favela.

Seeing the Need

“They have no wine.” (Jn 2:3)

Mary saw that there was a real need at the feast in Cana, and turned to Jesus.

Seeing the need, helping by their prayers and deeds, bringing comfort and courage, like Mary in Cana, and thus showing that Jesus forgets no one. This is the ministry of the Dominican Sisters of Mary, the Morning Star, in the Archdiocese of Aracajú in **Brazil**. Five Sisters came here originally, now there are eight. They go into the favelas, the city slums,

to provide hot meals and invite the children and young people to come and join in the Rosary and learn about the Catholic Faith. For part of the terrible deprivation in this region, teeming as it is with sects, is the lack of knowledge, the ignorance of the truth. And ACN Child’s Bible is proving its worth here. Now, faced with growing pastoral and evangelistic work, the Sisters urgently need a car. We are helping with a contribution of **£6,000** towards the cost. ●

A Place to Commune with God

“Do whatever he tells you!” (Jn 2:5)

Our Lady’s words to the waiters at Cana are one of only four occasions in the Gospels when she is recorded as speaking.

The Missionary Sisters of the Most Holy Redeemer in Chernihiv, **Ukraine**, take them very seriously. They visit women’s prisons, care for the handicapped, addicts, alcoholics, and young single mothers. They also preach the Gospel message in this region spiritually devastated by communism, where religious knowledge is very sparse,

yet the hunger for it great. They are doing what the Gospel tells them – only there are too few of them. They have been in the parish here for nine years, initially there were just the three of them. Now four more are hoping to join them. “The people need us here”, says Mother Theodora, the Provincial Superior of the congregation in Ukraine. But what they now need “is a space for quiet communion with God”; they want to be able to listen in silence to what He tells them. They plan to do this by extending the convent. We are helping with **£21,900**. ●



A selfie: three young missionary Sisters at work.



Ambassadors of His Love

“Whoever does the will of God... is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mk 3:35)

These words of Jesus could scarcely be more fittingly applied than to the religious Sisters of this world. People call them “mothers” – and so they are, to countless orphans and abandoned children, to the dying and the bereaved. People call them Sisters – and so they are, to the suffering, the sick, the handicapped, the lonely and elderly. They comfort them, care for them, teach them, pray for them. They don’t simply seek God’s will, they actually do it. They don’t seek any reward, but find it nonetheless in the eyes of those they care for – which for them are the eyes of Christ. They bring with them a spirit of joy and give of themselves selflessly. They are salt and light and leaven for the people they serve. They are Martha and Mary, on every continent. They burn with love for God, as ambassadors of his love. They are the quiet joy of God – and always worth our sacrifices of love. ●





Witnesses of Love



Evangelising in public is forbidden in **Mauritania**, but Sisters are witnessing by their love, as they care for children, nurse the sick and teach the women practical skills such as reading, writing and needlework. And their outreach of love is making a difference. Aminata Diallo was

brought to the Sisters as a malnourished five-year-old, weighing barely 20lbs. The Sisters took her in, taught her mother about good nutrition, helped the child to walk and exercise, visited them at home. Now she is a normal, healthy child and comes regularly to visit the Sisters – as do many of the mothers. Such love fosters trust. But the Sisters are entirely dependent on outside support. There are 27 of them altogether, and we have promised £17,500 to help them spread the love of Christ.



Thomas Heine-Geldern,
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

Ever since our childhood both my wife and I have retained many positive memories of faith-filled, committed religious Sisters, women who commanded respect. When we were young, most of them were still addressed as “Mother” and they conveyed a feeling of security and loving care to us. In the course of my life since then I have met some especially courageous and dynamic Sisters, some of whom hid and sheltered their fellow citizens when they were persecuted for being Jewish during the Nazi era, while others in more recent times developed the idea of the hospices as a Christian alternative to euthanasia.

During my time with ACN I have been privileged to meet many heroic Sisters in the remotest corners of the world, whether in the vastness of Siberia, the civil wars in Syria and Iraq or the downtrodden slums of Egypt and India.

Again and again they surprise us with their energy and joyful outlook, bearing witness in this way to true Christian charity and to God’s ever-present grace. And so they make known to those around them just what the Lord wishes our Church to be.

Let us all give thanks for these consecrated women, for their often overlooked life of service. Let us pray for them and support them wherever they need our help, so that they can live out their charism on behalf of us all.

Need, love and thanks – your letters

“Where God weeps”

When I purchased a few things for Christmas from ACN and got so richly rewarded with the book by Fr Werenfried van Straaten Where God Weeps, I just felt compelled to help a little towards making life a little better for all the poor and persecuted, for religious and other reasons.

Having been a refugee myself in 1945 from Silesia, I have seen what horrific deeds can be perpetrated by some towards others. I will keep ACN in my prayers and promise to circulate the book to as many of my friends as possible, to also assure their compassion towards Fr Werenfried’s cause.

A benefactress in Australia

Straight from the heart

Reading your Mirror sent shivers down my spine, and your report about what is happening to our brothers and sisters in Syria shook me to the heart. I cannot imagine what they have gone through, or what they are still

going through, on account of their faith and fidelity to Jesus. Enclosed is my poor contribution to your great mission, but at the moment I am not able to give more, as our daughter and her husband have been unemployed for five years and have a three-year-old daughter, and so we are helping them.

A benefactress in Portugal

For a world of peace

My best wishes to a team of people who, despite everything they daily have to see and hear, still find the courage to work for a world of peace. My heartfelt congratulations to you for your perseverance and determination!

A benefactor in Belgium

May God bless you all

Thank you for helping our fellow Catholics in Syria. I wish I could go there and help. God bless you all.

A benefactress in the United States

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

Our address is Aid to the Church in Need, 12–14 Benhill Avenue, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4DA. Please use the Freepost envelope – it saves you money and helps us. If you give by standing order or direct debit, or have sent a donation recently, please accept our sincere thanks. This Mirror is for your interest and information.

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