

Franciscan Sisters, Third Order Regular of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother



From the Desk of
Sr. Katherine Caldwell, TOR
Reverend Mother

September 2011

Mary Our Mother and Companion in Every Season of Our Life

Dear Family and Friends:

I am writing to share with you the amazing gift of Mary as our Mother and companion through life. You may not realize it, but we are in the midst of a wonderful Marian season—at least for the TOR Sisters. We begin this special season on August 2nd by celebrating the birthplace of the Franciscan Order, Our Lady of the Angels, affectionately known as the Porticuncula, or Little Church. The beautiful replica of this Church on the campus of Franciscan University of Steubenville is also the birthplace of our community, which took place on the Solemnity of the Assumption, August 15, 1988, the last day of the Marian Year. The novena of this great solemnity begins on the Feast of the Transfiguration, which is also the day we celebrate profession of First Vows. During this time, we also celebrate the Queenship of Mary on August 22nd and our patronal feast, Our Lady of Sorrows, on September 15. This season of the year was also a special time of prayer and solitude for St. Francis, when, in the year 1224 at Mt. La Verna Hermitage, Francis received, in his body, the wounds of Christ. St. Francis, a true son of Mary, joined her at the foot of the Cross and allowed himself to be transformed by Love into Love.

Our Spirituality and Vocation to Be with Mary at the Foot of the Cross

As many of you know, the spirituality of our community and the heart of our vocation is captured most fully by Mary's invitation to join her at the foot of the Cross, highlighted powerfully through the Passion scene behind the altar in our motherhouse Father of Mercy Chapel. In this scene Mary is in a stance of welcome, extending her right arm out to us, guiding us to look with her at the compassion of her Son and His pierced Heart. The depth of Christ's Love is caught in this gaze, and the abundance of His Mercy is poured out as we see the spiritual reality of His precious Blood and Water becoming the stream of our salvation and giving birth to the Church and the Sacraments. Mary, like the stream, becomes a conduit of God's grace and mercy through her union with Christ in His ultimate offering of Himself on the Cross. Like Mary we are called to become vessels of God's grace and mercy for others. Our Constitutions express Mary's significant role in our mission to make known God's Merciful Love:

As her own maternal Heart was expanded by the sword of sorrows at the crucifixion, so our hearts are expanded to embrace the world through our life of prayer and penance in union with Jesus and Mary. In a special way, we are with Mary at the foot of the cross at each Eucharist, offering and being offered with Jesus for the salvation of the world (see Catholic Catechism 1370). In Mary's Heart, we experience the loving care of our Mother, trust with confidence in her advocacy, and receive the holy wisdom which always shows us the way to Divine Love, incarnate in Her Son. Our Mother and advocate teaches us the true meaning of our vocation: to be contemplative penitents for love of God and for the world.

All of us are called to be with Mary at the foot of the Cross. In some seasons, the pain is felt so poignantly that we know the cross, but often we forget that we are not alone. Mary's arm is outstretched, embracing us and directing our gaze toward the merciful love of her Son. Through Jesus' compassionate sacrifice of Himself, He is united with us in all our sufferings and Mary teaches us how to allow even our pain and trials to be used for good in a stance of intercession and humble trust in God's merciful love. These more painful seasons in our lives may not feel good, even after we have united ourselves with Christ Crucified, but, ultimately, everything always works out for good for those who love the Lord (cf Rm 8).



The Gift of Being Children of Mary and of Our Heavenly Hope

Jesus' story, Mary's story, our story does not end at the Cross. The Cross is the Bridge, or Passover, into the heavenly fullness of God, Trinitarian Love forever. God, in His providential care for our community, ordained the founding of our community to be on the Solemnity of the Assumption, the last day of the Marian Year in 1988. By establishing our community on this Solemnity, our Merciful Father continually beckons us toward our final home and draws us ever deeper into the mystery of being His children and the daughters of Mary. Our Constitutions describe the beautiful grace it is for us to be daughters of Mary:

In her Assumption, we are filled with hope as we await the fulfillment of eternal life, and confidently look to her as our advocate to intercede for us on our earthly pilgrimage. As exemplar of the Christian and consecrated life, she teaches as only a Mother can—through a union of hearts. From Mary, we learn how to be beloved daughters of the Father, for she most perfectly received the gift of the Father's love and responded trustingly to the Father's will (cf. Lk 1:38).

All of us are beloved children of our Merciful Father and are cared for in a special way by our heavenly Mother during our sojourn here on earth. The artwork by Lisa Andrews in our Father of Mercy Chapel highlights this grace and gift of Mary in her Assumption. I hope these reflections on the painting of the Assumption will renew our hope in Our Lady's intercession and draw us ever more deeply into union with her motherly heart, where she teaches us the unfathomable Mercy of our Heavenly Father and the fullness of Trinitarian love awaiting us in Heaven.

The Artist's Experience of Painting the Assumption and Its Fuller Meaning

In preparing for this article, I asked Lisa to share with me about her painting in general and specifically of the Assumption. She shares, "I am captivated by the integrity of the natural forms that tell of the beauty that is to be found all around us. I build my paintings upon the three elements of classic fine art: unity, harmony of proportion, and clarity. By staying true to these elements, I feel I can create an image that is both beautiful and pays homage to God and His divine creation." She particularly enjoys painting devotional images, doing extensive research and sketches beforehand so as to bring familiar religious themes to contemporary viewers in new compositions. Most importantly in the creation of these devotional paintings is prayer. She shares, "In my experience, prayer is as great a preparation for painting a religious theme as anything else. Creating a captivating work of art that is finely painted is not my only purpose. While painting, I constantly think about the people who will ultimately view and be inspired by my work." In regard to her experience of painting the Assumption, she expresses: "Being asked to paint an image of the Assumption for the Father of Mercy Chapel was both an honor and a great responsibility... so the first thing I did was pray that the Holy Spirit would guide me in developing a composition and executing a painting that would be worthy of this great challenge."



To view this newsletter in color please
visit our website at
www.torsisters.org.

True to her word, Lisa did extensive research before picking up her paintbrush, which will eventually be included on our website. Through her research, she found an image called *The Throne of Mercy* by the great Jose de Ribera. She writes, "Something about the vulnerability of the pose of Christ and the way He was lifted on a veil into the loving and protective touch of the Father gave me another way of thinking about the process the Virgin might have experienced as she was lifted from this earthly life. For, as we know, she was assumed, she did not ascend." In her painting of the Assumption, Lisa has Mary's arms outstretched, signifying the acceptance of her status as Co-redemptrix, and echoing her Son's outstretched arms at the crucifixion, as well as her reception of His body from the cross. This pose also bespeaks the hope we have through Christ's Resurrection, for her arm reaches up in joy as she is taken up by angels to Him now in glory. With her face turned toward heavenly light, away from earthly trials, her veil, representing earthly obedience and humility, falls away, and her right hand drops the sundry cloth used to wipe away sweat. Having let go of the toils and sorrows of this life, and radiant in the light streaming toward her, highlighting her spotless garment as the Bride of Christ, she reaches towards heaven where a crown of stars shimmers before her. With her eyes ablaze with the light of heaven, her gaze is steady toward her Divine home where the Father, Son and Spirit, the fullness of Trinitarian Love, await her.

Sr. Katherine Caldwell, TOR

Fundraising and Financial Up-Date

We are grateful for those who have increased their donations or who have assisted us in making new friends and collaborators in our mission to make known God's merciful Love. Our advisors continue to affirm us in our prudent use of financial resources; however, providing for our current and future growth of our community has increased our operational expenses. Thus, our goal for the second half of the year is to raise \$50,000 more than previous years. Over the past two years we have increased the number of our donors by 234. While we have made good progress in advancing our development office it takes time for new initiatives to bear fruit. Please prayerfully consider increasing your donation or helping us meet others who can assist us financially. We will be sharing more about our specific needs in an upcoming Newsletter.

Meeting "Mr. Right" - First Profession of Vows



"What happens if you meet 'Mr. Right' after you join the convent?" This question flew like a bullet toward me from the mouth of a fourteen-year-old schoolboy in an all-boys high school in Ireland less than a year ago.

This question came back into my mind during the First Profession of Vows of two of our sisters, Sr. Sarah Rose Dent and Sr. Maria Clare Smith on August 6, 2011. I smiled and thought it ironic that it was exactly because they had, to borrow a secular phrase, met "Mr. Right" that we were all gathered to celebrate their Profession of Vows.

How more "Mr. Right" can you get than someone who never wronged anyone during his life on earth? Someone who, having been wrongly accused, heroically laid down his life for us and brought us right into a deep and beautiful filial relationship with the Father?

In his homily at the Profession ceremony, Fr. Gregory Plow, T.O.R., spoke about how Sr. Sarah Rose and Sr. Maria Clare heard the call from Christ to forsake all other exclusive loves in this world and follow Him who is Love with total abandon. He talked about how Sr. Sarah Rose heard the call through much time spent in Eucharistic Adoration. This reminded me of what J.R.R. Tolkien, a favorite author of hers, once said with reference to the Blessed Sacrament: "There you will find romance, glory, honor, fidelity, and the One True way of all your loves upon earth, and more than that." Her call was solidified during time spent teaching in New Mexico among the Navajo people during the year following her college graduation.

Sr. Maria Clare received a whole library of saint books when she was a young girl, and was inspired by the lives of the women saints who heroically followed Christ without counting personal cost. She was present in Rome when Blessed John Paul II was on his deathbed and was moved by the witness of a man who continually gave his all, doggedly refusing to embrace a "decaffeinated" or "lite" version of Christianity.

So what causes two twenty-six year old Mid-Western, sanguine, extroverted, Franciscan University graduates with seven siblings each, to embrace such a counter-cultural life of poverty, chastity and obedience in a world that puts the unchecked pursuit of money, sex and power on such a skyscraping pedestal?

The only possible answer is Love! When one is in love, one does all sorts of crazy things for the beloved that one does not do for anyone else. The desire to live in the same manner as the one loved can also be overwhelming. One does not desire to live above the station of one's beloved. Since Christ lived radical poverty, chastity and obedience while he was on earth, the desire to live in like manner out of love for Him and for souls can be overpowering for a religious.

A few weeks ago, I was flying from Philadelphia to Newark, and beside me on the plane was a thirty-something, ex-military, lapsed Methodist. As we drank our coke and ate our pretzels, he wanted to know more about convent life in general, and specifically our vows. After explaining a little bit about our vow of poverty, he exclaimed, "Okay, I get it. You want to be free of extra unnecessary 'baggage' so that you can more easily focus on what's truly important in life. I get that!" Without knowing it, he was right in line with the Vatican Document, Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes which states that the profession of poverty, chastity and obedience "frees the fervor of charity from every impediment." The vows release love to greater freedom, allowing it to soar like an eagle toward its Beloved, unshackled by chains and threads.

Sr. Sarah Rose and Sr. Maria Clare, thank you for the witness of your "Yes", a "Yes" that brings you in a mystical way to the foot of the Cross of Christ with Our Lady, a "Yes" that allows your heart to be expanded "to embrace the world through our life of prayer and penance in union with Jesus and Mary," as Sr. Katherine mentioned in her article above.



-Sr. Miriam O'Callaghan

Franciscan Sisters, T.O.R.

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Day of Recollection Saturday October 22nd

9:30am Mass with Bishop Zubik
10:40am Talk by Fr. Bob McCreary, OFM, Cap.
11:30am Rosary
12:15pm Lunch
1:30pm Inspirational Sharing of Father of Mercy Chapel by
Sr. Katherine Caldwell, TOR
2:00pm Adoration/Mercy Chaplet/Benediction with
Fr. Bob McCreary, OFM, Cap.

*RSVP by Thursday October 13th to
fosteringfriends@torsisters.org
or call (740) 544-5542*

Glorifying God and Inspiring His Children

How the Assumption Painting Came to Be: The Artist and the Gift

I can still remember my first visit with Lisa Andrews, the artist of The Assumption. I was nervous, as I almost always am when meeting people for the first time, but, as Lisa opened the door and greeted me along with my sister and brother-in-law with a big smile and warm embraces, I lost all my fears and felt right at home. Knowing that I loved art, she took us into her studio, and I became lost in a world of beauty and creativity. Looking at each painting with wonder, especially the portraits, gleaming into the unique mystery of each person and being struck by the beauty of their luminosity, making each face come alive, I felt as if I could hear their story. As I complimented Lisa, she humbly acknowledged the gift she had been given and her desire to glorify God through it.



Lisa and her husband Bob reside in the San Francisco area. She is pictured with her husband and children Kirk and Lauren. To learn more about Lisa and view her art, please visit her website at www.lsandrews.com

Our visit continued as Lisa graciously welcomed us to her back porch where we shared about each other's families and interests. Our time together enabled me to see how her art went far beyond the canvas of linen for her love and commitment to her husband Bob and her adult children Kirk and Lauren were painting a beautiful story on the canvas of life. As Lisa shared about her and Bob's love for the Church and desire for renewal, I also could glimpse the vibrant colors of her paint strokes moving beyond the family onto the canvas of the Church and eventually into our Father of Mercy Chapel. Lisa listened attentively as I shared about our budding new community and our dream of Father of Mercy Chapel. I believe our hearts resonated with the same love for the Church and desire for her continual renewal, and she gave a generous response. Not only would she and her husband Bob pray about how to support us financially, but she also offered to create a painting for our new Chapel. This encounter marked the conception of the beautiful painting of the Assumption as well as a wonderful friendship.

Sr. Katherine Caldwell, TOR