

A TIME OF GRACE

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We have celebrated another year since the arrival of Our Lady of Peace to the Congregation in the hands of our Foundress, an arrival filled with peace and trust into the newly born community; a peace and trust that continues to support us to this day. A month ago, she herself, through her image, presided at our Council of the Congregation held in Escorial, Spain and invited us to experience this time that the Lord gave us as a time of the Spirit, as a time of grace.

No doubt, the echos of the Council of the Congregation have reached each sister and community, and words, thoughts, feelings of joy, hope, trust, openness and perhaps of fear and uncertainty already resonate in your hearts. As you may be aware, the horizon can become clearer little by little, we have before us a “road map” that will lead the way over the next 18 months.

At this time of grace, God invites us to leave our past in the hands of his mercy, to welcome the present as a gift and to accept it with open eyes and hearts, attentive to every word, every face, every sister, every reality that comes to us, and to leave tomorrow in the hands of Divine Providence.

It is a time to be experienced with joy and enthusiasm, hope and joy; taking time but without stopping, as one who sees that something new and better is about to happen. It is a process to be experienced as a time of grace; an opportune time, a time of the Spirit, a new time; new with the newness of God, new with the newness of our seeking, new with the newness of our SS.CC. human, spiritual and

religious experience.

Experiencing what God is offering us as a time of grace is to learn to always look with fresh eyes at the wonders God is doing in us; it is to open our lives to his grace with confidence and to embrace the mystery of his love. At this time of grace, God invites us to leave our past in the hands of his mercy, to welcome the present as a gift and to accept it with open eyes and hearts, attentive to every

word, every face, every sister, every reality that comes to us, and to leave tomorrow in the hands of Divine Providence.

Over these months we will have the opportunity to reflect on our personal and community reality, our life and our apostolic tasks. We will deepen evangelical and charismatic values, and allow ourselves to be challenged by them; becoming aware of what dwells in our hearts. We will discover that our life is full of opportunities and strengths, but also limitations and threats; therefore we need to welcome God within our process and to experience it as salvation history, to accept our sisters, ourselves and our reality as a blessing, as a gift, with the confidence of those who know that the God of life is working with tenderness and patience in our lives.

Let the Lord draw near our personal, community and congregational life, as he approached the Samaritan woman and let us listen to his words: *“If you knew the gift of God”* (Jn 4:10). Why do we not know the gift of God? What is it that binds our minds from knowing him?. Many times we do not realize the “gift” that God gives us, we live in our little world, our relationships, our structures, our jobs, our convictions and projects, we create our own reality convinced that this is how it is, without perceiving that God is offering us something more.

The Samaritan woman also had her world, her schemes, her convictions, but Jesus surprised her and invited her to seek the truth within. She who went to the well with her empty jug looking for water, ended up leaving it in a corner, because what she found did not fit into it, but the water she was seeking had become a spring that flowed within her.

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This time will be a great opportunity for us to sit at the edge of the well with Jesus and to find the truth within us, to let his words resonate within us: *“If you knew the gift of God ...”* (Jn 4:10). *If you knew what He is offering you ...* will be a time to savour the living water, to quench our thirst in the Spring of Life, to worship the Father in spirit and truth, there where He wants. It is only drinking from this “source” that energizes, enlivens and humanizes, that we can open our hearts to welcome this time as a “time of grace”, as a “gift from God” and to welcome it with freedom of heart and full availability.

We are called to accept the grace that lives within us, to listen to and give life to the Word so that together we can rekindle our SS.CC. vocation and mission, and from there be the salt and light of the world

Like the Samaritan woman we are invited to breathe life into our existence. This "time of grace" will allow us to illuminate our being and our hearts, to revitalize our vocation and mission. Like the Samaritan woman this time will require a change of heart that will allow us to create a different way of looking at things, a

new attitude to the new circumstances that we experience today and that will lead us to a transformation of the heart. For our part, let us give the best of ourselves, let us be aware of our smallness and fragility as Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, so that the Lord will do great wonders in our lives and in the lives of the men and women to we serve daily.

At this time the Spirit is pushing us to find and recreate something new, it is essential to return again and again to the Spring of Life through the Word. As consecrated women we are called both personally and as a community to accept the grace that lives within us, to listen to and give life to the Word that calls us to walk together, holding hands, so that no one is left out, allowing ourselves to be challenged and helped so that together we can rekindle our SS.CC. vocation and mission, and from there be the salt and light of the world as Jesus asked.

What the Lord is asking us is to have confidence in His faithfulness towards us and to trust that through us, He is doing his work; he asks us to trust in the grace He offers us this time, grace that will transform our lives and our being, grace that will allow us to discover the way of God in our life, to discern his ways and to enlighten the future.

Sisters, we experience this process of the Congregation with the certainty that it is the work of the Spirit, that He is with us, convinced that *“In everything, God works for the good of those who love him, those whom he has chosen and called”* (Rom 8:28) and tells us every day: Courage! *“I am with you always ...”* (Mt 28.20). God leads us by the hand, his faithfulness is eternal, he is there, he does not leave us, He continues acting, loving and working in us. It is He who gives us the gift of each day, the blessing of showing us His Grace.

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It seemed appropriate and meaningful to end this letter recalling a thought of our Founder regarding Mary Our Lady of Peace *“Mary is and will always be our protector, our support and we will always have a share in the affection of her heart. Let us go to her, she intercedes for us”*. History tells us that the day the image of Our Lady of Peace came to Picpus that the Good Mother entrusted the Institute to her for ever. Let us be grateful for her protection for our beloved Congregation and renew our confidence in her maternal closeness in the process we are undergoing.