



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

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My dear Sisters and Brothers in St. Francis!

May the good Lord give you his peace!

"The day of gladness drew nigh, the time of exultation arrived"¹

Yes, the day of gladness drew nigh, and it is time to rejoice and to give thanks. God has come to amongst us, God said 'yes' to the man. This 'yes' has arrived almost unknown, in an unbelievable manner, *hidden these things from the wise and the learned ...and ... revealed them to the childlike.*² And yes, we see this in St. Francis, and we can see it also today, that the mystery of Christmas is hidden from the wise and revealed to the childlike.

Great things are born in silence. When we are living this season of Advent waiting for the coming of the Lord and celebrating the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ to the world at Christmas, we often experience the noise and buzz of the world, that is far away from the silence of the stall in Bethlehem. Only a few people knew about what has happened during those days, and thus having the joy of the great act of God: *the fullness of times had come*³!

We have to live Christmas with this experience today, too: we are living in the fullness of times. Christ has come and has remained among us. It is not easy to live this great gift, and today again, it seems that only a few people know about what this gift is really, what we celebrate. Sometimes even we, ourselves forget about it in the midst of the rush of our life, doing our best to prepare everything for the feast, to prepare things that we wish to be signs of our love to one another. We forget about the silence of Bethlehem, that is essential to be able to celebrate the incarnation of the Word of God.

The silence of Bethlehem is a great opposition to the noisy world - rebels, riots, claims, wars, fights in all areas of our societies and even in the Church! We have great concerns about what is happening around us, and it takes our attention, takes our time, takes our power.

But this is the time of exultation! Therefore, I give thanks to the Lord, our God for all the good that he gave us during this year, and I invite you all to live this time of exultation with a full awareness of the presence of God among us. I invite you all to renew our decision to live the fullness of our vocation, and to strive more strongly and more intensely to live that kind of holiness that God has invited us to.

1 1Cel85

2 Mt.11.25

3 Gal. 4.4

We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by laboring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.⁴

At Christmas, this call for holiness is stronger. Stronger, not because God is calling us louder, but because we are going to have a time with more silent moments. We are readier to discover the miracle of God, and to contemplate it in silence. I encourage you with the words of Thomas Merton, who died 50 years ago, but his teaching is still a strong invitation for us:

“There must be a time of day when the man who makes plans forgets his plans and acts as if he had no plans at all.

There must be a time of day when the man who has to speak falls very silent. And his mind forms no more propositions, and he asks himself: Did they have a meaning?

There must be a time when the man of prayer goes to pray as if it were the first time in his life he had ever prayed; when the man of resolutions puts his resolutions aside as if they had all been broken, and he learns a different wisdom: distinguishing the sun from the moon, the stars from the darkness, the sea from the dry land, and the night sky from the shoulder of a hill.”⁵

This is the kind of silence which lets us celebrate Christmas at the depth of its significance and meaning. God said a 'yes' to all men and women, and this 'yes' is unconditional. Mary said 'yes' to God, and her 'yes' is unconditional. It is a good approach to step on the road to holiness to repeat this 'yes', unconditionally.

Saying 'yes' to God: not only with our prayers, but also with our actions. Saying 'yes' to God also means to seek his will, to do his will. And yes, this will give new life to our fraternities, too.

Saying a 'yes' to myself: accepting myself as a gift of God to the world, to my family, to my beloved ones, and yes, even to myself. Life is the gift of God, and we have to say 'yes' to our lives. We have to accept it with joy together with all our weakness, fragility, difficulties, because it belongs to God. It is right Christmas that shows us the immeasurable value of life, regardless the external circumstances. And yes, this will give new life to our fraternities, too.

Saying 'yes' to the neighbor: looking at him as a gift of God. My neighbor is someone, whom God has sent to help me on my road to holiness. All I should do for him, saying 'yes' to him unconditionally, will help me to holiness. I invite you to love and act for the poor, the marginalized, the abandoned ones, the orphans, the widows of our times, who are on the edge of the society, or even beyond it. We need all those whom nobody else needs. And yes, this will give new life to our fraternities, too.

For us, secular Franciscan sisters and brothers, this silent celebration of Christmas means the fullness of times, the time of exultation. We always have to seek what is first, and silence always has been first. The world was created in silence. Christ has arrived in silence. Also, Saint Francis has met God first in silence, in the prison, in the St. Damian Church, in the nature, in the solitude.

Let us spend this feast season of Christmas with this exultation, born in silence and in prayer. Let us be aware that the fullness of times had come. Let us get closer to God, closer to our neighbor, and thus also closer to ourselves. Let us be more determined to become holy and let us be more determined to put the incarnated Word of God in the center of our fraternities, local, regional, national and even international. Let us share in the experience of Saint Angela of Foligno: *The Incarnation has made two things to us. The first one is, that has filled us with love. The second is that it makes us certain of our salvation.*⁶

4 Gaudete et exultate 14.

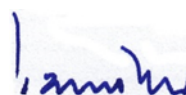
5 From Thomas Merton: No man is an island

6 12th letter of St. Angela of Foligno

I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right that I should think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart⁷.

I wish you all a blessed, holy Christmas, so that you can experience the silence of God, in which the greatest thing has happened: the Word of God has become flesh and dwells among us.

Your brother and your minister,



Tibor Kauser
CIOFS Minister General

