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Dear Sisters,

Our letter to you for Christmas 2018 centers on the reality of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Word of God. We will be writing to you regarding preparations for the General Chapter in separate communications in January 2019 when all the Provincial/Regional Chapters have been completed. Now, let us focus on the Gospel for Christmas Day.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race, the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. . . . And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth. . . . From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:1-5, 14, 16-17)

This Advent/Christmas season invites us in prayer to contemplate the deep mystery of the Incarnation and the wondrous gift given humanity and all creation in the life of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Karl Rahner, S.J., in his many writings presents a profound understanding of the “Word of God has become man [human].” What does it mean to be human? Marika Rosa, Ph.D., of the University of Winchester, UK, writes:

Rahner argues that it’s only in the Incarnation that we finally see the truth of human nature, because it’s only in Jesus that we see a person fully given over to God. Human nature’s meaning is to be given up to God, abandoned; humanity is fulfilled and finds itself by disappearing into God: ‘Man is insofar as he gives himself up.’ The Incarnation shows us that being human means having the potential to be completely inhabited by the Word of God.

What does it mean that the Word of God became human?. . . The divine freedom means that God can become not-God, finite, Other-than-God. In emptying Godself and giving Godself away, God can make the other his own reality. Everything that God makes has, as a result of God’s self-giving love, the potential to become an expression of God and God’s love. All theology, says Rahner, is therefore anthropology, and all anthropology is Christology. To know what it is to be human is to know Christ, and to know Christ is to know God. (marikablogs.blogspot.com/2009/07/karl-rahner-on-incarnation.html)

This explanation from Karl Rahner gives us a deeper understanding of the gift of the charism given by the Holy Spirit to Fr. Gailhac when we state “Our mission is to know and love God, to make God known and loved” (*Const.* 7). We are given the grace during this season to enter more fully into an appreciation for the gift given in the Incarnation. In our knowing Christ we are united by grace to live in Christ and we read so often in Fr. Gailhac’s writings we are called to be other Christs; Christ must be formed within us. How is Christ’s love, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness needed to be shared in our lives with others?

Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, a contemporary Distinguished Professor of Theology now retired, in her recent book, *Creation and the Cross*, presents another aspect of the “Word made flesh” that in the first century was commonly understood through the Holy Spirit that Jesus, God as Wisdom, came to dwell bodily on earth. She points out that in both Luke and Matthew the evangelists identify Jesus with Wisdom herself: “The importance of this connection cannot be overstated. It configured a limited historical figure, Jesus the crucified prophet from Nazareth, to Wisdom’s universal role in creating, saving, and making holy the world. The Wisdom tradition is a major route the early church took to the belief that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the Creator God’s own personal outreach and saving presence in the world.” (p.176)

Once the disciples interpreted Jesus as the human being whom God as Wisdom became, belief in incarnation took root in the Christian tradition. They came to see with the eyes of faith, so to

... speak, that this one human being revealed the holy mystery of God through the medium of the flesh. They came to believe that God was dwelling on earth as Jesus; that full of grace and truth, Jesus was in person the historical sacrament of God's merciful love; that he personally embodied divine presence and action in the world for human salvation and creation's renewal. Within the inevitable limits of his historical era, geographical location. . . . his story inscribes in time a revelation of the heart of God. (p. 177)

During this Advent/Christmas season we are invited in prayer to contemplate Jesus, full of truth and grace; to ponder and experience Jesus as the sacrament of God's merciful love and deepen our faith in Jesus as the revelation of the heart of God.

Our deep faith in and commitment to Jesus lead us to extend our apostolic mission, proclaiming to all that Jesus came to announce the good news of salvation and a new era in human history. We are called to create God's reign by the witness of our lives, extending to others love, compassion, and mercy.

Pope Francis in *Gaudete et Exsultate* states clearly, "Just as you cannot understand Christ apart from the kingdom he came to bring, so too your personal mission is inseparable from the building of that kingdom. . . . Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace. Christ himself wants to experience this with you, in all the efforts and sacrifices that it entails, but also in all the joy and enrichment it brings. You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavor." (#25)

This coming year is quite significant for us as an Institute as we prayerfully prepare for our General Chapter in July, 2019. We are invited this Christmas to deepen our contemplation of Jesus Christ, revealed to us in the mystery of the Incarnation. We have said during this past year that as an Institute we are on a "threshold," a defining moment, making choices in how we move forward in serving others and choosing the structures that are appropriate for us at this time. We pray for wisdom and courage that we live God's will for us. May we surrender in deep faith, hope, and love to all that God asks of us, creating a future filled with hope.

May we be receptive to God's grace to live deeply our RSHM mission and live faithfully paragraph #9 of our *Constitutions*: "We integrate our lives by centering them in Jesus Christ whose love in us is the source of our faith and zeal. Trusting in the Spirit we pledge ourselves to support each other in our consecration for mission."

We send to each sister Christmas blessings and love,

Rosemond Maria Emilia Philippa Mary

Rosemond Blanchet

Maria Emilia Peliz

Philippa O'Sullivan

Mary Genino