

Fr. Joseph Kentenich
Talk on the Occasion of the Celebration of the Silver Jubilee of His Ordination
August 11, 1935

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English translation, Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, 2007

My dear Schoenstatt family!

Why this Jubilee celebration?

When in the last week or two the invitation went out announcing this jubilee celebration, it must have caused our old warhorses – the old sodalists who have worked with me from the beginning – to ask: Do signs and wonders still occur? Is such a thing possible? How did they ever pull this off in Schoenstatt – this celebration? And when one of the oldest, upon his arrival, asked, “How is this possible?” he was told, “He consented because it serves the cause.”

I don’t know if that was the final reason why I not only permitted the celebration but even urgently insisted upon it. The hard saying which I so often quote is certainly true: “I will die where I stand!” And: “The banner bearer is nothing, the banner is everything!” If that is true for you, it is also true for me. We must serve the cause. The person must remain in the background, and the person must give to the cause whatever it requires.

I know and have experienced how our family celebrations have strengthened our family bonds, increasing our loyalty to the common cause, to our Mother Thrice Admirable, and to one another. Do we realize that we are in greater need than ever before of the duties of deep-rooted community, because our times are tearing apart the interior of man and because the dark and difficult portents of the future are signaling stormy times ahead? Difficult times may be approaching. And it is true that the more difficult the times, the more closely we must join together into one, great family called by God in order to consume ourselves in difficult times for the Church of God, the kingdom of our dear Lady.

All of this is true, but it is not the last and deepest reason for my joyful acceptance and even insistence that this celebration be held.

The Real Reason for our Gathering:

A Common Jubilee of our Unity as Family

What was just said in jest is what really moves me on the personal level: I celebrate a jubilee *with you*. I think of all of those who have worked together with me in the course of these 25 years. I have invited you here to celebrate *your jubilee*. Is it not true that what the great God has foreseen from all eternity has gradually become reality? I don’t know if there is currently a second community like ours, in which the fate of its main leaders is so directly tied to the fate of the director of the family. “What God has joined together, let no man rend asunder!”

Do you therefore understand how I can take all the hymns of gratitude which you have sung

today, especially in simple loyalty, all of them words which I accept which deep emotion, and redirect them to the rightful recipient whose they are from the start – to our dear Mother Thrice Admirable!

1. The Jubilee Celebration: Gratitude for our Work Together for the MTA

You may ask me why I give thanks. Whom shall I thank? I thank all Schoenstatt children, I thank the dead, I thank the living, I thank the generations to come.

1.1 Gratitude to our Dead

I thank the dead. The celebration this morning set the tone so beautifully, and we want to continue in the same vein. Our dead are not dead, they are with us today. What has been done here is also the achievement of those who worked with us. I am unthinkable without you. The whole Work cannot be explained without your most personal involvement and closest collaboration. Above all else that applies to our dead.

1.1.1 Gratitude to our Hero Sodalists and our Deceased Sisters

Whom do I mean? Should I remind you of our hero sodalists? I may not mention them all by name lest I do an injustice to anyone. Of course, our dear departed from the ranks of the Sisters are also meant here. They are all with us today, and what has developed is their work. And when such hymns of thanksgiving rise up to heaven, we don't want to forget to whom they are addressed. Did not our hero sodalists, and our deceased Sisters, give their lives for our common work with boundless, selfless loyalty? Did not many of them soak Schoenstatt's ground with their blood? Many are those who reap the benefits of their holy lives and the selfless oblation of their deaths.

The dead continue to work; they continue to work through their heroic example, they continue to work because they embodied, sometimes in an heroic way, what we see today as a great ideal in the heavens of our lives. And we hope to God and admit with great gratitude that they work on through their intercession, through praying for us together with the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt. Yes, the hymns of thanksgiving should therefore rise to a crescendo, far more than they have done until now.

1.1.2 Gratitude to Vincent Pallotti

We want to and should also sing a hymn of thanksgiving to Vincent Pallotti. He, too, must be counted among the departed who are at home here in Schoenstatt. After all, he founded the community in which the thoughts and goals have been more or less consciously alive to which we have committed our entire life and strength. Through his life and sacrifice he has made a tremendous number of contributions to our capital of grace. This river of grace continues to influence our Family.

So let me repeat: I want to collect again all the gratitude you have sent up to heaven and direct it into eternity to those who have died for us, and who continue to live for us in eternity.

1.2 Gratitude to the Living for Our Work Together

I may and must say a word of thanks to the living. I am thinking especially of all those who have joined their destinies to mine for twenty-five years or a large portion of it. Let me say it again: Try to find another community at present which is so much a part of the life and thinking of its members! Or do I exaggerate? Am I trying to use some rhetorical sleight-of-hand to direct the

attention away from myself? No, it is my conviction that the entire Work which has come about is every bit as much your work as it is mine. I don't know where to begin. Since the whole celebration has more the character of a family celebration, you will not take it amiss if I now speak more in the first person than I usually do.

The Origin Goes Back to our First Encounter

Please listen and examine for yourselves; please think of all who bear responsibility in the Family – the oldest and the middle generation, the Schoenstatt Priests, the women, the Sisters of Mary. The fate of the vast majority, with perhaps a single exception, has been connected with mine. Am I wrong to even claim that it can be generally proven that their calling to Schoenstatt is connected with the first time they met me? I would be grateful if you would examine such statements for yourselves, because it is a strong desire of mine that we feel inwardly united just as the Triune God has wished it from eternity. “What God has joined together, let no man rend asunder!”

And this mutual faithfulness becomes all the deeper and stronger, the more we see the unique way God has joined our fates together. Yes, when and where did these meetings take place? It would be inappropriate to lift the veil from so many mysteries in this public gathering. When I think of the first generation, of all those who are now working directly with me, it is evident that their childlikeness found an answer in my life as a man, and that their whole lives have been united with my thinking and willing. If I also think of the first generation of our Schoenstatt Priests, or of our Sisters, I know that for the most part the first meeting took place at a workshop or in a private conversation. And I believe I could even tell each one the details of when grace started to work, when the deeper contact began, and when our mutual relationship began to become extremely fruitful.

Yes, my dear Schoenstatt Family, that is how it is. One can generally say that this first contact has been uniquely and profoundly alive and active ever since. The whole great work which astonishes us today grew, coherently and inner-spiritually, from our personal and community effort.

The Insight and Heartfelt Warmth Generated by our First Encounter

Will you take it the wrong way if I try, very briefly, to sketch out your share in this work? To begin with, I must admit that you have had an incredibly strong influence on my personal development. What was said a few moments ago in jest is true. And what was said by one of our own – one of our “conference hunters” who tries by every means to get hold of every transcript – is also true. When I once stated that copies of the talks should not be circulated, he said, “He knows all this only from us!”

The book I have read is the book of the times, the book of life, the book of your holy souls. If you had not revealed your souls to me so unreservedly, most of the spiritual accomplishments would never have been discovered. One cannot learn that from books, only from life. And one of our Sisters of Mary was correct when she remarked a few days ago: “We have been so dependent on you, and this has awakened so much in you. In all probability it would not otherwise have been awakened.” If the first statement applies more to my spiritual-intellectual insights, the second refers more to the unfolding of the abilities of my heart.

Last night one of our older members reminded me that back then, when they were in the war, I must have had a warm heart for them. I quietly and unobtrusively got hold of all sorts of clothing – something to protect the head, a warm vest, etc. It is true, I developed a very warm heart for our

youth at that time. But this development continued through all the people God has given me and who have made demands of me.

If you want to know the secret behind what is an almost superabundant fruitfulness, I can tell you: It is to be found in our deep, mutual union from soul to soul. In answer to the question that was posed just now: “Where does this richness of heart and mind come from?” I can tell you: A person who loves, who has ultimately placed his love in God’s heart, shares to a certain extent in the immeasurable riches of God’s love. If there is anything that doesn’t make us poor, it is love, the giving of the warmth of one’s heart.

You may tell yourselves – all of you who have made demands on me, sometimes loudly, sometimes quietly, all of you can tell yourselves: Without you I personally would not be what I am today. You may not underrate this one point, this one train of thoughts. Let me repeat: If you want to know the source of the riches of my mind and heart, you have it here! My wish and prayer to God is that he will give all future generations the same opportunity that I have had to serve souls quietly in the background. Great riches will then flow back to those who try to place themselves with all their abilities at the service of souls.

Holding Fast to the Ultimate Goals – Open to the Intermediate Goals

Yet this is not enough. What I was privileged to read in your souls indicated to me each intermediate step along the way to our ultimate goal. A future historian may some day conclude after critical research that my primary task in these 25 years was to define and consciously hold fast to the ultimate goals. But the many intermediate goals which had to be accomplished, the holding fast and discernment of these intermediate goals¹ and the enlightened effort to accomplish them, that, my dear Schoenstatt Family, would simply have been unthinkable without you. And this is where the interconnection of our acting and willing, our living and loving, begins in a most profound fashion. These things are so alive in me that in most cases I can still tell you: this and this came from him or her; this comes from the life of that one’s soul. This is the mysterious source of our profound community. You know that I normally had no time for social engagements, but not even this weakened your loyalty, precisely because the connection from soul-to-soul rested on such a firm foundation.

Everyone has Contributed Something Important

Community implies the harmony of hearts. And if you can say that the Family is marked by the deep, inner community of the individual members – to a very large extent this is because most of you have contributed your very best to the Family as a whole. I would like to ask each of you individually to admit honestly and humbly – or if you don’t know, I will gladly tell you privately – what you have contributed of your heart’s blood to the life of the Family. If you want to thank me for anything, it can only be for one thing – that I have tried to take up everything that was developing in you, to open up the way for you, and once it had come alive in the community to some extent, to proclaim it as a motto. So I could tell you who were the main leaders at that time in our mission movement². As the master builder I have also built up things on my own, but when I knew that something sound was developing, I withdrew completely, because I knew it would grow on its own.

¹ German: *Teilziele*, also translated as “partial goals.” See Second Founding Document, No. 68, 73, 81, 86.

² The original Sodality in the College at Schoenstatt was divided into two main groups: the Mission Section and the Eucharistic Section.

I could also tell you who were the main leaders when the External Organization was founded [in 1916]. Do not forget that it can be proven – and in spades! – that it was through *your* work, through your cooperation, through your primary activity that the entire war organization, the *Congregatio militaris*, found its way to a new form after the end of the war. Here you have a classical example: I deliberately did not go to Hoerde, so certain was I of what would come out of it. It was all prepared because each individual soul had gradually grown into this great work.

My dear Schoenstatt Family! You must admit that I am justified in taking the hymns of gratitude you have been singing for me and redirecting them, gratefully and joyfully, to you. I know that by so doing I reveal the general outline of what personally moves me.

I could sing the praises of all those who have not yet been directly mentioned. I am now thinking of all those, also from the young generation, who have been the guarantee of the Family again and again through the capital of grace, by enriching the capital of grace. If it was my ideal from the beginning, “I will do nothing in the whole Family without my cooperators,” then I know that this thought penetrates everything I have done. Even the other parts [of the Family] with which I was not in direct contact, acted in accord with the law, “Nothing without us!” In eternity we will discover how the smallest and least significant souls of our Family contributed everything they could. The Family with the spirit we know today would be unthinkable without their heroic life of sacrifice and prayer. Yes, nothing without you!

I don’t know what I should highlight in particular. Just imagine, our Sisters have lived for ten years without a written law, and yet they have grown into the most varied fields of activity. How was that possible? And when you look back for a moment, you will find that not one jot of their original ideal has been cast aside. Our eldest Sisters have merely matured inwardly in these ten years to such an extent that they gradually begin to understand what we set up as a program ten years ago. I can prove precisely which spiritual current has come from this or that Sister. Each can discover herself again, the best qualities of her soul, in the Family, in all that we are aiming at. That is a part of our ideals pedagogy, our movement pedagogy, and our pedagogy of anticipation.

The Co-Workers in the Retreat House

Don’t you think that in this context I should make particular mention of those who work with me up in the retreat house? Without their loyalty it would have been completely impossible for me to undertake so many different tasks. Please take a look at how much life and spirit proceeds from up there, and how each one is trying to give of their very best for the whole Family.

Yes, let me repeat: I want to take up and direct upwards to the Triune God all the hymns of thanksgiving you have sung. All honor is due to him, all thanks to you.

A Special Word to the Young Generation

Nor may I forget our growing youth! When I saw this morning how many sacrifices they made, what a heroic and growing youth this is! What our predecessors became, we too must become! Schoenstatt must not go its way without us, not without our youth! I greet with special warmth our youth with special strivings, from both the girls and boys youth. I received a letter of congratulation from the high school boys youth, and in it resonated the spirit of the founding generation: “We want to take up the spirit lived by the older members, and with courage for battle bear it into the new generation. Our symbol is the graves of the heroes.”

Our girls youth is also at work. Not just the eldest generation, also the youngest generation

is included in my thanks. They, too, are celebrating a little bit of jubilee. It is their jubilee.

1.3 Gratitude to the Coming Generation

But I must also express my thanks to those not yet born, those still to come. What will become of Schoenstatt if the coming generations are not filled and penetrated by the same spirit? Surely, this must remain a law in the Family for all time to come: Each generation must conquer Schoenstatt in its own way. If my gratitude to those not yet born, to the generations of the centuries to come, is not borne out by the timeless development of the ages to come, we will, more or less, be standing at the grave of our Family. Unless God sends us people in every age who will devote themselves to the same ends, with the same means and in the same manner, we will have created a flash-in-the-pan. Yet it is my hope that God, who has protected us so far, and our Blessed Mother, who has stretched out her hands so kindly over our Family, will continue to favor us with grace and goodness. I hope that, for the sake of the loyalty with which we have strived to hand on our inheritance to the coming generations, God will always send us people who will give their heart's blood for Schoenstatt. I would like to thank these generations, too.

1.4 Gratitude to Our Lady

There is a second party to whom I must address my thanks. You know who I mean. And I think that the gratitude which has been shown toward me during these days, and which I rightly redirected to you, must be taken up by the whole Family and directed to the heart of our dear Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt.

Many years ago I read about an old, revered priest who was also celebrating his jubilee. And as is so often the case at such jubilees, the people collected everything they knew about his life, and there was a great deal that they could say about their priest. At the end of all their songs of gratitude, the old gentleman stood up and declared, "Yes, you have told me of everything which I accomplished in my life..." And then we broke out in tears and said, "I owe all of it to our dear Lady!"

I, too, know, that countless persons owe the complete reform of their life to the encounter with Schoenstatt. I know how many priests declare, again and again, "What would have become of us without Schoenstatt!" It would be a rude lack of gratitude to ignore these thanks. Yes, I too know and gladly admit that there are few priestly lives which have been so blessed as mine. But I, too, say: What has come about, what has come about through me, has come about through our dear Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt.

May I explain to you in detail how and what has been growing and developing in the different stages [of the past]?

First of all, I can say this: She personally formed and shaped me since the ninth year of my life. I am otherwise reluctant to say this, but I think that in this context it is right that I explain it briefly. When I look back, I can say that no one had a more profound influence on my development. A million people would have been shattered if they had been thrown back so totally on themselves as I was. In my inmost soul I had to grow up in complete isolation because a world had to be born in me, which later had to be nurtured and passed on. If my soul had been in touch with the culture of that time, if I had had a personal attachment to someone, then I could not say so definitively that my education was solely the work of the Mother of God free from any other substantial human influence. I know that in saying that, I am saying a great deal.

You must not believe that it was lip service when I told about the loving kindness of Our

Lady. But I also know that the Blessed Mother placed her interceding omnipotence and her motherly heart at my disposal in a singular way. You have experienced this yourselves and could historically verify it: From the moment she came to dwell in this Shrine she placed her power and her motherly heart at my disposal for the work I was called to do. It was she, too, who gave you to me as my collaborators.

Please study the subject and see how everything we see before us today has developed out of this deep and childlike love for Mary. Am I right, then, when I ask you not to forget the one to whom we owe special gratitude today?

2. The Jubilee Celebration: A Pledge of Loyalty

Nor may I forget to take up your simple promise of loyalty in the same way. It is true, if there is anything that can touch me, it is grateful loyalty!

To whom should we return this grateful loyalty? That sounded so strong and solid just now: “Faithfulness, loyalty!” I am happy and accept your loyalty with great gratitude. I know that it is not just faithfulness to me, but also to God and our work. We want to make this promise of faithfulness together at the end of this celebration, your jubilee celebration. Faithfulness to our Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt, faithfulness to her work, and faithfulness to one another!

2.1 Loyalty to the MTA and to the Shrine

Faithfulness to our dear Mother Thrice Admirable! Don’t you think – I address myself to the eldest children of our Family – that we owe the fruitfulness of our Family, don’t you think that we owe the amazing fact that despite the chaos of our times we could develop as organically as we have until now, don’t you think we owe all this and our childlike faithfulness to our Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt?

We want to promise once again to remain true to her. We all feel proud, especially those who are working directly with me, to realize that the battle surrounding Schoenstatt³ ultimately concerns our devotion to Mary. As long as we may battle for our Lady, everything is in order. Please study all the spiritual currents of our times. Take, for example, the youth movement or the liturgical movement. If we had not held onto our love for Mary without wavering, we would without doubt have fallen prey to the extremes of these spiritual currents.

We want to remain faithful to the Blessed Mother no matter what happens. In these days I was told that the opposition had concerned itself with us. They say that we have put the Mother Thrice Admirable in God’s place. It doesn’t matter! What is wonderful is that we have developed so calmly until now. I don’t know whether there is another community that can boast about a similar calm, about such a profound calm! And the reason? Because we have remained true to Our Lady even when it sometimes seemed as though the lightning were going to strike. As long as we are faithful to her, she will spread her protective mantle over us. Even if she one day allows thunder and lightning to strike, even if she allows what sounded so serious just now at the end of the talk, that the Family is rocked and shaken in every possible way, we may be certain that as long as we remain true to her, everything will be alright! We shall remain true to the Mother of God, to the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt!

And when I utter the word “faithfulness,” a promise immediately re-echoes in our little

³ In 1935 the German bishops started an enquiry into Schoenstatt’s “peculiar ideas.”

shrine.

I can remember how a few months ago, when it was said that people wanted to take our picture from us, many declared: “No one will be able to enter our shrine except over our dead bodies!”⁴

We thank the loving God that the place of pilgrimage is primarily connected to the place, not the picture. Places don’t move so easily, pictures can change. Hence our simple loyalty to our dear Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt.

2.2 Loyalty to our Common Work

Our promise of loyalty also applies to our common work. Do not think that our effectiveness has reached its end. The goal we have in view is something extremely great. We want to help create a new type of person such as the Church needs, able inwardly to overcome the terrible upheavals. We want to help create a new kind of family, a holy community. Our Movement must produce holy people. Woe to us if we become superficial, if the members of the Family begin to talk big about God but do not carry him in their hearts. We must strive for real holiness. And so, faithfulness to our work includes unflinching striving to reach the ideal of our state of life, to reach the ideal of our sex.

This morning one of our priests said to me when he saw our girls youth: “How much purity is in our girls!” If only we could manage to save a really sound womanhood and girlhood and bring them through our present times! The same applies to our men, to our priests! I don’t want to go into this, it should be sufficient to mention faithfulness to the ideal of the type of person, the holy and saintly person, who is called to serve the church in an outstanding way.

2.3 Loyalty to our Dead: Joseph Engling

We want to be faithful to our dead. And here I want to greet all who are working for the canonization of our Joseph Engling. I know what this loyalty to our dead means to our generation. The Family has brought forth great people. We want to remain true to them. Faithfulness to them is faithfulness to our MTA, to our shrine, to our ideal.

2.4 Loyalty to the Coming Generation

But we also want to remain true to the coming generation. We have a task to fulfill for the coming generation. We bear responsibility for the coming generation, for our future history. That is why we try to lead youthful people into our family circle.

2.5 The Promise of Mutual Loyalty

Yet we also want to swear that we will be faithful to one another. I am happy that one of the local sections of our Priests’ community has given me the following jubilee present: “To build up our community in the sense of a Schoenstatt Apostolic Order and family.” How much reciprocal faithfulness we need when we are out in the world, since we are not chained to one another by community life, how much profound faithfulness we need if we are one day to realize this great ideal of “a Schoenstatt Apostolic Order living in the world”⁵. We need faithfulness if our whole Family

⁴ The Nazi secret police already had their eyes on Schoenstatt and it was becoming increasingly dangerous to be a member.

⁵ Later to become known as a Secular Institute.

is to become an organic entity at a time when so many conflicting trends are at large. The less we can live our way of life together, the more we want to swear simple faithfulness to one another. Faithfulness for faithfulness, love for love!

May our jubilee – your jubilee, my jubilee – thus come to its God-willed conclusion. So let it be, we remain true!⁶

Somewhere in a boarding school there was an ordinary lad who lay dying. His lips formed just one sentence: “So let it be!” The Rector of the house heard those words, but didn’t know what to make of them. In the delirium of the fever the youngster prayed again and again: “So let it be, we swear once again, Heart of Jesus, we shall remain true!”

I think that this should be our conclusion. We swear once again:

We shall remain eternally true to you, O Schoenstatt land!

I swear to remain true to my love, until death, with heart and hand!

My Schoenstatt land, I consecrate to you all that I am and have!

⁶ German: “*Es bleibt dabei, wir bleiben treu!*” Cf. USA-Terziat (1952), Vol. 2, 327f.