



## Società del Sacro Cuore Casa Generalizia

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June 24, 2022

Dear Sisters and Family of the Sacred Heart,

Happy Feast of the Sacred Heart! Since the time of Sophie each year RSCJ have come together to renew our commitment in the Society, to discover and make known the love of Jesus. We stop, we remember and we recommit. Sophie and her companions came together as a community dedicated to “rekindling the torch of faith and the sacred fire of love” (Constitutions of 1815, par.1) during a time of revolution and unrest. Like Sophie, the world in which we live calls us inward and outward, to examine and re-set the agenda of our lives, to rekindle “the torch of faith and the sacred fire of Love” for ourselves, for the people we serve and for our church. We invite those of you who share our mission and spirituality to renew your commitment to this mission with us.

How wonderful it would be to say that we are living in a time of peace, prosperity for all, good health, with safe and sufficient clean water, inclusion and equality in the Church and civil society. That we live in a world where we can walk down the street or cross a border without fear of violence or discrimination because of the color of our skin, to be in a place where each person feels loved and secure and able to trust “the other”, where each has received what she/he needs to thrive. Sadly, this is not the world of 2022. What is perhaps really true is that each moment in history presents its own challenges and our longing for the reign of God, here and now, fans the flame of radical love and a passion to incarnate God’s mission as Jesus did.

It is not by chance that in the midst of this messy world and global crisis, Sophie’s little Society continues to listen to the same Spirit that she did and search for the way we are called to discover and make known the love of Jesus Christ today. This journey as a community right now is not totally comfortable. Would that we could rest awhile, wait until the world was a little more certain, or the economy was more stable or the Church was less divided or the threat of war was over. But that is not real and actually it is the very state of our world and our people that calls us to create something new, to think and act beyond our boundaries, to find new ways to support our life and mission beyond the safety of the known, to be women and men of hope.

On this feast of God’s love for humanity, we ask for strength from the pierced Heart of Jesus. Jesus holds humanity in His Heart. He chose to “lay down his life for his friends” as the ultimate act of love, of voluntary vulnerability for the sake of all of us.

I have been pondering what gives us strength for the journey. What helps us “to widen the doors of our tents”, to be open to the new, to be welcoming to who and what is not familiar? To hear the voice of God in ourselves and outside of ourselves, to be people of hope in this time of uncertainty, we need to learn to be vulnerable and, at the same time, resilient. How

do we allow ourselves to be both vulnerable and resilient? Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans that we are reconciled by the vulnerability of the cross and strengthened by the power of resurrection. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane teaches us about vulnerability and Mary and the women who stood by the cross and braved the tomb show us resilience.

I think it is true that to touch our own VULNERABILITY, to be willing to be open to the unknown, we need a deep sense of security as well as belief that we do not walk alone. I am reminded of what we say when we make our vows and proclaim each year “Trusting in the fidelity of God and the love of my sisters...” It is not easy to be vulnerable, to trust each other, to lay open our imperfect lives, to recognize and welcome our need of each other. And yet God promises to shepherd us in our vulnerability.

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down says the Lord God. I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed and I will bind up the crippled and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice. (Ezekiel 34:15-16)

These words capture the essence of God’s concrete love for us and our call as Religious of the Sacred Heart to act and love in the same way. We discover that God is the core of our strength and at the same time we are called to shepherd God’s people and each other, in good times and hard times.

And what does it mean for us to be RESILIENT? While being resilient may seem contradictory to being vulnerable it really means being able to recover quickly from difficult conditions or able to spring back into shape after being bent or compressed. It means learning how to stand up again after falling, to forgive after being hurt, to allow our wounds to be healed, to choose life over death, to believe in Resurrection. We might want to pray about what Jesus taught us about the resilience of the Resurrection in the last few years. The pandemic has taught us about being vulnerable as well as about the power of resilience especially with the help of each other and the communities of which we are a part. We need to continue developing personal and communal skills to help each other navigate these times of uncertainty in our world and in our lives. Certainly God’s invitation to learn something new will allow us to create something new within ourselves, within our community and for the sake of the mission.

I would like to invite us to spend some time pondering what it means to be vulnerable and resilient, as individuals and as a community of sisters and as part of our family on this journey upon which we have embarked:

How can I recognize and own my own vulnerability, particularly right now in the Society and in the world in which we are living?

What would help me/us to own my/our vulnerability and become more resilient?

How will owning our vulnerability and building resilience help us to live the mission and proclaim the gospel? To be ready to begin something new?



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How do we allow Jesus who we meet in the Garden and Mary who we meet at the cross to shepherd us in this time of change?

Lastly, here is something I would like us to think about as we create new paths for our future: I have been thinking and praying about those who are most vulnerable, who risk losing the future, the young people of our cities, towns and countryside. I would like us to ponder the call today of our fourth vow –the vow to the education of youth. Sophie had an insight about the world in which she was living and the need to ensure a future for the young people of France in the midst of chaos and revolution. I think all of us would agree that young people across our globe are suffering. Our children and young people suffer not only the present but also the future consequences of our broken world. No matter what country we live in, we see young people who have lost hope, who lack the security, faith or trust in the systems and institutions that used to provide a sense of stability. We have also visited the spaces where RSCJ are accompanying young people in their search for meaning, sometimes in classrooms and often in more informal settings, including and sometimes especially, in our communities of older sisters. I would invite all of us to pray about what this fourth vow means when we renew our vows this year. How do we as a congregation live out this call today? My intuition is that this may be key to our present and future if we want to go into the future firmly rooted in the intuitions of Sophie. The Central Team would welcome your thoughts about steps that we might take, given who we are now with all our strengths and vulnerabilities, to enliven the words of this fourth vow, to pay attention to those who bear the future on their shoulders, to enliven our commitment in a way that is right for us today.

I would like to end with a thought on the gospel for the Feast, imagining Jesus as shepherd finding the lost sheep. At some time or another, each one of us is that lost sheep –stranded on a mountain, lost in the wilderness, wandering out into the road, perhaps injured. Recently I had the opportunity to drive through the beautiful countryside of Ireland for a few days with my sister. We were struck by the way the sheep were marked with different colors –blue, red, green, pink. We surmised this was the way the farmers could tell their own sheep. We did not really see any shepherds but it was clear that the sheep were cared for and marked by the seal of their shepherd. I think this is the way we are with God, with Jesus –wherever we are, on the top of the mountain, in the deep valley, or grazing peacefully in the field, we are marked by the seal of Jesus' Heart, cared for even when we are not aware of God's presence, searched for when we are lost. God does this for us and we are called to do this for each other and for our world. Let us be shepherds to each other and to our people and let us allow ourselves to be shepherded by our faithful God and by those who make God's love known and present in our lives each day.

With love and prayer,

Barbara Dawson RSCJ  
Superior General