

CHRISTMAS LETTER
FROM FATHER KENTENICH
TO THE SISTERS' FAMILY

December 13, 1965

(Trs. M. Jane Hoehne)

Rome
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My dear Sisters,

This Christmas invites us to look back on the past years more than usually. Our hearts and minds, our memories and imaginations, tend to revolve around Christmas 1941 and the events associated with it. There are, indeed, many and important points of comparison between then and now.

The *miracle of the Holy Night* and the *Candlemas Vision* are the center of our attention. The meaning of both events has been so deeply imprinted upon the family that I need not go into details.

The miracle of the Holy Night is for us an elementary divine intervention into our family and its breakthrough in our own hearts as well as its emergence into the whole person and the community. As an exterior, a visible proof of the fact that the individual and the community have been deeply penetrated and elevated by the divine, we expected the work, its master and the instruments to be liberated from exterior chains. The one and the other were given us in rich measure during and after the first imprisonment.

The second imprisonment from 1951 until 1965 was noticeably sustained by the same deep hope and longing. On October 22, 1965, looking back on the past fourteen years, we had even more grounds than in 1945 to sing our hymn of thanksgiving. We were able to see that not only exterior oppressive shackles had fallen, but interior chains as well. Both things happened to such a degree that at present the family does not realize yet how much the spirit of freedom from ourselves and for God and his wish and will has been growing.

Today we still cannot fully grasp the new manner in which *the image of the child, the image of the father, and the image of the community* have become a reality within us; a reality which, at the same time, may be expected as a permanent gift for all generations of our family. This does not mean that we did not have a clear idea of the threefold image before. We also know that, year after year, its individual features have increasingly made an impression on the individual person and the community and left their mark on them. Likewise, it is familiar to us that this threefold image remains capable of development and is adaptable until the end of our lives. This will be so until it has reached its final form in the *visio beata*. At the same time, we may not overlook to what depths this change had taken place by the end of the second imprisonment.

This is primarily true with regard to *the image of the father*. For us God has always been the Father of love. This can be seen from our great emphasis on the fundamental law of the world which has characterized and permeated the spirit of the family from the very beginning. We know—not only conceptually but practically as well—that love is ultimately the cause of causes of all divine operations. Everything that comes from God is done out of love, through love, and for love. We have always considered it our special mission to make God's fundamental law of the world the basic principle of our lives and of our education. We have also known that we must see *merciful love* as a characteristic feature of God's love. However, what is new for us is the extraordinary depth of God's merciful love. Until now, we have been guided more strongly by

the thought of God's just love; that is to say, by the belief that we have to earn this love through our actions, through all kinds of sacrifices of love. Even today we adhere to this faith conviction and, as before, we strive to please the heavenly Father in the above-mentioned way. However, concerning the evaluation [of our actions], we are on the way to considering our co-operation less important. Only God is important to us—the Father and his merciful love. As we have been teaching from the very beginning of our family's history, ultimately God loves us not so much because we have been good and well-behaved, but because he is our Father; or because he bestows his merciful love most abundantly upon us when we joyfully accept our limitations, our weaknesses and inadequacies, and when we realize that they are the most essential title to God opening his heart to us and letting his love overflow.

That's why, in the future much more so than in the past, we will rely on two titles: his infinite mercy and our abysmal misery. We gladly fold our hands and pray:

Dear Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt, see to it that we experience ourselves as miserable royal children worthy of mercy and that this experience will enable us to walk through life as the most beloved children of God's infinitely merciful father-love.

This is our way of describing the father image of St. Therese of Lisieux and of choosing it as our ideal. Like her, from now on we wish to be less a victim of God's justice than a victim of his mercy; that is, we rely less on the good deeds we accomplished and the claim to a reward we thus merited. Rather, in all situations we rely on the infinite mercy of our God and Father and our own misery by joyfully accepting it and by being aware that we thus draw God's mercy upon us, upon our family, upon the Church and the whole world in a unique way. In *Everyday Sanctity* we read that the weakness of the child, if realized and acknowledged, makes the child all-powerful and the Father powerless.

With that we have simultaneously characterized *the image of the new child* which we have been allowed to live and experience during the past fourteen years and which we want to transmit to future generations.

Our image of the community has permanent features characterized by the holistic nature of our covenant of love. We have always known that the covenant of love with our dear MTA should be seen and lived as an expression, a protection, safeguard and means for the covenant of love with the Blessed Trinity and the covenant of love among ourselves, the covenant of love with each other and for each other.

Year after year, we have experienced more deeply this close interdependence of the various covenants. Because the degree of the covenant with the supernatural world usually determines the relative degree of the covenant among ourselves, it is easy for us to understand the truth of the statement we made at the end of the second imprisonment; namely, that the fusion of hearts with one another, that is, between Father, Mother, and children and the children among themselves has reached a wondrous depth which can be understood a little only in the light of faith and by virtue of the divine intervention in our family. Today we take it as a matter of course that we all have grown into an indescribable community of destinies, community of tasks

and community of hearts the like of which can probably not be found anywhere else. All of us have carried the same cross planned from all eternity for the father of the family and placed on his shoulders when the time had come. All without exception offered in their own way their shoulders. This, too, was done in such a way that the burden of the cross lost on weight because no one had to carry the heavy burden alone. This way we lived in a spiritual union with each other, in each other and for each other so that we really understand only now what *the image of the new person in the new community* is all about. We might also sense that in this way we are approaching an ideal which the Church of the future will naturally feel urged to reach out for and that then the Church may rightly apply the praise to itself: See, how they love one another.

If, with a cursory glance back at the past years, we summarize and examine the result of the plans and designs of Divine Providence, two basic attitudes will naturally be awakened and deepened within us. There is, first of all, the attitude of an inexpressibly deep gratitude. With gratitude we reach out for the hands of our dear Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt as the visible hands of the Blessed Trinity. We also want to be grateful to one another for the faithfulness with which we carried the common cross and we want to promise each other unshakable loyalty of love.

With heartfelt gratitude I accept the many gifts sent to me from every direction, that is, from all the branches and from individual members, on the occasion of my eightieth birthday. I consider them a symbol of the enduring surrender of hearts to my person as an exponent of the family and an image of the Trinity.

I know that the presents were meant that way; I also know that they are meant as a symbol of your own hearts. Therefore, your gifts and my accepting them express a mutual fusion of hearts the kind and degree of which is probably quite extraordinary in the history of salvation. God's fatherly wisdom and the Blessed Mother's maternal care obviously demand the experience of the new community in this way as a model for the experience of a new Church which the Council Fathers ardently desire for the Church at the new shore and which they all, without exception, reach out for.

Summarizing all this, our hearts and souls do not tire of repeating the prayer of gratitude:

My heart, O Mother, longs to thank for everything
in ardent love for you and childlike self-surrender.
What would we be alone, without your care,
without your mother love and your concern.

You saved your children in distress and needy times,
in faithful love you drew us close into your mother heart.
I thank you now, thank you eternally,
in perfect love I give myself to you.

As we did in similar circumstances in the past, we won't forget the axiom today either: gifts are tasks. Let us daily reconquer what we have inherited from our fathers so that we might possess and transmit it to future generations as a sacred tradition and legacy.

All in all, this year, the miracle of the Holy Night has become a reality in a way as never before. This guarantees that it will become actualized more perfectly every year until the family may experience its continuation in eternity. How inexpressibly deep and beautiful it will be when we can savor and enjoy the new image of the child, of the father, and of the community in our Schoenstatt heaven for all eternity. Then the words of St. Augustine will become true: *Videbimus et amabimus in fine sine fine.*

Closely associated with Christmas 1941, there is, among other things, the pressing issue of the *Candlemas Vision*. We know how to interpret it. We know what it looked like at that time; we also know its shape and form at the end of the first imprisonment. Ever since, we have been intensively striving for the Candlemas Vision of the Holy Father, that is, for his deeper insight into Schoenstatt's originality and mission. Future historians will have to discover and describe in greater detail the work and the sacrifices [we all made] in this direction during the past fourteen years. Later generations will be surprised at the uncompromising consistency with which the family upheld this secret and tried to actualize it.

At the end of the second imprisonment, we may state with great joy that the Candlemas Vision we ardently long for has been given to the Holy Father in no small measure. This is the only explanation for the repeal of all the decrees and even more the manner in which this took place. This is another precious fruit of the momentous events in the past. Less known might be the fact that individual members and branches of the family make great efforts to explain this secret to various bishops and cardinals in different dioceses and continents and to help them understand it.

If you contemplate all this on Christmas, you will feel inclined to fall on your knees and to joyfully acknowledge: What would we be without *your* care... that is, without the supernatural guiding power and without the hard blows of fate which divine-maternal wisdom planned and destined for the family and carried out as well.

The leaders of the family gathered here in Rome are living out of these great realities which I have merely outlined. Day after day, they try to enter more deeply into these inner connections in order to better understand God's plans. The more they are interiorly filled with divine light, the greater their desire to institute for all times one day of the month on which to relive time and again the great happening which we are witnessing now. At issue then is a day of remembrance and renewal which, in addition to the 18th and 20th of the month, should lead the entire family into supernatural spheres and milestones.

When I now send heartfelt wishes for Christmas and the New Year to every member and every branch of the Family, we understand what I mean by it:
[I wish] all of us God's blessing in the spirit of the past years and our mission for the future.

With heartfelt regards and my priestly blessing.

(Signed) J.K.

