

Dearest Sisters and young women in formation,

With the rite of being marked by ashes, we begin our itinerary of conversion, which introduces us into the paschal dynamic of *dying so as to live* by means of a progressive stripping of self, which is the path to fullness. This "holy journey" is marked by the presence of the Master, who continues to bear the cross of the world's sins alongside the women and men "of every race, language, people and nation" (Rv. 5:9) who sow hope, dry tears, promote peace and open horizons of communion in an era wounded by a serious shortage of fraternity.

As Benedict XVI says in his Message for Lent 2012, the aforementioned men and women are the true disciples of the Lord who, "united with him through the Eucharist, live in a fellowship that binds them one to another as members of a single body. This means that the other is part of me, and that his or her life, his or her salvation, concern my own life and salvation." This "belonging to one another" is so profound that we can no longer close our hearts to others. On the contrary, it prompts us to "take care" of them because we are interested in them, concerned about them....

The invitation to put our faith into concrete, visible practice through solicitude toward our brothers and sisters is especially timely for us, who often find it hard to base our fraternal relations on a genuine experience of faith, that is, on the fundamental motivations that uphold our communal life. But mutual love, the desire to take care of one another, the commitment to pursuing together the road to holiness, and a sense of belonging to the community are all basic conditions for perceiving the cry of contemporary humanity, as well as for quenching the thirst of God and witnessing to his commandment of love.

In following this Lenten itinerary, it would be helpful to take advantage of the booklet, *Moving Toward Easter with Jesus Master*, prepared by the sisters of the Commission for Animation on the Constitutions. Illuminated by the Gospels of the Sundays of Lent and by the story of grace contained in *Abundantes Divitiae*, let us set out with renewed faith in the footsteps of Christ, who died and rose for us, "perceiving, ever anew, the marvels that God works for us" (*Porta Fidei* 15) and "the overflowing riches of the Pauline Family...so that, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God might be made known" (AD 4).

Moving toward Easter with Jesus Master and all humanity, let us courageously and humbly take on "the most difficult battle"—the one against ourselves. As Athenagorus, Patriarch of Constantinople, says in the prayer found at the end of the supplementary aid:

When we are disarmed and dispossessed of self, when we open our hearts to the God-Man who makes all things new, then he takes away past hurts and reveals a new world where everything is possible.

Maestra Thecla urged us in the same direction many times, saying:

Let us transform ourselves into instruments of peace.... Peace is the fruit of charity, compassion and harmony.... Therefore, let us learn to sympathize with others, to put up with them and to excuse them. Let us hold our tongue and accept the small wrongs done to us, even when we are convinced that we are in the right (VPC 137).

With our gaze fixed on the Lord Jesus, let us make the effort to put charity into practice in our community life and apostolate. Let us strive to help one another and to make a gift of ourselves to them, especially those in greater need, because Lent is also a time of solidarity, of concrete attention to others.

Sisters, on 15 March, mid-way through our Lenten journey, we will be joyfully and gratefully celebrating the 59th anniversary of the approval of our Institute—yet another reason to renew our efforts to strive for holiness and to witness with renewed vigor to the prophetic dimension of the Church.

A warm embrace to each and everyone of you. Please feel me close to you in joy and hope.

Sr. M. Antonieta Bruscato
Superior General