



Dearest Sisters and young women in formation,

Ideally, the “four stars” that illuminated our Advent journey have come to rest on the grotto in Bethlehem where the mystery we contemplate every year was fulfilled: “*A child has been born for us, a son given to us*” (Is. 9:6).

This Son, *whom the heavens cannot contain* (St. Augustine), the Eternal Word of the Father, comes to us in weakness, embracing the poverty of our human condition.

Is there anything greater than a God who allows himself to be held in our arms like a child? And is there any challenge more thrilling than that of offering the Word of God our very life so that he can live in us and we in him?

Christmas is the “memorial” of our entrance into the mystery of the Incarnation; it is the celebration of the birth of Christ in us:

To construct a manger scene is an excellent act of devotion, but that manger must first of all be constructed within us. The Son of God Incarnate must be born in our hearts, in our minds, in our entire being (FSP 53, p. 370).

If Christ is born in us, then the flame of mission burns more brightly. If Christ lives in us, he “infects” us with his love for humanity and we become *competent communicators* of the Good News that frees everyone from slavery. We become *traveling companions* of the people of our time and witnesses of hope in the midst of the darkness of non-sense.

Sisters, on Christmas night and at the conclusion of a year wounded by all kinds of violence: wars, martyrdom, natural calamities, social inequalities and spiritual uncertainty...let us accept our Founder’s invitation to pause before the manger so as to learn the lesson of *love* and, through our daily exercise of the apostolate, follow the path whose distinguishing feature is authentic *holiness*—a holiness that is capable of attracting others:

In spirit, let us enter the grotto of Bethlehem where Jesus taught his first lessons—lessons of radical poverty and love. What prompted the Son of God to come to earth, clothe himself in human flesh and dwell among us? Love.... And what does Jesus want? Two things: the glory of God, that is to say, the glory of the Father, and then holiness—the salvation of all people of good will.... Let us ask ourselves if we have the firm will to become holy and to carry out the apostolate. Is this our predominant thought? When a person’s ideal is to become holy, when she wants to place everything in Jesus Christ and live in him, when she wants to imitate him, enter his school and serve him, then her good will is blessed by the Lord. If we ask for many things but fail to ask for this good will, then we are not asking for the graces proper to the manger (1961).

May Mary obtain for us the grace to become holy and may she rekindle hope in us as we await the One who continues to come among us. God comes to visit us personally; he comes to visit our communities. Let us welcome him joyfully.

A Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year to all of you.

Affectionately,

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