

DISTRICT OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Society of Saint Pius X

Saint Mary's House

13 William Street

Rockdale NSW 2216



30 March 2022

Dear Friends,

Certain words which are associated with our religion nearly always bring us consolation. “Sacred Heart”, “mercy of God”, and “Christmas” come quickly to mind. The word “Lent” is not such a word. We are not angels after all, and a word which calls to mind bodily penance does not naturally fill us with consolation. Nevertheless, these 40 days are a beautiful season because Lent is truly the season of God’s generosity. Of course, God does not love us more now than at other times. But God respects our human nature, and He knows that we cannot maintain the same degree of spiritual effort at all times – any more than we can sustain physical or mental effort at the same level at all times. And without effort on our part to open wide our souls to God’s action, they remain largely closed to Him by our pride, our too natural point of view, our laziness, and our blind pursuit of pleasure. But when we set ourselves seriously, for weeks at a time, to act contrary to these self-destructive tendencies, our souls are freer by far to accept God’s healing and purifying gifts. Our Father in heaven knows this, and our Mother on earth, the Church, knows this. From their wisdom and parental love, we therefore receive the season of Lent. So, in this letter, we will consider the generosity of God.

“Even the best things that are behind us have no proportion with what is still before us, since God will always be better to us than He has been yet ...”

These words were written by Janet Erskine Stuart R.S.C.J. who was a mother general of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. She died in 1914 at almost the same time as St. Pius X and from almost exactly the same causes: chronic overwork and sorrow at the outbreak of the First World War. Her quote rings true to our Catholic ears because it seems to touch something in our theological virtue of hope. But does it stand up under scrutiny? Can we really hold this bold and consoling claim to be true? I believe we can, but to understand why we must first understand three things.

First, **God has a unique love and a unique plan for each soul.** To quote another word of Mother Stuart, *“Every friendship between God and a soul is the only one of its kind.”* This must be the case because every person whom God creates is due to a particular choice of God, not to any necessity of chance or fate. There are untold numbers of souls whom God has not and never will choose to create. But among all those who *could be*, to some He gives the gift of existence. And existence is only the first gift; God intends to add many others until, at last, each soul arrives – after many particular graces – to the unique place in heaven prepared for it.

Second, **each soul faces particular obstacles to this loving plan of God.** The most obvious are its sins and the wounds which they leave behind in the soul. Every person is *constantly changing* through the choices which he or she makes. By their individual decisions, each person is *becoming the person they are going to be*. And every sin wounds the soul – shrinking its capacity for love, undermining its courage, making it less and less reasonable. Besides these obstacles which the soul imposes on itself, there are others which are not sinful – they are just not helpful! These include fears and anxieties, tendency to laziness, little inclination to think about the important questions of life, etc. Each of us

knows some of our own obstacles, but none of us knows them all. Yet God sees each soul as in an X-ray, and He sees perfectly all that stands between us and our true potential. This explains so many of the ups and downs, twists and turns in our lives. God is lovingly undertaking the very complex and delicate work of getting us over, around, or through these obstacles to His unique plan for each soul. The road of our life might seem very winding to us, but it is actually as straight as it can be given the obstacles which are actually within us.

Third, and most importantly, **God's generosity is guided by His infinite wisdom.** God does not perform random acts of kindness; there is an order and a logic to every grace and circumstance which He gives us. Each grace He offers to us has already been prepared by the ones before it, and the grace of the present moment will prepare us for the graces still to come. Over time, as God's particular loving plan unfolds, souls are healed more and more. Their *capacity* to receive God's gifts increases as does their *willingness*. This allows God, over time, to give greater and greater graces. This is why Mother Stuart is right. Even if each grace is not necessarily greater than the one just before it, on average at least, our graces should grow larger over time. That is why "*even the best things that are behind us have no proportion with what is still before us ...*"

We must understand that God loves all the souls He has created, and He loves them *now*. Real love, whether God's or ours, is always given to real people as they are now – because they are the only people who really exist. God is not waiting until some future time, once the soul makes progress and becomes better – *it is because He loves them now that they make progress and become better*. Of course, God is *not* pleased with everything about us, as if love meant to ignore sins and faults. That is the liberal and modernist lie. More than that, such an idea does not even make sense; it actually contradicts the very notion of love! **Love wants the good of the person loved, and it is willing to pay the price for their good.** That is what love means, and it implies that we always want the person we love to become even better than they are. The only rational concept of love is one which is given to real people as they really are now but which wants to give them even more goodness – *love wants the person loved to change* – to be happier, wiser, closer to the potential for which they were created.

Our Lord's love wants to cause a gradual but deep change in us. He wants to transform that very part of our soul which we think cannot be changed – the faults we identify with our individuality. If our Savior was anyone other than God, perhaps He would not be powerful enough to do this. But, as it happens, He is God, and He is ready. Nor does it matter if our sins are great. We will soon hear Our Lord speak to Judas in the Garden of Olives when he comes at the head of a mob. "*Friend, why have you come?*" Jesus cannot lie; He means exactly what He says. He is truly offering friendship to Judas even then. He is offering to change that horrible thing in Judas which defines him at that moment. Lent, and especially the season of Passiontide, is a season of God's generosity. We must live these days with the conviction that God is ready to be more generous to us than we thought possible.

I am often asked how someone interested in a priestly vocation would begin this process now that Holy Cross is no longer a full-scale seminary. This is a very important question, and I wish to clear up any misunderstandings. Holy Cross still operates as a pre-seminary, and the first year of studies (the year of Humanities) is still taught at Goulburn as it always was. Any young man interested in the priesthood would still begin his studies at Goulburn. The application process is exactly the same as it always was. Applications are available through one's parish priest, and they are sent to the District House in Sydney. The priests and brother stationed in Goulburn are still in need of financial support in their work, and so donations to Holy Cross are still most appreciated. The bank details are as follows. Holy Cross Seminary (General account): BSB: 062545, Account No: 10028417; Holy Cross Seminary Building Fund: BSB: 062545, Account No: 10028425.

With my prayers and best wishes in the Sacred Heart,



Fr Daniel Themann, District Superior