

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



from the desk of

*Mother Della Marie*  
OCTOBER 2020

*Dear Friends,*

We are grateful to God for the many blessings of this summer. In August, Sr. Lisa Marie Shatynski and Sr. Mary Petra Ricciardi made their first profession of vows (picture below right). What a miracle of grace for our community and the Church to have two young women give themselves exclusively to God! Sr. Isabelle and Sr. Bridget were received into the novitiate just a few days later (picture below left). They radiate joy and peace as they enter more deeply into their discernment. We are so thankful for their “yeses” and for the gifts they are to our community.

Due to COVID-19, all our mission house sisters came home to the Motherhouse in April. This facilitated more quality time together, which prepared us for our General Chapter meetings at the end of May and into June. General Chapter is a time to reflect together as a finally professed body, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, on how the Lord is calling us to be renewed and to live more fully our consecrated life. Beautiful values emerged from our General Chapter: a desire to grow in deeper unity with each other and to develop deeper bonds between our Motherhouse and our mission houses. To assist us in growing in deeper unity this coming year, we are focusing on this theme: Receiving God’s merciful love with Mary at the foot of the cross in order to extend it to each sister, the Church, and the world. It is too easy for differences and misunderstandings to cause our love to grow cold, even in the convent!

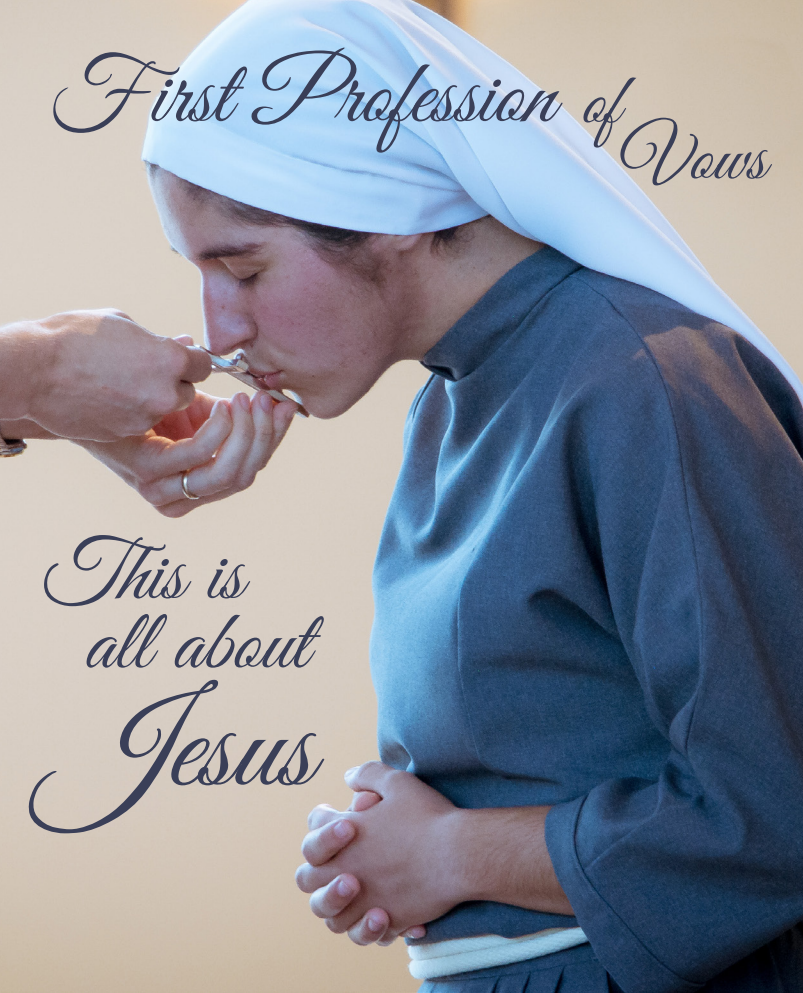


We cannot be merciful with each other unless we first receive God’s mercy. It is not easy to receive God’s mercy, because we have a tendency to want to deserve it or earn it. Since this is impossible, we either give up or strive pathetically for the scraps we can earn. Being aware of our need to earn or deserve can be a first step in surrendering to God’s undeserved and extravagant love (cf. Titus 3:4-6). When we receive merciful love from God, the core of our identity is built up in Christ. When we are grounded on the solid foundation of our true identity in the midst of our daily trials, no misunderstandings nor even our own sinfulness can separate us from God’s love or each other. Only from this firm foundation are we able to extend the mercy we have received to others.

The more we recognize our need for mercy and contemplate God’s mercy for us, the more capable we become of being mercy for others. This mercy is manifested through the solicitude, forgiveness, and love we have for those whom God has placed in our lives. I am grateful for the seventy-times-seven times that my sisters show mercy toward me; it is always an experience of God’s mercy for me. Daily living mercy for others emanates the warmth of Christ’s love beyond ourselves. It extends into a Church and a world that are in desperate need of being built up in merciful love. We invite you to join us in this endeavor of being renewed in receiving and giving mercy in this coming year, so that the world may believe in Jesus, our merciful Savior!

*To Glorify God and Make Known His Merciful Love*

# First Profession of Vows



This is  
all about  
Jesus

## REFLECTION BY SR. MARY PETRA RICCIARDI, T.O.R.

Praised be Jesus Christ now and forever! This year has been a crazy year. With COVID-19, General Chapter for our community, and Sr. Lisa Marie and I professing first vows, so many changes occurred and are still occurring. Change can be hard, especially when it feels like it never ends. I have grown to have a pretty good threshold for change, but this year, I reached my limit many times. Throughout the year, plans either adjusted or were taken away, one right after another, such as: various modifications in our common life to adhere to social distancing rules, no home visit, and no guests for profession besides immediate family, which eventually turned into not having our families attend profession at all.

These gradual, yet constant, changes felt like a stripping, because all of the plans I enjoyed or looked forward to were being taken away. So, how was I to respond to this? Thankfully, we have many opportunities for prayer in our way of life, so I spent many hours before Jesus in the Eucharist, “pouring out my heart before Him” (Lam. 2:19) in regards to these changes and the unstable feelings that it brought. In these times, He gave me strength. He gave me comfort. He gave me love and accompaniment.

In addition to all this, I was impacted by an experience I had in June, during a vacation at a retreat house in the mountains of Western Pennsylvania. This retreat house had two ATVs that we were able to use, so, one day, some of the sisters rode them. The other sisters and myself were watching when an accident occurred. Two of my sisters caught air on one of the ATVs and were thrown off. I immediately

During these trying times, we are keeping you in our prayers. We remember the many who are unable to receive the sacraments at this time, those who are lonely, those who are experiencing economic hardship, and those who are experiencing difficult family dynamics. We are so grateful for your love, prayers, and generosity toward us, especially during this time. We could not exist without you nor could we live our life of prayer, penance, and works of mercy. Words cannot express how humbled we are by your goodness to us and God’s provision for us. We carry you in our prayers and grateful hearts!

In Christ’s love,

*Ms. Della Marie Doyle, T.O.R.*

*Mother Della Marie Doyle, T.O.R.*

*Reverend Mother*

ran to them, and, praise God, they were able to walk away with only minor injuries. However, I was very shaken by the sight and it brought me to question Jesus’ presence in suffering. I learned through prayer and discussion with different people that Jesus was not only with me, but even more profoundly, because of the Paschal Mystery, He also experienced these sufferings as His own. In me, He ran to my sisters. In my sisters, He fell off the ATV. Jesus is radically united to our suffering because of the cross. This perspective changed everything for me and it is shaping the way I interact with Jesus, myself, and others.

Our community’s Constitutions say that at the cross we meet God. This summer, God gave me opportunities to meet Him at the cross, especially with the gradual decline of guests for my first profession. I initially felt some loneliness, yet the Lord taught me that He, too, was lonely on His way to the cross, even though there were people everywhere. He taught me that at the Crucifixion, the moment in which His mission was consummated, there were only a few of His loved ones there to witness. Not everyone He wanted to be with Him was there, for one reason or another. Jesus invited me to see that He is all I need and He intimately knows what I am experiencing and He experiences it with me and in me.

I was very grateful that our profession Mass was livestreamed, so our family and friends could still be with us. I felt so much peace and joy throughout the entire Mass. I was so excited to give myself to Jesus, who has given Himself totally to me. One moment that distinctly stands out for me was during the communion meditation, when the power went out. I felt so many emotions. I was certain that the livestream completely cut out (it had not). I wanted to cry out of defeat, but also laugh in amazement! I was thinking, “Are you kidding me?” Then the musicians sang this verse from Hillsong’s “Lord of Lords”: “Keep my eyes fixed ever on Jesus’ face; let not the things of this world ever sway me.” This was exactly what I needed to hear to remember that this is all about Jesus. Now I live for Him and am dedicated to Him in a deeper way.

## REFLECTION BY SR. LISA MARIE SHATYNSKI, T.O.R.

There are many gifts and graces that have come to me with making my first profession of vows, but there is none so great as the gift of being God's—all God's, His and no other's. The day was long-awaited by both me and God, in the sense that He has journeyed with me throughout my life.

In the days leading up to vows, I was disquieted. I felt that I couldn't pray, and if I was praying, I was not doing it very well. I was stressed out by a laundry list of things to get done and the list continued to grow. I was grieving the loss of my family, who were unable to attend my profession because of COVID-19 precautions. Yet, that wasn't all of it. I realized that another source of my disquiet was fear. When it came down to it, I was afraid that God would not show up on profession day. I was afraid He would leave me alone. It must be what a bride feels like before her wedding. She offers herself to her beloved and her beloved has the freedom to accept or reject her. It is quite a vulnerable thing to do! From the outside, it seems like a silly fear. Of course, her beloved will show up—He loves her! Yet, on the inside, the question remains, "What if . . . ?"

Making ready for vows, I felt all the nerves of a bride. Never before had I given my full self to someone as I was now consecrating myself to God. What would happen when I did? Would He love me back fully like He had promised me? The ground in my heart was already tilled through two years of novitiate. I had also made a general confession earlier in the week, going through all the sins throughout my life. I knew He had taken those times I failed to love and redeemed them through His mercy, through His blood flowing freely on the cross. In this way, I felt that my heart had been cleared out and washed clean. I was ready to receive my Beloved. I was ready to live a life with Him, spreading the gift of His redeeming love everywhere I would go!

All that was required now was for me to step up to the altar to profess the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and for God to show up. Would He? I decided to leave that question in God's hands and simply put my trust in Him. I couldn't feel Him like I wanted to. I did not have sweet consolations leading me to profession day, but I did have the graces of faith, hope, and a deep love keeping me firm in my resolve to consecrate myself to God.



## *When God's Heart* **EXPLODES**

If you had the opportunity to watch our profession online, perhaps you got to see the moment when God really showed up. Of course, He was there the whole time, but in a particular way, I recognized Him when I received Him in the Eucharist and then the power went out. Yes, the power went out. You might be a bit confused as to why that would be a sign for me of God's presence. Let me explain.

Communion is the most intimate moment of every Mass. It is when Jesus, hidden in the form of bread, literally enters into us and becomes one with us in a way only God can. At long last, after I had vowed to be bound to Jesus through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, I received my Beloved. We were united in a way that was deeper and more profound than ever before, and to me, it seemed that God's Heart exploded with sheer joy and happiness, so much so that all of creation could not contain it. He literally burst a fuse in the power lines leading to our motherhouse. It appeared that we were having technical difficulties, but I knew from my heart, with utmost certainty, that I was loved and that God had indeed shown up.



*Sr. Lisa Marie praying at the moment the power went out!*



*Sr. Mary Petra professing vows in the hands of Mother Della Marie*



*Sr. Lisa Marie kissing her crucifix*

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*Sent forth by the Holy Spirit ... (ACTS 13:4)*



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Sr. June Benedicta, and Sr. Lisa Marie

**Downtown Steubenville and FUS Works of Mercy**

Sr. Agnes Therese, Sr. Joan Paule, Sr. Maria Teresa  
and Sr. Lisa Marie

**Florida State University and ministry to the poor**

Sr. Rita Clare, Sr. Faustina, and Sr. Eliana

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*"To Glorify God and Make  
Known His Merciful Love"*



# Share His Mercy VIRTUAL BENEFIT

SATURDAY, OCT. 24, 7 PM - 8:15 PM EST THE DIFFERENCE JESUS MAKES



You are invited to join us virtually as we share our mission and how Jesus makes a difference in our lives and the lives of those we serve! Please invite your friends!



Our keynote speaker:  
**Fr. Dave Pivonka, TOR**, president of Franciscan University of Steubenville

The evening's program will include testimonies from our sisters:

[WWW.FRANCISCANSISTERSTOR.ORG/EVENTS/BENEFIT](http://WWW.FRANCISCANSISTERSTOR.ORG/EVENTS/BENEFIT)



Sr. Sarah Rose,  
Sr. Agnes Therese, and  
Sr. Rita Clare  
(pictured above)

Our sisters, those with whom we minister, and community friends will share testimonies of the difference Jesus makes. You'll also hear original songs from our sisters!

To sponsor or donate toward the Virtual Benefit, visit [www.franciscansisterstor.org/donate/donate-online](http://www.franciscansisterstor.org/donate/donate-online) or call Sr. Anna Rose at 740-544-5542 ext. 135