



UT CHRISTUS REGNET

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BEHOLD, I AM DOING SOMETHING NEW.

Isaiah 13:19



With Him, Life always begins anew.

-Pope Francis

I recently had the joy of visiting a Sister who was instrumental in helping our community become established and more firmly rooted when we first returned to Nebraska. I remember Sister as being a strong leader – decisive, creative, confident, organized, hardworking – qualities which were all very helpful to us as new religious sisters, just beginning this way of life. Now, thirty years later, she lives in Camilla Hall, the infirmary of her community, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (I.H.M.). She spends most of her day in her room, sitting up in her chair or resting in bed. During my visit I assisted her while she ate her supper. This was a profound experience for me, to serve this woman who had once been so independent and generous in her service of others. I found myself desiring to be as humble and gracious as she was. In fact, during my stay I spent time with several I.H.M. Sisters. I found myself wishing to be like this one who suffers so much and keeps smiling and encouraging others, and like that one whose gratitude flows continually, and like the one whose gentle serenity and attentiveness lifts the hearts of those who meet her. I truly desire to live like these Sisters, and at the same time I realize how frequently I lack these qualities.

As I continue to reflect on these experiences, it becomes more clear that when I notice myself not responding in the way I want to, it is an invitation, an opportunity to begin anew, rather than a reason for discouragement.

Let us call on our Savior for the grace to begin anew:

Create a clean heart in me, O God. Renew in me a steadfast spirit! (Ps. 51:12)

In the Heart of Jesus our Risen King,
Mother Margaret Mary, C.K.

Mother Margaret Mary, C.K.



IN THIS ISSUE ...

Blessed Easter! In this issue we celebrate the miracle of conversion. Every time we see ourselves, others or the mystery of God's love in a new way, we've undergone a conversion. Like the disciples at Pentecost who were transformed by the coming of the Holy Spirit, may this Easter season be a time of loving and gentle transformation for you and your family.

GOD'S IMPECCABLE TIMING

growing in love of neighbor



My Lent began with a familiar theme: love of neighbor.

A quote from *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* came my way, “love of neighbor is inseparable from love for God” (CCC 1878). Pope Francis exhorted the faithful in his annual message for Lent, “love of God and love of neighbor are one love.” Over the course of my 20 years in religious life I have completed numerous retreats with a resolution related to this theme. I continually experience the need and desire to love those around me more perfectly.

Years of battle with the same weakness can be exhausting and can easily lead to discouragement. A recent conversation with my students helped me recall the perfection of God’s timing. During a discussion about God’s love for us I quoted Jesus himself, “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). Hearing these words, the fifth graders grew quiet and their eyes widened. As the words penetrated their hearts, one child inquired, “so if I say a bad word or hit someone, I am doing that to Jesus, to God?” I answered in the

affirmative and he exclaimed, “you should have told us this a LONG time ago!” His peers agreed.

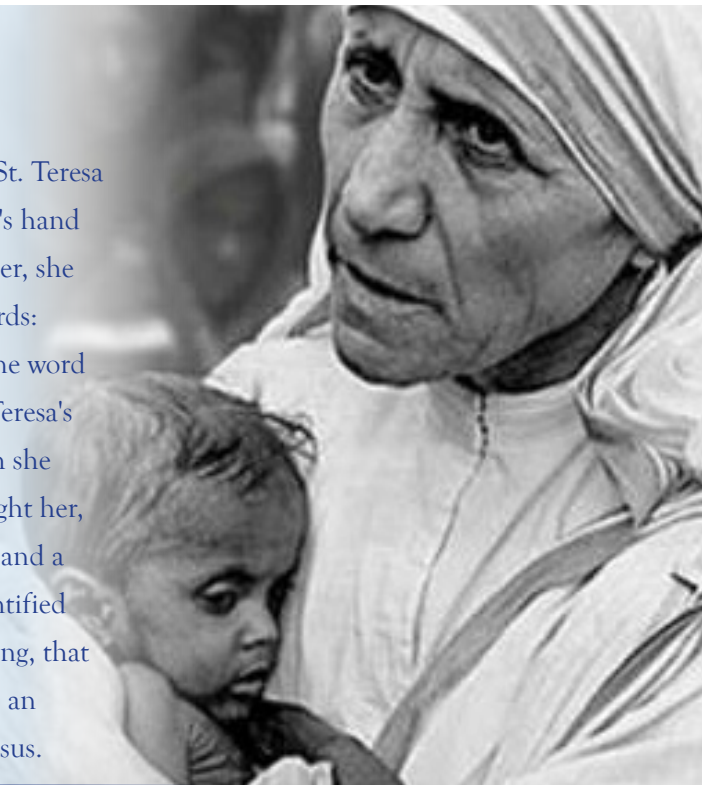
I am very sure that every child in that classroom had heard these words prior to our conversation that day. However, the grace of God was profoundly at work in that moment. My students’ hearts were prepared to truly listen and soak in the meaning of Jesus’ proclamation more fully at that particular time.

God longs for my conversion, for me to love Him and others better than I often do. However, He is perfectly patient in waiting until my heart is ready to respond. In the meantime, His grace is at work softening and strengthening my heart. I can trust that He always fulfills the desires of my heart in His impeccable timing.

By Sister Marie Caritas, C.K.

Mother Teresa's 5-Finger Gospel

I recently saw a video of St. Teresa of Calcutta taking a man's hand and as she held each finger, she slowly articulated the words: "You. Did. It. To. Me." one word for each finger. Mother Teresa's "five-finger gospel," which she said her own mother taught her, issues both an invitation and a challenge. Jesus is so identified with the poor and suffering, that anything done to them is an action done directly to Jesus.



FROM INDEPENDENCE TO DEPENDENCE

My Conversion Story



Growing up on a farm in small-town

Nebraska I learned a lot about being independent. If something needed to be done, you just figured it out. We raised a large garden, butchered chickens, walked beans, and loaded hogs for market. My dad and brothers could fix just about anything. I learned

from my family a strong work ethic, a can-do attitude and self-sufficiency. For much of this I am grateful.

When I entered the convent, I continued to operate in this same mode. Of course, I needed Jesus as my Savior, like everyone else. But in the day-to-day, I prayed and studied and worked hard. Without realizing it, I relied a lot on myself. I was building on a foundation that I thought was firm, but was actually very shaky – I was building on my own strong will.

I wanted to be a good Sister, but I never seemed good enough. My mistakes and failures seemed to prove that over and over. Without realizing it, my identity had become rooted in what I could do, which led to feeling like a failure: as a Sister, as a teacher and eventually as a principal. No matter how hard I prayed or how much I tried, I couldn't fix myself. After 13 years in religious life, I hit bottom. I felt depressed, empty, and incapable of loving God or being loved by Him.

But, in His mercy, God began to teach me that life was not about fixing myself. Rather, life is about relationship and depending on Him. I had actually built up a barrier of self-protection that kept others – even the Lord – at a distance. It took many years of spiritual direction and therapy with solid Catholic psychologists to break through this stronghold.

Ultimately, I came to understand that the patterns of self-sufficiency and independence I had learned growing up were not my identity and God's

love was not contingent upon anything I could do or not do.

Looking back, I am amazed at the peace and joy and healing that God has granted over these years. But He's far from finished with me! Recently, I found myself frustrated and burdened. It felt like many things I was hoping for and working toward for months – God-centered things – were just not working out. They kept getting thwarted. Jesus then used a simple line from a book to remind me that I didn't need to be in charge. By His grace, I was actually grateful for this reminder! I could then pray, "Jesus, I surrender all of this to You. Thank You for everything exactly as it is and not as I wish it was."

I know I will struggle with self-reliance until my dying breath. And that's okay. Jesus doesn't need me to be fixed. He just needs me to grow step-by-step in relationship, to keep learning and living in dependence on Him.

By Sister Mary Angela, C.K.



Sister Mary Angela (front) with her siblings, 1978

WHAT SAINTS have inspired your ongoing conversion?

Here's what some of our Sisters said:



St. Maximilian Kolbe has helped me in my conversion by witnessing to me perseverance in living when the carrying the cross and his dependence on Mary.

Sister Edith Marie

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity has inspired my ongoing conversion because of her awareness of the presence of God within her. She was able to receive God's unconditional love and then was a conduit of His love and presence to others. Even when I am far from living that, it is a desire of my heart.

Sister Mary Guadalupe



I turn to St. Jane Frances de Chantal. It's often a temptation for me to believe that the jobs of my day are too little, are not significant or don't matter. Jane would show her sisters that, in the eyes of God, every moment matters and every task is "touched" by Him. She has taught me how to have little conversions with Jesus, bringing an increased hope that He is taking care of me throughout each day.

Sister Peter Marie

St. Josemaria Escriva has powerful one-liners that help me re-focus. For example, "to begin is for everyone, to persevere is for saints." I also like to use his various Stations of the Cross meditations.

Sister Mary Agnes



St. Dismas, the good thief, encourages me most in my ongoing conversion. He soared high in insight and faith when all seemed dark and hopeless to the crowd.

Sister Mary Alma

St. Thérèse of Lisieux was helpful to me when I became discouraged at my sins, faults and weaknesses. That was one thing I had a lot of, and I thought I couldn't offer them to God. She taught me that the pain I experience, even if it's through my own fault, can still be offered to Him and can unite me to Him. Thus, nothing is wasted ... NOTHING!

Sister Mary Fidelis

I have been a half-hearted friend of St. Thérèse for a time. Recently, however, she has been drawing me to let go of trying to "fix" myself and allow Jesus to carry me to Himself. Her complete confidence in Jesus' transforming mercy encourages me to open my heart to Him and trust Him in leading me to the Father.

Sister Mary Kolbe





I read the life of St. John Vianney when I was a young sister and he became a hero of mine as I prepared for perpetual vows. He has been a friend ever since. In an unassuming and simple way, he did tremendous work in bringing souls to God. Unnoticed by the world, he walked faithfully with God every day.

Sister Mary Clare

St. Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises used in the 30-day and 8-day directed retreats, his rules for discernment of spirits and the daily examen have been pivotal in my ongoing conversion. I am deeply grateful to St. Ignatius and to all who dedicate themselves to spiritual direction- and especially to Jesus who works so powerfully through them.

Sister Maura Thérèse



St. Mary Magdalene inspires my ongoing conversion by the totality of her self-gift and definitive choice for Jesus. I heard it described that, being possessed by seven demons (Luke 8:2), she entered into a "family relationship" with them. (Seven is the sign of a

covenant or family bond.) Since she had chosen this relationship, she had to engage her will to choose against it before Jesus would cast the demons out of her, which she did. Hers was an absolute choice for intimate relationship with Jesus, and she lived it out most beautifully for the rest of her life.

Sister Marie Amata



THIS YEAR'S PASCHAL CANDLE

An Offering of Love

Sister Mary Vianney designed and painted our community Paschal candle. Last year's candle was designed and painted by Vicky Sohl. Sister, who majored in art education at Benedictine College was eager to take on this new challenge. After receiving training and suggestions from Vicky, Sister began designing and painting.

The images on the candle express the Paschal mystery and the Kingship of Christ. The colors are chosen after reflection on the Heavenly Jerusalem passages in Revelation 20 as well as the Ghent altar piece "Adoration of the Mystic Lamb". What a beautiful offering of time and talent to be consumed in His sanctuary.



"On this, your night of grace, O holy Father, accept this candle, a solemn offering, the work of bees and of your servants' hands, an evening sacrifice of praise ..."

- Easter Exultet



FORGIVENESS

Conversion in Relationships

“Unless you forgive your brother from your heart...” (Mt. 18:35)

It happens often during recess. Two students – and, if they are girls, each brings two or three others – rush to the teacher on duty to share her side of the story. Someone broke the rules or refused to play or took something that didn’t belong to her. After hearing both sides of the story and saying something to help promote empathy and good will on both sides, the teacher asks, “Are you sorry?” “Can you forgive her?” The two girls shake hands and rush back to their game. I know I have countless memories of similar situations from my own childhood: forgiving my siblings, classmates, and teammates. I wonder if these childhood experiences led to the misunderstanding that forgiveness should be as easy as a few words on the playground and reconciliation as simple as a handshake. In practice, especially when the offense is deep, true forgiveness from the heart is one of Christ’s most challenging commands. In fact, the love and forgiveness of the early Christians was so astonishing to their pagan neighbors that it converted a whole civilization.

True and deep forgiveness is impossible without the help of Christ. When you or I forgive another person from the heart we are doing something supernatural. Deep forgiveness begins with taking an account of the hurt the other has inflicted upon us. All of us long for and deserve to be loved. When that love is withheld (being ignored by friends, not being received well when we are suffering, etc.) or when suffering is given to us instead of love, these moments hurt us deeply. Often others’ offenses against us have repercussions that add to the hurt. All of this should be considered when we decide to forgive another. When you or I are hurt we build walls around our hearts to protect ourselves. These walls lead to isolation, defensiveness, and any number of chains that prevent us from living in the “glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

When we choose to forgive we turn (convert) our hearts in a beautiful and profound way. Instead of living from these places of anger and defensiveness, we choose instead to live from a place of freedom. Forgiveness, simply put, is choosing to allow God to pay back the debt owed to us from those who have offended us. We release the debt, of love withheld or suffering given, to God who knows and sees all things and judges justly. In doing this we also chose to think and act differently toward those who hurt us. This is a challenge, especially if the hurt is deep. We decide to put more love into the world by holding back those angry thoughts or biting words, even if reconciliation is impossible (the people may be deceased, live far away, or the relationship might be one where it is unhealthy or unsafe to reconnect in a meaningful way). This is the beauty of forgiveness. Regardless of the other person’s attitude, you and I can choose to live in a way that brings more love into the world. We, like the early Christians, can forgive from the heart as we have been forgiven in Christ. During this glorious Easter season, I pray that your heart and home may be a space where your neighbors marvel like the Greeks and Romans of ancient times, “see how they love one another.”

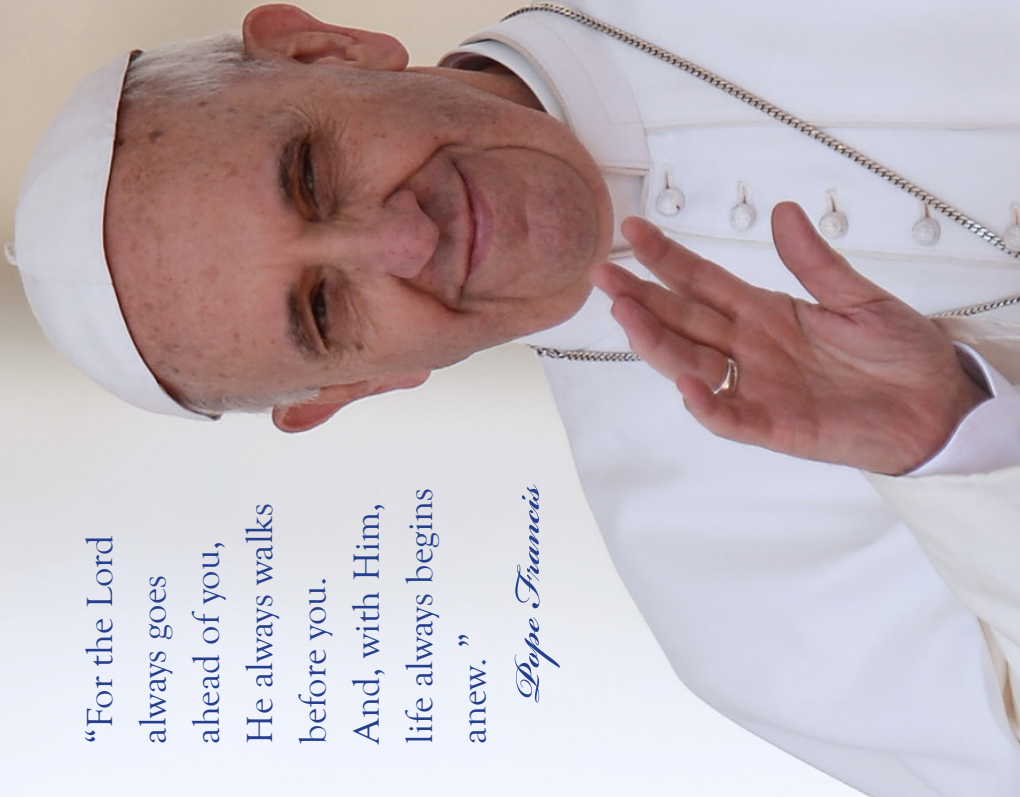
By Sister Mary Gabriel, C.K.

Photo Album



“For the Lord
always goes
ahead of you,
He always walks
before you.
And, with Him,
life always begins
anew.”

Pope Francis



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