

FRANCISCAN SISTERS, T.O.R.
of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother

from the desk of

Mother Mary Ann Kessler, T.O.R.

JULY 2016



Staying Focused

Dear Friends,

Have you ever felt caught up in a whirlwind and unsure of where you were going to land or as if you were trudging along in the mundane, longing for change? Have you ever felt as if you were constantly being bombarded with doom and gloom news? It can be hard at times not to get depressed, discouraged, or stressed when we feel that way.

In recent months I have experienced the whirlwind, the mundane, and the doom and gloom. I have felt like there has been a “gray cloud” hovering over us with the uncertainties of the upcoming presidential elections, the threats to our national security, the narrowing scope given to religious freedom and conscience, and the list goes on. I have felt pulled in several directions with the manifold tasks of daily life: renovations, travels, meetings, phone calls, e-mails, and the humdrum of endless filing, tedious government forms, etc. I have found myself a bit overwhelmed and discouraged with the amount of work that was lying on my desk. I also felt uninspired one day, as I tried to write a talk I was to give. I felt depressed at our nation’s degradation, and the general state of world affairs. After some days of struggling with all this, I finally asked the Blessed Mother to help me “tackle” all this “stuff.” She, in her gentle, motherly way, spoke to my heart, “You have lost your focus.” Her words helped to inspire me to praise the Lord through song and scripture, and the burden I was feeling began to lift. She was right. I needed to get my eyes back on Jesus.



After this experience I began to reflect on Bl. Teresa of Calcutta’s life. She too lived in some gloomy days, as her home country of Albania was taken over by the communists, and India, the country where she lived and served for so many years, was also in a time of national division. Her life, too, seemed pretty mundane and overwhelming at times. Every day she was working in less than desirable conditions—body odor, bad breath, and scorching heat with no fans or air conditioning. There were days with little water or food and questionable sanitation. Yet, she went about with a smile. What could have been every reason to become “stressed out”, depressed, or discouraged was an opportunity for joy and love. Why? Because she never lost her focus—she kept the eyes of her heart on Jesus. She knew that the God who created the entire universe from nothing was big enough to handle the “burden” of not having enough food to feed her poor brothers and sisters, so that now it became an opportunity for miracles to happen. She experienced in her own life how Jesus could transform something that was a struggle or a situation that was seemingly “bad” into something that was beautiful and good.



To Make Known God's Merciful Love



So, how can we stay focused on the Lord? The answer varies for each of us, depending on our work and family life. I would recommend three ways: 1) Spending some time with Jesus each day, 2) Offering to Jesus all that we do for love of Him, and 3) Having holy cards and other concrete reminders of the Lord easily accessible.

As we all know, any relationship, whether it is between spouses or friends or parents and children, requires some effort. We need to spend time with each other. The same is true of our relationship with Jesus, and for many of us, this takes some creativity on our part. If we have small children, it may mean praying when they take their naps. If we have to commute some distance to work, we may need to pray in the car. As with any relationship, the more we spend time with the Lord, the more we will grow in knowing and trusting Him.

Offering to Jesus each activity of the day as it happens enables us to remember that Jesus wants to be with us in every circumstance. It is also a powerful form of intercessory prayer. God can use every act (washing dishes, doing laundry, balancing the books, debating in court, etc.) as an avenue of grace for ourselves and for our intentions.

Human persons are tactile beings. We need to experience life through our senses, so concrete reminders are helpful in keeping our focus on the Lord. For example, if we are working in a secular law firm, we may not be able to have a crucifix on our wall at work, but we could have a holy card of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a bookmark in our reference book. We wouldn't be offending anyone, and at the same time, we could be reminded of Jesus' presence and love for us every time we opened up the book. The possibilities for our creativity are endless.

So, in our daily lives of joys and sorrows, victories and struggles, let us keep our focus on the Lord who encourages, empowers, and provides for us. Thanks to each of you for your continued love and support through your time, talent, and financial resources. You are an important part of our mission to make known God's merciful love.

God bless you all,

Mother Mary Ann Kessler, T.O.R.

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YOU ARE OUR *Companions in Mercy*

Lifting prayers and songs for five hours a day; listening to, teaching, feeding, and clothing the poor in downtown Steubenville; fostering the faith life of college students at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Florida State University, and other colleges; holding hands and sharing our hearts with the elderly in nursing homes; and bringing God's love to our brothers in prison: none of it would be possible without your part in our mission.

With our vow of poverty, over 70% of our needs are provided for by charitable contributions. Our Faithful Friends are those who invest in us monthly, providing the stability we need to live out our mission. You put the veils on our heads, the food on our table, and the sandals on our feet so that we can pray for, clothe, and comfort the spiritually and materially poor. Whether it's \$10 or \$10,000 a month, every expression of generosity enables us to make known more of God's love.

In this year of mercy, our Holy Father Pope Francis has encouraged this generosity. He even bribes you with double a return on your investment! At his General Audience on Ash Wednesday, February 10, 2016, Pope Francis exhorted us:

"The Lord . . . promised his blessing to those who open their hand to give generously (cf. Deut 15:10). He will give to you two-fold, perhaps not in money but in other things, but the Lord will always give you double.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Bible's message is very clear: be courageously open to sharing, and this is mercy! If we want mercy from God, let us begin to practice it. It is this: beginning to practice it among ourselves, among compatriots, among families, among peoples, among continents."

Many of you have already been courageously generous. Here are the words of current Faithful Friends on why they have opened their hands:

"I am a Faithful Friend because I feel the mission is important: the outreach to the community, the worship, the way that the order is conducted as a witness. I think about Mother Teresa and why she spent two hours of the morning in prayer. She said that the two hours or however many were essential so that she could be in tuned with the will of the Lord. I think the sisters look at their ministry the same."

"I think it is a good cause. . . You're supposed to support good Catholic causes. I'm trying to tithe and this is a good place to put part of it."

"We want to support [the sisters] because they are religious nuns. We hope that someday schools and our communities will have more visible nuns. We support the sign value of their habit and their presence. And we take seriously the call to support the Church financially. It's exciting to see a Church that's alive."

"We feel it is our Christian obligation. It's also Scriptural as far as giving what you receive. 10% is what our faith is based on, so we do that. We have been to a couple of the Masses and think it's pretty cool that they put on activities for families."

"I like the work that the sisters do and I just want to support that. They are just so faithful to their vocation as sisters: their life of prayer, and the fact that they are both a contemplative and an active order. They've made a successful order in a world where many orders are fading away. They went back to the basics of seeing what the Lord wants them to do. I'm happy to keep the sisters going and for prayers for me and my family. We're retired now but we try to squeeze out our monthly donation for the sisters."



Courtesy of Franciscan University

In return for our Faithful Friends' generosity, we promise:

- o Daily remembrance and weekly special remembrance in prayers and Holy Hours
- o Prayer in Rome and Assisi twice a year for your intentions
- o Annual Mass on the first Friday of November and other Masses throughout the year offered for your intentions
- o Regular updates on the community in the form of newsletters
- o Guest invitation to the annual Lenten Retreat
- o Year-end receipt and renewal of your prayer intentions for the year

Think of the many mercies springing from your open hands: the mercies of sustaining our very life of prayerful service; the mercies of each of our visits to the schools, poor, sick, imprisoned, and our other works of mercy; and the mercies of daily and special prayers by over thirty sisters for your intentions. Please prayerfully consider our Holy Father's plea to be courageously generous. Please continue to be, or please become, our Faithful Friend. Thank you and God bless you.

If you would like to become our Faithful Friend, please fill out the envelope inside of this newsletter, call the Mission Advancement Office at 740-544-5542, ext 115, or go to our website: www.franciscansisterstor.org/giving/faithful-friends-monthly-giving/



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THANK YOU

Faithful Friends

Thank you to our Faithful Friends and to all who support us. We are keeping your intentions close to our hearts and in our prayers.

CONTACT US! (740) 544-5542

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"To Make Known God's Merciful Love"



UPCOMING EVENT

Paddling for the Poor

It's summer and Fr. Matthew Russick, T.O.R., is back raising funds for Heart of Mary Mission House, which serves the poor in downtown Steubenville, Ohio. This year, he'll cover more than 27 miles over two days of canoeing, July 24-25. He and his older brother, Aaron, will form a dynamic tandem, a.k.a. the portly paddlers, canoeing the Muskegon River in Michigan from Newaygo until the river empties out into Muskegon Lake. With the help of your sponsorship, Fr. Matt's 27-mile paddle will provide funding for the five sisters who reside at Heart of Mary, allowing them to continue to live and work among the poor in the heart of downtown Steubenville.

Support Fr. Matt by mailing your gift in the attached envelope, or by donating online. God bless you and your canoe, Fr. Matt!

WWW.FRANCISCANSISTERSTOR.ORG/DONATE-ONLINE

