



My dear Sisters of Ndanda Priory!

Hundred Years of Grace

We start to celebrate the hundred years of grace looking back in gratitude, being faithful to the present and daring to follow Christ into the future.

Looking back in gratitude and *let go of the past*. We keep the faith, hope and love of our Pioneer Sisters, and we let go of all open or hidden misgivings, grudges, complaints against others. We let go, Sisters, we get rid of these burdens, which tie ourselves of being free and happy persons in the union with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. What a gift we received by the grace of God that we are forgiven and that we can forgive. Some of you are carrying burdens on your back or shoulders for many years. You did not yet forgive that you were not treated well or appreciated or understood or what so ever. Please, Sister, let this burden go in this Jubilee Year.

The Jubilee Year began with a day of Atonement, see Leviticus 25:9. It is a year of Liberty to set free. It starts with ourselves, to set ourselves free from all these burdens of non forgiveness. That applies to each one and all of us. As we are one in Christ, the Sister who does not forgive, brings impediments and wounds to the whole body of our Priory. And you yourself cannot be happy. Let go of all these burdens in the presence of Jesus, who lays his hands on you to set you free, so that you can stand upright and praise God, Luke 13:13. Do this exercise in your room: imagine all the burdens of the past. How much are you bent down under these burdens. You can see only the dust at your feet. And then let Jesus come to lay his hands on you, to set you free. Straighten up and reach out to heaven. See the heaven, the sky, no limits. How light you are, free and happy! And give your life new to Jesus.

We let go of the past. We commit ourselves to the present. Here I want to call to mind the motto Pope John Paul II gave us for the new millennium:

Duc in Altum – Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch. Luke 5:4.

Image the scene: Peter and his companions had fished the whole night, caught nothing. They were tired, exhausted and frustrated. Now Jesus preaches, uses Peter's boat. He had finished finally, probably at noon time. Simon is extremely tired and hungry by now. Yet, he hears Jesus say: *duc in altum, put out into deep water*. Simon knows this Jesus is a non professional and obviously he has crazy demands. Much more likely would have been that he refused such a command of a stranger. He would have missed the opportunity of his life without even noticing it. Simon would not have become Peter. He would have continued with his fishing trade, fed his family faithfully until old age and see his children continue the trade. A funeral with his family and village in honour but that new world with Jesus, the Messiah would have been closed to him for ever. He would have been forgotten since long.

Jesus can make strange demands. He tells us: dear Sisters, though you laboured now for 99 years in my vineyard, it is not yet enough. No time to rest yet. Put out into deep water. So much fish is still waiting for your nets, even beyond your dreams. Not because of all your talents and skills, but because I want to be glorified and save the people through your small group in Ndanda Priory. Nothing is impossible for God, Luke 1:37.

Duc in Altum. Put out into deep water.



Sisters, we can expect much of God. He will not let us down if we are ready to follow him where ever he will lead us, not counting the hours of service, not limiting ourselves to anything. We vowed to be taken completely by Him like Mary did. We can become excited about the future, though we see how small our number is, how limited. God's power is made perfect in weakness, 2 Cor 12:9. Let us be generous

to God, willing that He takes us over completely, not licking our wounds. Let us look at the example of our Sr Bernadine Hefe. How much was she exhausted, seeing darkness only, was in the temptation to give up or to go the easier way. She always started new under so harsh conditions, seeing her Sister Walburga with the orphans killed. "Here I am, Lord. I come to do your will." Ps 40, Hebrew 10:7. She started Lukuledi, was forced to give up, she started Nyangao, finally she started Ndanda. What would have happened if she would have said: "Enough is enough. Not again to start with nothing".

Or consider the example of our dear Sr. Thekla Stinnesbeck, a great and adventurous personality, seeing a future in the darkness and willing to go the way not trotted before. In her old age she started yet another hospital, which became St. Walburg's Hospital Nyangao. She did not say: "Well, I am beyond retirement age by far. I think I deserve a rest now".



She was ready to yet put out her nets to deep waters, deeply immersed in prayer, as Sr. Regia Bürger used to tell me. Or let us look at our living examples of faith: Sr. Lia and Sr. Avina. Their

example humble me, but often I praise God for all the graces He can pour out on the world because of these two Missionary Benedictine women in Ndanda.

Dear Sisters, the future prepared by our God is always a great future. If we are willing to let go our own small hurts, are generous and willing to give our whole person to God as we have vowed and detach ourselves ever new from so many small things which block our horizon so that we cannot see the greatness of our God and the greatness of our lives in union with God for His Kingdom.

My God, how great is your trust and expectation in us. How much do you love us. Help us not to disappoint you and give ourselves completely, where ever you want to lead us during the next hundred years. Here we are, we come to do your will. Open our minds and hearts that we yearn for that what is beyond our reach. We believe you are the source of life, nothing is impossible with you.

Amen.

United with you though far away
In thanksgiving and hope,

Sr. Raphaela Händler OSB
Prioress

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