

The Vine

I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.

(John 15:5)

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A newsletter of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus



*O Most High and Glorious God, enlighten, I beseech You, the darkness of my mind.
Give me right faith, certain hope and perfect charity.
Grant that I may know You, Lord, that I may always and in all things,
act according to Your most holy and perfect will.*

Prayer of St. Francis before the Crucifix at San Damiano



Letter from Mother Ryszarda Wittbrodt, SSCJ Provincial Superior

Dear Friends,

Allow me to share with you an experience that happened once during my early years in religious formation in Poland that had a deep impact on me in understanding that our Lord comes to us in surprising encounters.

During my years as a novice, in addition to our formation classes, we were assigned to fulfill the various tasks in the convent, such as serving in the sacristy, refectory, laundry, etc. At this particular time I was responsible for receiving guests and keeping the entrance and parlors always ready for visitors.

On many occasions, I dusted a small crucifix in a guest room, while never having the time to examine it carefully. One particular day, I took note of it with surprise thinking it so little resembled the face of Jesus I had usually seen de-

scribed on crucifixes. However, I asked myself, "These features seem strangely familiar. They remind me of someone I have met." Going about my work, I put this unresolved question out of my mind.

The following day, at the entrance, I was serving a poor, mentally challenged man who came nearly every day to us for a bowl of soup or a sandwich. As he expressed his thank you for the meal, I knew the answer to my question of the previous day – Jesus on the crucifix had the very features of this person!

As we meditate upon God's love for us, especially during this time of the commemoration of His Passion, Death and Resurrection, it is my hope that this, my personal, surprising encounter that God allowed me to have and to share with you, will be an encouragement to us to return our love to Him in the person

of our neighbor and in our response to the situations of our life, as we all fulfill our commitments and call to become another Christ to others.

As our Sisters continue to serve the many who come to us and pray for your intentions, in this issue of the *Vine*, we are happy to share with you the life and apostolate of our Sisters in Swedesburg, Pennsylvania.

May God bless you and give you His peace and grace each day to recognize Him in many encounters of His presence.

United in the Divine Heart of Jesus,

Sr. Ryszarda Wittbrodt, SSCJ

Mother Ryszarda Wittbrodt, SSCJ
Provincial Superior



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**The Servant of God
M. Klara Szczesna,
Co-Foundress of the
Sister Servants of the
Most Sacred Heart of Jesus**

Prayer through the Intercession of the Servant of God Mother Klara Szczesna

God, Almighty Father, you willed that your servant, Klara Szczesna, would love You with her whole heart, and imitating the meekness and humility of your Son, serve the abandoned and needy. Through her intercession, grant me the grace of ... , which I ask of you, and by this mercy toward me, show that her virtue, together with her hardships and sufferings, undertaken for the glory of the Most Sacred Heart of your Son, were pleasing to you. You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Crown of Thorns Plant

By Sister Mary Joseph Calore, SSCJ

Each Lent calls to mind the Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We especially use this time to meditate on the Lord's Paschal Mystery through the Stations of the Cross and, in the Polish tradition of Lenten Lamentations. Often our Sisters will create a Lenten display to serve as a reminder of the sufferings of Our Lord in His Passion.

A few years ago, the superior of one of our nearby convents asked if she might use a crown of thorns plant from our Provincialate for one such Lenten display. The potted plant was kept in an upstairs study. It had become large and overgrown, and was dangerous to handle. In examining the plant and considering how to get it safely to the car, the Sisters looked at the great thorns on the branches and were afraid of injury. It was decided that some branches would have to be trimmed in order to move it safely. Still, in spite of the precaution of gloves and large tools, the Sisters still managed to incur some scrapes and cuts in the process of trimming back the overgrown plant.

While its lovely red flowers reminded the Sisters of the drops of blood that filled the true crown of our Crucified Savior, the thorns were a terrible reminder of what our salvation cost the

Son of God. Most memorable, however, was what occurred when the Sisters clipped the branches of the crown of thorns plant. The milky white sap of the plant emitted a sweet odor that became



noticeable only when the plant had been cut. In the process of pruning, the room became filled with the plant's delightful fragrance.

This is a good analogy for the Lord's Passion and the sufferings in our own life. When Christ the Vine was hung, pierced and bleeding upon His Sacred Cross -- that trellis of our Salvation, the rich sap of His Most Precious Blood

fell like dew upon us, the branches, purifying and strengthening us in holiness. From the piercing of His Sacred Heart, the heavenly, sweet fragrance of our salvation filled the whole earth and rose like a pleasing incense to God. In our own life, we, His branches, share in His Passion and are pruned by the sorrows and cares of life, but these trials, if borne with love, fill the Church with a like sweetness, pleasing to the Lord.

Thinking of the Cross still more, we recall the custom of a man to express his love by carving his initials and those of his beloved on a tree. We must say that for Divine Love, it was not enough for Him merely to trace out His initials to confess His love. He has traced out the image of His love for us in all of creation. No, the Lord Jesus went still further. He had Himself nailed to a tree, His flesh affixed as the parchment on which was written, in the ink of His Precious Blood, his infinite love for humanity. He is Himself the "love-letter" we receive avowing God's goodness and mercy and love.

Let us respond with our own love-letter to God, penned in our loving prayer, service and sacrifice, that the fragrance of our offering may arise before our Risen Lord at Easter!

Thank you!

We would like to express our thank you to all those who remembered the Sisters on their trip to the store in purchasing needed paper products. Please know how helpful this is for us. We always appreciate your donation of:

- Kleenex
- Paper Towels
- Napkins,
- 8 x 11 White Paper
- Address Labels
- #10 Envelopes
- Toilet Paper
- Paper Plates.

Be assured of our prayers that God will reward your kindness.

To contact us:



**SISTER SERVANTS
OF THE MOST SACRED HEART
OF JESUS**

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Swedesburg Mission in Archdiocese of Philadelphia Includes Teaching, Parish Work, Promoting Polish Heritage...

With God's providence always accompanying our life, three years ago, our Sisters moved to another location in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia—a beautiful parish dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Swedesburg, (Bridgeport), Pennsylvania. We are privileged to serve there in the apostolate of teaching, parish work, and are engaged in promoting the Polish heritage of this parish which is under the pastoral care of—and we trust Father will excuse us—a very zealous and good priest, Father Andrew McCormick.



Sacred Heart Church in Swedesburg, PA.

When our first Sisters arrived there, they immediately received the kind assistance and support of the pastor, as well as the resident, Msgr. Anthony Jaworowski and so many generous parishioners. The convent had been refurbished and so immediately the Sisters 'put their hands to the plow.'

Presently, there are four Sisters residing at this location, and we would like to introduce them and their mission:



St. Margaret Mary Alaquoque Convent where our Sisters live.



Our Sisters with the Pastor – Rev. Andrew McCormick.



Members of St. Cecilia Choir provided the Sisters everything for Thanksgiving Dinner.

Sr. Superior Klara Slonina serves as director of religious education for Sacred Heart Parish. We currently have about 70 students in grades Pre-K-5th. This past October, the 6th graders received the Sacrament of Confirmation, and now the 2nd and 3rd graders are preparing to receive their sacraments of Penance & Reconciliation and First Holy Communion.

Two of our Sisters are also making progress, 'slowly but surely,' in Sister Superior's Polish language classes that are held in our convent for adults as well as children.

This past September, Father McCormick, our Sisters and a busload of Sacred Heart parishioners participated in the Pulaski Day Parade in Philadelphia, celebrating this year 400 years of the



Sr. Superior Klara Slonina with the girls wearing Polish costumes.

presence of Polish people in the New World. Sacred Heart Parish had originated with Polish immigrants and many

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Swedesburg Mission

Continued from page 4

make the effort to keep the Polish traditions alive. For example, Sister Klara, assists in the children's Polish dance classes, in the Parish Czestochowa Society and in the Masses celebrated at the parish in Polish.

Sister Mary Joseph Calore directs our postulant, Sr. Katherine Major, in her formation and works as vocation director for our Sacred Heart Province in the United States. She also serves as a provincial councilor and a parish secretary, teaches catechism, and uses her talent of singing with the members of the St. Cecilia Choir.

Sister Miriam Joseph Spinneweber is a wonderful presence in the sacristy of the parish. Confirmation, Parish Forty Hours, and other parish events are made even more beautiful by Sister's patient, behind-the-scenes work, together with the many wonderful volunteer members of the parish. Sister is also a catechist of religious education and the RCIA program –always ready to help with many other parish projects.

Our youngest Sister, **Sister Katherine Major**, who will become our postulant in February of this year, is, as she says, "feeling very much at home with the Sisters." Aside from learning about the daily prayer and community life of the Sisters, she is involved with

apostolic works such as part-time secretarial duties at Sacred Heart Parish as well as at Our Lady of Mt Carmel Parish, Bridgeport, PA, where Father Salvatore Pronesti is pastor to the predominantly Italian community. Sister Katherine assists in teaching as a catechist and is also tutoring English as a Second Language.

The Sisters have their 'hands filled with work' but are happy that the Sacred Heart of Jesus has welcomed them here through Father McCormick and so many good people and they pray that God might use them for His greater glory and the good of our neighbor.



Sr. Mary Joseph Calore with Fr. Benedict Groeschel, CFR, in Philadelphia.



Sr. Katherine Major with her family.



Instruction moment.



Sr. Mary Joseph Calore with Fr. McCormick in the parish office.



Sr. Mary Joseph Calore and Sr. Katherine Major teaching religion.



Sr. Miriam Joseph Spinneweber with the sacristy work.

The Eyes of a Merchant

When I entered our community almost nine years ago, the words Franciscan, Dominican, Benedictine, etc. really meant very little to me. I honestly do not know if I even realized that I had entered a Franciscan community! However, it was not long after my entrance that a biography of our Seraphic Father, St. Francis, was given to me to read. I knew immediately that he was my father and my inspiration. I was enthralled with his energy, his dynamism, his craziness! St. Francis's response to God was so complete, joyful and immediate. His radical response challenged me and was a source of encouragement in times when I experienced doubt and weakness. As a postulant, I longed to imitate him, but at that point, I had very little training in the spiritual life, and my efforts can only be described as a cute mimicry. Later, when I learned a little theology, I understood that holiness cannot be attained in this way, but only by love, and each person has to love God with his own heart. Furthermore, since we only love that which is good, it follows that the only authentic way to benefit from the example of St. Francis is, like him, to continually discover God, or as scripture tells us, "constantly seek His face" (Psalms 105:4). If we want to convince our hearts that our God is the only Good worth having, we need to feed our minds with the truths of God's infinite perfections.

Reflect on St. Gregory the Great's paraphrase of Christ's words from the Gospel of St. John, he writes, "I am the good Shepherd... those who love me are willing to follow me, for anyone who does not love the truth has not yet come to know it" (Liturgy of the Hours II: 752). In other words, if we do not love our God with all that we are – If we do not consider Him our greatest treasure, it is only because we are ignorant of Him because everything in us is wired to love God. If we chase after other loves, it is only because we see some goodness in them, a mere glimmer of the goodness they reflect.

Fr. Farrell in his work, *My Way of Life*, explains that without knowledge of the perfections of God "we are underfed weaklings, starving waifs, paralyzed in our living not only by lack of strength but even more by lack of light. To live," he continues, "a man must move by the steps of his heart; and how can he



move until he can see and be drawn by the beauty of Goodness and Truth?"(2). Again, consider the parable of the pearl of great price: "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it"(Matt 13:45-6). I find that this parable is particularly helpful in illustrating the connection between knowing and loving because the subject of the parable, namely, the merchant, is an educated individual. A merchant is very skilled in buying and selling. He certainly knows a good bargain when he sees one. I am sure that the merchant had seen many pearls, but this one was different. This pearl was worth more than all the others combined, plus his house, camels, livestock and whatever else he might have owned. In light of what he was to gain, the merchant paid very little attention to what he was losing; for, in the long run, he lost nothing!

Like the merchant, we must know the value of the treasure we are gaining. We have to be experts.

Otherwise, the pearl is only a pretty rock, a nice decoration, a conversation piece. Our faith cannot be this way if we want to be zealous lovers of our Lord. St. Francis of Assisi, for his part, was so captivated by God, that all other desires were consumed by the violent conflagration of love that inflamed his heart. For him, there was no other love, no other truth, no other good, no other beauty but only Christ. In his biographical work entitled, *Major Life of St. Francis*, St. Bonaventure tells us that St. Francis "prayed constantly until he was consumed with a passionate longing for God and was ready to give up the whole world in his desire for his heavenly home and think nothing of it" (Omnibus, 638). Such was his generosity with God, and his deep peace and unrestrained joy tell us that he did not regret his choice in the least. St. Francis struggled with many of the difficulties we face today such as commercialism, a broken family, and a desire for fame and prestige, but once he discovered the Good God – that, "ravishingly attractive being who is resisted only when He is not seen – that captivating loveliness to tear the heart out of a man..." (Farrell 8) St. Francis's heart "burst into such a flame as to make a torch out of his whole life" (Farrell 8-9). Is not that what we long to be? Is it not the desire of our hearts to bring the love of God to all we meet and to spread His kingdom in our daily living? Then let us take courage and set out to follow St. Francis in his magnanimity. Let us avail ourselves of the treasures that the Church has given us in Holy Scripture, the Catechism, the Lives of the Saints, Documents of the Church and other spiritual writings. Let us set aside time each day to nourish our minds because in truth, our loving can only go as far as our knowing. For sure, once we have refined the eyes of our souls with truth, we will see clearly that the only good worth having is Our Lord Jesus Christ and we will not regret having lost everything else to possess Him entirely.

Lent and Stewardship

By Robert J. Allen

“As the eyes of servants are on the hands of their master, so our eyes are fixed on the Lord our God.” (Ps. 122:31)

Or are they? People are basically good. We want to do what is right, honest and fair. We strive to live a loving and peaceful coexistence with family and friends, but as Americans we seldom think of ourselves as servants. We are independent, we have rights, and we are basically self serving.

Or are we?

As servants of God’s goodness and love, we are called to be good stewards. “What has Lent to do with Stewardship, and besides, I’m hearing a little too much about this stewardship business” as one person told me. “It’s just another way the Church is trying to get money out of me.”

But stewardship is much, much more than money. Stewardship is also about how you use your time and how you share your talents. Stewardship is a responsibility and should cause each of us to ask: “What do I own? What owns me?” Never have two questions allowed us to answer the question, “Who are you?” better than these.

Lent allows us to take time to reflect upon what we are doing and what we should or could be doing, especially in response to God’s Will for us. Lent is no different than any other 40 days, but it is however a time that helps us examine ourselves, to deepen our relationship with God and others. This is a time to see how God, through his Son, so loves us that he became the steward of our salvation. Now you may ask: “Can I love myself so that I can love others as He loved me? You are always in the moment of God’s Will.



Nuns on Wheels Program

Would you like to donate a used vehicle...Car, Van, Truck, as is?

While we may need to sell it or trade it, this donation will be a great help to the Sisters and you can claim its value as a charitable gift and tax deduction to the extent the law allows.

The Sisters would like to extend their thanks to S&A Homes, 2903 Benner Pike, Bellefonte, PA 16823, for their donation that will cover the cost of this issue of our newsletter *The Vine*.



IN THANKSGIVING



As our first newsletter for 2009 goes to press, we are very grateful for having completed our development work and endeavors for the year of 2008.

We would like to acknowledge all of you who responded with your kind support and prayer requests, especially those who contributed to our annual appeal and monthly calendar mailings.

May God richly reward you for remembering us with your donations, but above all for remembering us in your prayers.

Be assured of our continued prayers for you, your families and for all the intentions you hold deep in your heart. Be assured that all our dear benefactors are remembered especially in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered at our Provincialate Chapel in Cresson, PA on the last Tuesday of each month. May God bless you and keep you in His Love. We wish all of you a very Blessed Lenten Season and a very Joyful Easter.

*Yours in Christ,
Sacred Heart Sisters*

What's Happening in Maggotty, Jamaica!

The clinic, where we serve approximately 180 patients a week, opened again after Christmas break on January 7, 2009. Dr. Maria Proniewska arrived on December 28 from Poland and is working at the clinic for the month of January. We are grateful for her help. A doctor from Chicago will help us also for a few weeks in February. We are still looking for a doctor to come in March.

We received many medical supplies in December from our friends in Maine, USA. We spent our break going through many boxes and organizing everything.

Classes with the children resumed on January 5. Also, Sr. Clare Marie



The clinic in the village of Maggotty, Jamaica.

Carriger, SSCJ, will teach daytime and evening reading classes with adults at our mission center. Sewing classes will begin again for beginners in our convent where a special room is prepared for it. A local Jamaican woman will teach these classes but we hope to find someone from abroad to come and teach sewing to those who have some experience, but who would like to learn more. We have been selling hand-sewn pillowcases and pillows made by those who attend these sewing classes, and these funds are used for our various school projects.

We have received some donations for the construction of a new clinic. This project will begin in January 2009 on the site chosen for the new clinic. We are very excited about this, and grateful for the organizations who were so generous! As always, we remember our friends and benefactors in our prayers, especially on Wednesdays at the Holy Mass at Holy Spirit Church, where we gather each day to give glory to God for His many wonderful works at this mission for the good of His people.



Sister Superior Emila Malczak, SSCJ, filling a prescription at our clinic in Jamaica.



Please remember us when making or revising your will.

Our name is:
Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

Our federal ID number is: 75-236-912

Please Send Us Your E-Mail Address!

Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus need your e-mail address. Why?

There are many exciting special events and information for you to receive. Because postage is expensive, we would like to inform you of some things via e-mail.

Please be assured, we will **NOT** share your e-mail address.

Name: _____

Address: _____

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The Chaplet of the Divine Mercy

1. Begin with the **Sign of the Cross**, Pray one **Our Father**, one **Hail Mary** and **The Apostles Creed**.

2. On the Our Father beads say the following:

Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.

3. On the ten Hail Mary beads say the following:

For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

(Pray 2. and 3. for all five decades).

4. Conclude with *(three times)*: **Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.**

I desire that the whole world know My Infinite Mercy. I desire to grant unimaginable graces to those who trust in My Mercy....” – the words of the Lord Jesus to Saint Sister Faustina (Diary 687)

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