

**Fr. Joseph Kentenich**

## **Sermon at the first Holy Mass after his Arrival in Rome, September 17, 1965**

*Excerpts from*

*“Sermon – Fr. J. Kentenich, September 17, 1965, Rome”*

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### **Introduction**

On the afternoon of Monday, September 13, Fr. Kentenich received the emphatic message by telegram: “In the name of Father General, immediately come to Rome.” Fr. Kentenich immediately made plans to travel to Rome, and was able to book a flight via New York and Zurich to Rome, scheduled to land the morning of Friday, September 17.

Fog in Switzerland, however, forced the Swiss Air flight to land in Geneva instead of Zurich and to wait several hours before it could continue to Rome. In the end, the flight arrived five hours late. The news of his call to Rome had reached the leaders of the main communities in Schoenstatt as early as September 14, and a small core of leaders was on hand to welcome the founder in Rome, including Sr. M. Erika of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary (stationed in Rome), Frau Gertrud Gramlich of the Ladies of Schoenstatt (general superior), Fr. Günther M. Boll of the Schoenstatt Fathers, and Herr Bruno Herberger of the Schoenstatt Brothers of Mary.

Fr. Kentenich was then taken to the Carmelite convent on Monte Verde, near the residence of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, where he celebrated Mass around 5 pm, his first Mass on European soil in 14 years.

After supper, Fr. Kentenich took part in an informal gathering with the various Schoenstatt representatives. Two bishops who were members of the Schoenstatt Institute of Diocesan Priests, Bp. Adolph Bolte of Fulda and Aux. Bp. Heinrich Tenhumberg of Münster, were also on hand for this meeting; Father asked the latter to tell about the Council; Sr. Winfriede then told something about Milwaukee. The gathering ended around 8:30 pm with the blessing. From there Fr. Kentenich proceeded to the Generalate of the Pallottines to announce his arrival.

Also present at the welcome were Sr. M. Edelgard, Sr. M. Judith, Sr. M. Lorenza, Fr. Bodo-Maria Erhard, Fr. Humberto Anwandter, Frau Höltschi, and (traveling with Fr. Kentenich from Milwaukee) Sr. M. Winfriede, Frau Maria Kleimeyer, and Fr. Alex Menningen.

What follows is a transcript of the sermon which Fr. Kentenich gave at the Mass he celebrated on this day.

## *Outline*

- I. The reunion after 14 years of separation awakens emotions of gratitude
  - A. For the divine mission we have been given
    - Schoenstatt, a new divine initiative
    - Schoenstatt an instrument in the hand of the divine powers at work in the background of the times
  - B. For the divine protection we have received
    - the life-threatening battles
    - the burden of ecclesiastical power
    - the reality of the covenant of love
  - C. For the remarkable divine victory
    - the legality (conformity) of God
    - the precision work of the Blessed Mother
- II. Expectations for the future

## *Sermon*

{3} My dear Schoenstatt Family,

You probably expect me to capture in at least few words the emotions we are feeling. This is easy, for the strings of the instrument are already tuned. Nor will it be difficult or require special artistry to get bring the instrument to full resonance.

### *I. Emotions of Gratitude after 14 Years of Separation*

{4} It is a very great joy for all of us to welcome one another as the exponents and representatives of all of Schoenstatt's elite communities. We not only want to see ourselves for who we are, but also for who we stand for, seen from this special standpoint: We are from the circle of those who fought the battles, who fought for the entire Family with great bravery, with courage, and with no small success.

The entire community of those who have struggled, the warriors and the Schoenstatt victors therefore stand in spirit before the image of God the eternal Father. And whatever we have savored during these years should slowly find a certain conclusion.

What kind of conclusion may it be? It is quite evidently a deep feeling of sincere gratitude. We have always known it, but now more than ever we are aware that: "It is not you who have chosen me, but I who have chosen you that you may go forth and bear fruit, fruit that will endure" (Jn 15, 16). This is the first thought which may fill us now during this lull in the battle. It is the deep sentiment of gratitude for an immense divine mission, for divine protection, and at the same time for the divine victory!

### *A. Gratitude for our Divine Mission*

My dear Schoenstatt Family, I think that we all by and large share the conscious belief that a divine power stands over Schoenstatt, that a divine power has called us, and that a divine power has made use of us.

{5} We were not born yesterday. We know from ample experience that all things of human making, even the most ingenious of them – and there is much that human ingenuity has produced and

accomplished in our times (we need think only of modern technology and industry) – will sooner or later collapse. Where have we received our strength? No doubt from the awareness that a divine power stands over us. It has give us the victorious strength and confidence to stand fast in all the many stages on the way and in all the tense arguments.

We serve a divine mission. It is a great mission and task, placed on weak shoulders. These words are not unknown to us; we have heard them countless times and, as leaders of the Family, we have repeated them often. But it is one thing to say something which we only grasp with the intellect and another to express it after emotional suffering and, now, filled with such sentiments of gratitude.

I think this renewed and deepened awareness ought to stir in us sentiments of grateful joy! God and the Blessed Mother stand behind us! We have been chosen not just for a divine work, but for a divine mission. If we as leaders of the Family are convinced that Schoenstatt is a new divine initiative for our modern times, that is what we are today.

An important thought! What does a new divine initiative {6} mean? It is a familiar expression for us, especially in the ranks of the new community. It means that we believe we are to tend to the new divine initiative. Not as if God could not call and persuade others all over again to be his helpers. But when we call ourselves a new divine initiative then it has a two-fold meaning: Whatever is alive in us, whatever gushes forth from the bosom of the Church comes from an innermost source within the sphere and scope of the Church, but from this gushes forth an extremely powerful stream of life and love which must carry the Church to the shores of the newest times.

Yes, a new divine initiative that already called us fifty years ago to set an example of what the entire Church should one day realize on the shores of the newest times. Certainly, when we repeat this it may seem strange to those unfamiliar with the thought. It seems to me that the difficult battles which lay behind us have convinced us more than ever that we have canceled absolutely nothing of what was alive in the Family. What we taught has become newly conquered and deepened, above all the belief in a new divine initiative which our

family represents. Therefore, how richly fulfilled are the words: We live out of a divine mission entrusted to us by God. We want to be warmheartedly grateful to God and to Our Lady for this.

Since I have already touched upon these thoughts, may I ask you to be drawn with me into wider circles, into the {7} remarkable world of divine government, the way God governs the world and the souls? Don't you think that the otherworldly powers are at work in world events? For us this is an absolute fact, a profound conviction, indeed a greater inner certainty than ever: otherworldly divine powers are at work here, as well as otherworldly diabolical powers. How often have we heard this before! The older ones in our midst need only recall how often and with what effort we elicited this [lesson] from [the events in] our hearts, from the entire Family history and the events of the times. It was just before the Dachau era, a time defined by the ideal not only of the apocalyptic priest but also of the apocalyptic Christian. At no other time did I stress so much [the teaching about] the powers behind all world events. And these are the powers which we have experienced in these years, whether we think of the entire Family, including those who have remained with us, or those who have disagreed with us. These are the powers which wanted to use us as their instruments.

Divine – or better said and in more general terms: otherworldly – powers seek instruments everywhere in order to shape the destiny of history. And we have been called as instruments in the hand of such powers behind the scenes, to spend our lives, to sacrifice them, yes even to consume them in the service of the divine.

A great joy fills us when we see each other after so many years! Isn't this the common way of rejoicing when there is some degree of mutual fondness, when to some degree one {8} has carried the other in his heart and sees him again after many years? No, I feel it is much stronger than that. It is much more the happy awareness that we have grown side by side into a great mission and into the insight, into the certainty of being permitted to be instruments in the hand of the eternal, of the all-powerful God.

If, in this first encounter after fourteen years, we try to find an image that captures what we feel so matter-of-factly [in this moment],

then I think this one comes close: Suppose one has a well-tuned zither, and next to it another zither. Because the instrument is so sensitive, the sound from the one instantly causes the strings of the other to vibrate. What do I mean? Which zither am I referring to?

If I may again brush on the powers behind all world events, it is self-evident for us that the primary power is the Triune God. But God in his wisdom and goodness relies and depends on instruments. And the instrument envisaged by him from all eternity to oppose the powers of Satan is our Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt, the helpmate of the Incarnate Word. What do I mean to say with the image of the zither? We may picture that just at this moment the Holy Spirit strums, as it were, the zither of the Blessed Mother's heart, and we who have so deeply inscribed ourselves into the heart of the Blessed {9} Mother, we who share our heartbeat with the heartbeat of Our Lady – I feel we may rightly say – as her heart resonates, in it also resonates for us the heartbeat of the Triune God!

The Blessed Mother thanks us today; she sings a joyous song of gratitude that she could successfully use us as her special instruments in all the ways she needed in the battle against the diabolical powers.

We also intone this joyous song of thanksgiving on account of the great gift that the Blessed Mother with us, and we with her, were able to fulfill the divine mission bestowed on her and which we are permitted to share with her. It is certainly no self-praise if we honestly say: We have truly striven to be and to remain her instruments.

My dear Schoenstatt Family, let me repeat that if this is not the greatest and most beautiful fruit of all the past battles – namely the deep conviction of inbreak of the divine into the Family and into our personal life histories – then I must say that it was all superficial, was child's play, was something that will not last long.

### ***B. Gratitude for Divine Protection***

I think I should now briefly mention the second point: We have experienced, experienced in a renewed and deeper way, not only our divine our mission, but also divine protection. If a historian would investigate the background of the exceedingly tense and dangerous

{10} battles – these were difficult moral battles – he would be greatly amazed. It is no disgrace on Alex – I can say this because he doesn't hear well any more – that so many times in the course of the years he had to endure truly frightening situations. You know, a man is not so easily frightened, especially one who is accustomed to battles. And how did he manage to get such a fright? He discovered that a decree had been prepared which would have dissolved our Schoenstatt Work, for no less than the change of *haeresia proxima*. (No matter how supernatural one is, when one is wholeheartedly devoted to the work of Our Lady, one realizes that man remains man. No matter how much we want to be at home in the supernatural, our nature is not diminished a single bit. And so one isn't surprised that from time to time one gets a great fright. I mean this only as a small example of how difficulties can be part of life. But in the end we always admit: *Mater perfectam habebit curam!*)

Are we fully convinced of to whom we owe our existence, indeed our victorious existence? If we recall how many fought side by side with us, how many abandoned us over the years, how many fell by the wayside as time went on... What we have been through was no child's play. All of them were noble persons. So to whom do we owe the grace that we remained loyal? One may not forget that the entire Church with her great weight {11} and immense power leaned on us, so heavily weighed upon us that each one had to say – I can't take any more! Humanly speaking, it is inconceivable that a Work would survive this.

It was already a great trial when the National Socialists ruled with nearly unlimited power and tried to crush us. But what is that in comparison with the power of the Church! We think especially of her intellectual and spiritual power. We still have the memory of how she leaned on us with her entire weight. There were two noteworthy thoughts to which I always adhered in these years. (Of course, I must not talk so long, not because I am tired, but because you are tired!) It is generally like this in my life: If I believe that someone has a mission, then I am the last one to hinder it. My position is then: He or she must fulfill this mission. Thus, in the time after the Second World War, I gradually came to the conviction that Bishop Stein had

the mission to promulgate and make us known in the Church. When he seemingly did the opposite, his mission remained unchanged, even if it happened differently than we expected. We should ask ourselves: Would we have ever become so well known if God had not crushed us in such a terrible manner! Soon we will hear and see still more of how hard the battles were and how often one, in fear, had to say, “I can’t take any more!”

I must admit – in order to refer once again to the aforementioned thoughts {12} – I admire all of those who can suffer openly. It always impresses me. It contrasts so sharply [from myself]. You can see how unaffected I emerge from all the battles. It is not as if I had not felt the pain or were unaware of the danger. I was probably more aware of the dangers than anyone else. But this knowledge, this comprehensive knowledge, did not make me restless even though my person was the one most directly affected. But perhaps you can scarcely imagine how absolutely calm I always was. There would have been wild jubilation on the other side if I had broken down. But no, thanks be to God, that cause for thanksgiving never came. I carried such a deep conviction; it was so self-evident that the two things go together. It is the criteria of an extraordinary divine work. If we, from the beginning, have believed in this divine mission, then it is self-understood that this Work must face battles and even be threatened to the very root of its entire existence.

Now that we see each other for the first time after so many years—and humanly speaking it has been truly a long time! – as circumstances would have it, I think we can take a little time to look back. I do not know whether you will understand that the hardest thing for me in prison was not the thought, “This will cost you your life.” This is one of my particular weaknesses. (Alex has another weakness! His worry back then was: “What will the community suffer now? So now you know it!) If I think back on all you have been through! Now you must not be so quick to say, “*Mea culpa! Nihilum et peccatum!*” (Through my fault, through my fault... I am nothing and sin!) Yes, we are also this, a small nothing, and your part {13} was one of her-

oic compassion (*Mitleiden*)<sup>1</sup>. One does that and does not know how one is able to bear it all.

Looking back, I think we can already say with all sincerity: What a glorious protection we have experienced! What a remarkable protection from Our Lady we have been allowed to experience in these years! We have stood under divine protection! I have often said to myself in these years: It is a bold venture which we undertook. As far as I know, no other women’s community [in the Church] besides those from our elite communities has experienced such severe blows and carried on to the end. I will not name our men’s communities because it is taken for granted that they are “warriors” in God’s kingdom. They must fight and see to it that they are not defeated in battle. All things considered, these are a few highlights that we want to assimilate.

Each one of us is experiencing an exterior joy, but also a deep, interior, blissful joy. For many months over in Milwaukee, my sermons were about how we should be a child of an endless divine smile and an endless human cry. With that I wanted to describe our basic attitude, just with a different name. Let us take note again of everything we experienced in our souls during the years and also of what may later grow more and more and become still more the meaning of our lives.

{14} I repeat: Joyous gratitude fills our souls. Why? We give thanks on account of the extraordinary and distinct divine mission and of the loyalty that we stand firm to this mission. But also gratitude and joy on account of the boundless divine protection which was granted to us as represented in an eminent manner in the protection of the Blessed Mother.

If I ponder on these or other similar thoughts, then it runs in my blood to point again and again to our covenant of love. If anything whatsoever was established unshakably deep within us in the course of these fourteen years, then it is the reality of our original covenant of love. And we may place claim in this as a gospel truth. Place

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<sup>1</sup> That is, we suffered with (the founder); we were not the direct object of the sufferings, but only helped our founder carry the sufferings.

claim in what? If the covenant of love does not ultimately affect and establish itself in the depths of our being, then we will not be prepared to fulfill our original covenant of love. I will repeat once more: We have a pronounced divine mission! Therefore, everything else is unimportant. The Lord has one person shed his blood in one way and another in another way. And when we have done everything in our power then we must say: We are all useless servants! (Lk 17, 10).

This is something we will have to demonstrate sometime. Think of the ranks upon ranks of those who struggled and suffered besides us, of their soldiers and their officers, persons who had perhaps more daring battles than we. Well, how did it happen that they went to pieces? All is grace! Certainly, we said that often in earlier times, but it is one {15} thing to sit around the conference table and have wonderful talks about all these truths and another if the severity of the fighting continuously touches us, constantly exacting and demanding the utmost from us. This is one of my favorite verses. It comes to me often:

“I firmly believe that no one will be lost  
who remains faithful to the covenant of love!”

I do not think it is important that we be naturally gifted. Certainly it is true that, as we used to say, the Blessed Mother does not always need to only use blockheads... that must not always be qualified blockheads. Well, the Blessed Mother needs them like this and like this and like this. But we must always impress upon our minds, especially now, because we meet again: If we would only be convinced about our pronounced divine mission. The Lord lets one shed his blood this way and the other that way: We are only useless servants! Come what may, over us stands another power which seized and used us. And if you do not read these conclusions from our family history of the last years then, as I believe, you have missed the graces which God wanted to offer us in a special way during the last years. They are, if I may use the expression, a kind of charism. I deliberately say “a kind of charism,” because the expression can be misunderstood.

### ***C. Gratitude for the Divine Victory***

Now comes a third thought. I want to illuminate the past a little.

I think if we understand each other and understand {16} God then we must declare: We are experiencing an extraordinary divine victory.

We have really experienced the victory. It was something unique! I do not know how far you have penetrated into the background: We recall here the time when the battle began – men who were high-minded and influential, who were able to help us and also wanted to help us, before they accomplished their intentions, they all without exception died. It was so clear that God wanted to let us experience our limitations. That is just the great law of God’s kingdom. Thus he will educate and lead modern mankind as a whole, also the Catholic world. You will see, everything will go wrong which will be tried today. Everything goes deeper and deeper into the abyss. This is the great law in God’s kingdom. It cannot be any different. It is something we must experience, and we have experienced it in a classical manner. It is not enough that the individual experiences it. We will hope to God that we experience everything still more – our own powerlessness, that we are no use for such a gigantic work, that our powers are stretched to the breaking point, that everything fails first in one place and then another.

I believe I could almost tell you the exact moment when the turning point occurred. I have gotten accustomed to the expression – in a sense we used it in earlier times but now it is valid *par excellence!* – from now on the Blessed Mother will work with terrible, precise accuracy! She did this {17} previously as well. But then the precision work consisted in that each battle brought us a tiny step ahead. We were not being crushed to death every time (nor ever [in the exile] either, actually, although we were close to it). It was remarkable. But today, [after the exile,] you can say it [happened] with a certain grand recklessness, especially when I think of the new *pars motrix et centralis*<sup>2</sup>.

Yes, it is so. And if a revolution has now been finished, then the real work begins. We have been part of a revolution. One commonly calls saints revolutionaries. You see, we have already essentially won

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<sup>2</sup> The newly founded community of the Schoenstatt Fathers.

a revolution. But now comes the evolution and what kind of evolution! We must now take upon our weak shoulders a heavy responsibility and then examine the nature of the building blocks look and how rough-hewn they still are; one day they will be expected to form mighty buildings. The more one comprehends and recognizes this, the more quickly one breaks down.

But we maintain: Our Lady does precision work! For now, everything, everything is succeeding for us. But not for always, otherwise we might become too proud. But for now!

\*\*\* If we also think of our poor Brothers of Mary, they were ready to break forth in order to create a large movement around Joseph Engling. Naturally they now have a better chance because, out of true love for Joseph Engling, their first general superior, they have called a great movement into life. And great blessings flow back to them because of it. {18} Yet it is difficult to create a community in our meaning if only because of the structure of the Brothers of Mary. But everything will succeed; only have patience! The same holds true on down the line, it holds true for everything. It is the Blessed Mother's precision work all down the line.

What else must we admit? Looking back on the past fourteen years, we may say: We were carried by a divine mission, by divine protection in an exceptional manner and are now drawn into an extraordinarily intense and deep victory.

Now hold fast to the thoughts which I emphasized at the beginning: A new divine initiative! When I used the expression "divine initiative" for the first time, our gaze did not yet go so far, did not yet reach into the whole Church. It was more a divine initiative for the work of Pallotti. And that was without a doubt a divine initiative. I am the same as before: convinced of the mission of the Pallottines. I feel we will never create the worldwide organization without the essential, the characteristic element which God has entrusted to us: the covenant of love. But it did not last long, because I believed the expression must be expanded: a new divine initiative for the whole Church! Now you must once observe all that God has done with us, and how he has done it. What we said in 1929 about the "shadow of the shrine," doesn't that mean just the same now? Or

if we think of the newest expression that is naturally a weighty word, but it contains a seed of our {19} originality: We believe we are called to be the heart of the Church of the future! You must let that work on you with its all its consequences and fullness.

### *III. Expectations for the Future*

I believe that we should come to a close. We will just throw a brief glance into the future. What shall we say? What may we expect if I think of the victory and the precision work? I will just string together three expressions:

It is a vast new inbreak of the divine into our Family,  
a new divine awakening, an awakening of all our strength and of  
all the members and  
a new divine breakthrough into the entire breadth of the Church.

Am I not as incorrigible as ever? It is not always the same bold talk as before? I should have forgotten all that I had learned. It is said: You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

I think that today we should reach our hands to each other and rejoice that divine love has made us the object of its special love. And we want to be occupied with devoting ourselves to the Eternal Love and to our divine mission with immeasurably deep loyalty and unpretentiousness. There is a beautiful saying which we heard so often in earlier times: Be a child of a unique great love and of a unique great mission. With this we have the basic thought on which everything orients. God has lead the entire great {20} Family to this aim. We have become and must become more so in the future a child of one singular great love and mission. In this meaning we will now celebrate Holy Mass together. We want to place ourselves on the pater with one another, as we are here symbolically for all the members we represent in order to be transformed into the divine. Then all hell may rage against us, it may incite all the powers of the world against us, but in the end the truth remains that the party who will be victorious is the one who stands on God's side! Oh, that does not express it correctly. God is the victor in the end! He is always

the victor! We are co-victors inasmuch as we let God be victorious in us. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.