

# Message

CHRISTMAS 2024

*"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (Jn 3:16)*

*Dear Sisters,*

As we journey through this sacred season of Christmas, our hearts are drawn to the profound mystery of *Dilexit Nos*—"He has loved us." This is the reason for our celebration each Christmas and the foundation of our joy: "not that we loved God but that he loved us [...] **He first loved us**" (1 Jn 4:10, 19). We were loved without any merit and are always loved first by God. His love is so concrete that He took on flesh and came to live in our midst, as the Baby in the Nativity scene. This love has a name and a face: Jesus, the God-made-man.

In a world filled with uncertainties and imbalances, the church calls us to "return to the heart" (*Dilexit Nos*, 29). Returning to the heart means experiencing deep interiority, where we encounter the God-with-us who probes the heart, awaits us, listens to us, shares our struggles, and carries our burdens with us. However, this journey of personal encounter with God in prayer is not without its challenges, especially in our religious life.

The various distractions—both external and internal—pose significant challenges in encountering God. In our fast-paced world, filled with constant noise and demands, finding moments of silence to retreat into the heart can be difficult. Internally, the mind often wanders, making it hard to maintain the focus needed to enter into deep communion with God. These distractions can sometimes feel overwhelming, making it hard to remain attentive to the divine presence.

There is also the temptation to superficiality in prayer. In the face of so much need in the world and the demands of our apostolate, there can be a tendency to reduce prayer to a ritualistic or functional task, rather than an encounter with the living God. Finding the balance between our numerous responsibilities and the deep interiority that prayer requires can feel like an ongoing struggle. Without a



commitment to deepening our relationship with God through prayer, the authenticity of our witness to the Gospel can be compromised.

Despite these challenges, returning to the heart calls us to persevere in prayer with sincerity and trust. It invites us to confront the distractions, doubts, and difficulties with faith, and to rely on God's grace to guide us deeper into intimacy with Him. This is the great "gift" of the Child of Bethlehem: He brings us a spiritual energy, an energy which helps us not to despair in our struggle, in our hopelessness, in our sadness and fears, for it is an energy that warms and transforms the heart. Indeed, the Birth of Jesus brings us the good news that we are loved immensely and uniquely by God, and He not only enables us to know this love, He also gives it to us!

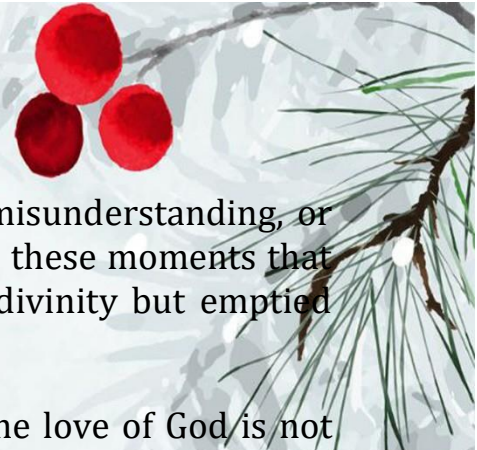
Returning to the heart means discovering "in the heart of each person the mysterious connection between self-knowledge and openness to others, between the encounter with one's personal uniqueness and the willingness to give oneself to others" (*Dilexit Nos*, 18). This calls us to move beyond surface-level actions and reconnect with the deeper essence of who we truly are. Through self-awareness, we discover the depth of our compassion, empathy, and the ability to recognize and respond to the needs of those around us.

The birth of Jesus is the ultimate manifestation of God's unfathomable love for humanity. It is a powerful force that moves us to serve selflessly, with love, respect, and the recognition that in serving we encounter the divine. This love is marked by vulnerability, simplicity, and humility as God chooses to dwell among us so that we may come to know the depth of His care for us.

The vulnerability of Jesus in the manger invites us to embrace our own humanity and that of others, even in its frailty and imperfection. In community life, this means practicing patience with the limitations of others and ourselves, choosing to see one another through eyes of compassion rather than judgment. It challenges us to let go of pride and self-sufficiency, nurturing relationships of mutual support and understanding.

The simplicity of the Incarnation reminds us of the need to detach ourselves from worldly desires and distractions. It calls us to a countercultural witness of simplicity, particularly in a world that often equates success with material wealth and recognition. It encourages us to prioritize relationships over possessions, service over ambition, and mission over personal comfort.

The humility of God-made-man invites us to empty ourselves of ego and self-importance, making room for God's grace to work through us. This humility is



especially challenging when we face moments of conflict, misunderstanding, or failure in our ministries and in our communities. Yet, it is in these moments that we are called to imitate Christ, who “did not cling to His divinity but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil 2:7).

As we reflect on the birth of Jesus, we are reminded that the love of God is not distant or abstract; it is deeply personal and tangible. It challenges us to make our love equally concrete and visible. This means being present to others with genuine care, whether in our apostolates, our communities, or the silent moments of prayer. It means choosing to forgive, to listen, and to accompany, even when it is inconvenient or difficult.

Ultimately, the mystery of incarnation invites us to see every challenge in our religious life not as a burden, but as an opportunity to manifest the same love that came down to us on that holy night in Bethlehem. It invites us to revitalize our consecration so that we can live more fully our call to be authentic witnesses of the God who loved us first.

From all of us at the Generalate, we extend our heartfelt wishes for a Christmas filled with abundant joy, boundless love, and lasting hope. May we step into the New Year as pilgrims of hope, with renewed faith, trust, and courage.

*With prayerful wishes for a blessed Christmas,*

*S. Maria Goretti Lee*  
Superior General

