



Fra Donatus Forkan
Priore Generale

THE WHOLE ORDER.

“Patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary”

November 17th. 2007
Prot No PG102/2007

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Hospitality.

This year, November 17th is the day on which the Order celebrates the Patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This feast was made official at the General Chapter held in Rome in 1736. By adding this feast to the Order’s liturgical calendar of feastdays, the General Chapter not only wished to give recognition to a long history of devotion to the Mother of God within the Order, but also to entrust the Order, its membership and its mission of Hospitality to our Heavenly Mother under the title of “Patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary”. The history of devotion to Our Lady within the Order dates back to St. John of God himself who had a particular love and filial devotion to the Mother of God, on whom he relied for help and strength in his ministry and to whom he turned in all of his difficulties. In each of his letters, John commenced with the words “In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of Our Lady the Ever-Virgin Mary,” and encouraged others to do everything for the glory of God “and that of Our Lady the Virgin Mary”. (1GL 12)

In fulfilling our mission of hospitality: receiving, accompanying and caring for people in their time of vulnerability, illness or particular need, the Order has always relied on the guidance of Our Blessed Lady and prays constantly to her for those whom we are privileged to serve in our Centres and Services around the world. The beautiful example of the young woman, Mary, hurrying across Palestine to be close to her elderly aunt who was expecting a baby and lovingly caring for her in her time

of need is just one vivid example that serves as a model of hospitality for us. Mary's sensitivity and love for Elizabeth is inspiring. She had only just offered hospitality to the Son of God in her womb, yet she was not so preoccupied with the great mystery unfolding in her own life that she neglected to see Elizabeth's need for assistance.

Mary will do the same for us in our time of need, so let us not hesitate to turn to her, even if we have not always been the perfect son or daughter that we might have been. Mary loves us passionately because she shared in the passion of her son, who "saved me because he loves me." (Psalm 17 '18') No matter what circumstances we find ourselves in Mary understands how we feel, having had the sword of sorrow, as prophesied by Simeon, pierce her soul. (Lk. 2:35) What it must have been like for her as a Mother the evening that Jesus came to their home to say goodbye, before leaving for the events that would lead to his death? What a painful separation that must have been? The deep sense of being alone that Jesus felt throughout the ordeal that led to his death. His Mother must also have felt a terrible isolation, a deep sense of helplessness and the terror of knowing that Jesus was in the hands of cruel, corrupt and violent people. Because of her sensitivity, the knowledge that her son was like no other in goodness, kindness, compassion and forgiveness, intensified her suffering all the more.

Mary, united with her Son in the work of salvation (LG 57) continues to love us, who were bought at such a great price. (1Cor:20) Mary is therefore a most powerful advocate with her Son on our behalf, who would never refuse her anything she would ask of him, as is evident at the wedding feast of Cana. Once she became aware that there was the potential for an embarrassing situation developing for the newly weds, she didn't even wait for Jesus to give an answer to her request, she knew he would do what she asked of him. Mary turns to the waiters and tells them to do whatever it is he asks of them. Mary gives us the same advise, to do whatever it is he, her Son, asks of us and we will find that whatever it is that troubles us, will be answered in a way that ultimately will be beyond our wildest dreams.

As we prepare for this special feast of our Order, let us to turn to Mary, our Mother, renew our love for her, renew our trust in her and with her, let us daily pronounce our *fiat*, our yes to God. Let us turn to Our Blessed Mother, Queen of Hospitality, for hope and guidance for those who have it within their power to bring about peaceful resolutions to the conflicts that are causing such havoc and suffering for so many people in so many parts of our world. To renew our lives and our Order, let Mary be our intercessor and model. Mary always did what pleased her Heavenly Father from the moment she consented to be the Mother of His Son, her faithfulness and total commitment and love for him, is evidence of her strong faith. She would have willingly exchanged places with Jesus if she could, but it wasn't what the Father willed. Mary shows her qualities as a religious leader through her accompaniment and presence with Jesus' disciples after his death, all of whom had lost faith in him, and had lost direction and hope in their lives. Mary, despite her personal anguish and

suffering, kept the flame of love for and belief in Jesus alive until the Holy Spirit came to strengthen them.

It is worth noting that Mary the Mother of God is recognised and respected by all the major religions. I recall some Buddhist Monks when they were ill would visit our clinic in Kwangju, Korea, and when passing a statue of Our Blessed Lady they would always stop and give a profound bow, adding that as they respected the mother of the Buddha, they also respected the Mother of Jesus, whom they recognised as a prophet. Likewise in the Koran, the Muslim Holy Book, the only woman who is mentioned is Mary where she is always mentioned in association with her son, Mary the Mother of Jesus. In Vietnam when the Communist Government nationalised the Order's hospital in Bien Hoa in 1975 some of the religious symbols were not removed. In one of the corridors there is a picture of Our Lady, Mother of Good Counsel, still hanging there more than 30 years later.

In conclusion, I pray that all the members of the Order will enjoy the loving protection, guidance and presence of Our Blessed Lady, Mother of Good Counsel, at all times in your lives, but especially when you have a particular need that is causing you concern, be it personal or that of a loved one. Let us together turn to her in prayer for the needs of our Order, especially that she helps us to renew our Order in accordance with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Let us pray for our troubled world that is becoming increasingly more violent and uncaring. Let us pray to Mary, *Mother of our Youth*, many of whom are, in the words of St. John of God, *like a boat without a rudder*, going around in circles, without direction or the hope of a better future.

Let us pray to Mary for so many sick, poor and marginalized people who will never know how much they are loved by God, because society or other human beings have turned their backs on them. This must cause God great sadness, for he has no hands to touch, to heal, to sooth the sick and help people who have severe disability, but ours; he has no feet to seek out the lonely and the lost, but ours; he has no voice to console and comfort the sad and sorrowful, but ours; he has no heart to show love for those who feel most unloved, but ours. God has ordained things in this way so that we can be his partners in his great work of ministering, healing, redeeming and sanctifying. Without us, in a manner of speaking, God's hands are tied.

Finally, it was inspiring to see and to hear the reports during my visit to the Provinces for the Provincial Chapters, of the dedication by the followers of St. John of God, Brothers and Co-workers, to so many people who come to our Centres and Services in their time of need and being received with genuine love, concern and professional skill. May Our Blessed Lady, Mother of Good Counsel, St. John of God and all our saints and martyrs, and so many Brothers and Co-workers who have gone before us who were truly marked with the sign of hospitality, continue to guide and inspire us all.

May you all have an enjoyable and blessed celebration for the Feast of the Patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Fraternally yours in St. John of God,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donatus Forkan O.H.", written in a cursive style.

Brother Donatus Forkan, O.H.
Prior General.