



Before the Tunnel Was... the Contemplatives Were 1825 – 2025

Beyond 200 years - the dawn of a new day...

Reflection

(We encourage you to use this REFLECTION for the opening/launching Liturgy, in small and big gatherings and for personal prayer throughout the Jubilee Year.)

Mary Euphrasia Pelletier was a woman who found a way when there was none. Already in the 19th century, she recognized that stars burn out but, she said: “Don’t let that stop you -- look far into the horizon and see what beckons beyond”. *She was one who saw, who could hear and listen; she risked and made the path.*

Far ahead of her time, the ingredients of synodality already stirred in her and so with her Shepherd God, she co-created the *future* that was before her. And she said: “Yes, let it be”.

Thus, the Contemplative Sisters of the Good Shepherd came to be. This is their story.

200 years ago in 1825, soon after Sr Mary Euphrasia of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge was elected Superior of the convent in Tours, France, she said this to her community:

“You made me Superior. I am unworthy of the charge. I am overwhelmed by it. But since you have named me, we shall establish the Magdalens”.¹

This decision had been preceded by and the result of, numerous conversations with some young women who were former residents and who confided in Mary Euphrasia about their deep longing for *oneness*: union with God and for living life in community. She recognized in these young women the same call that also burned

¹ Quoted from *In Truth I am their Foundress*, cf. p.277

within her, that is, the ever-ancient, ever-new summons to *become*, to *belong*, to *return* to the Living God in whose Presence all Creation stands.

At the time, the Institution's policy forbade admitting women who had been in our residences. This was also the norm in society.

Mary Euphrasia, understanding their deep yearning to belong and be connected, did not want to allow this policy to discriminate against these young women nor be a block to God's call in them. Exploring all the different areas and options, Mary Euphrasia circumvented this policy, enabling women to respond to the call to be contemplatives within the same apostolic congregation. On establishing the contemplative sisters, she adopted the primitive Rule of Carmel for the sisters to guide their lives and mission. She added to it the call to closeness and tenderness that is derived from the hearts of Jesus and Mary, a belief of Saint John Eudes (cf. See #113 of Pope Francis' *Encyclical on the Sacred Heart of Jesus*).

In addition, she also named St Mary Magdalen as the sisters' model for the contemplative life, intuiting that this saint's personal relationship with the Christ of the gospels would teach the sisters how to live community life. 'Staying in the gap', identifying forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation to be a communal way of life, remaining faithful in love in the ordinariness of every day is to see and hear the Risen Christ ask the contemplative sisters to share the Good News – the Good News that their living as sisters and brothers of the one God can make it possible for *New Life* to be birthed.

This is the Good News that God wants the whole world to hear. (cf. John 20:17; Mk 16:16; Mt 28:19-20; Lk 24:47)

This is the Good News that was heard by Mary Euphrasia. 200 years before the Congregational Chapter called us to a Universal Culture of Justice she rose above a culture of discrimination and judgment to draw for us the Face of a merciful God.² A God who sent Jesus into the world not to condemn or judge, but, that we may live the joy of the Gospel embracing its abundance (John 10:10).

In 1855, thirty years after the foundation of the first contemplatives (of St Mary Magdalen), Mary Euphrasia once more circumvented another obstacle. This time the rule of enclosure (during that time) did not allow sisters to go to the Abbey of St Nicholas which was outside the walls of the convent in Angers. Given the demands of the much needed ministry in the Abbey of St Nicolas, she responded by working with her sisters to dig a tunnel linking the convent to the abbey. Thus, the sisters continued to serve women and girls in dire need of care and love.

In our turn, here and now, how do we see ourselves giving voice and meaning to "our place in the sun?" How can we make visible God's abiding love which the Church gives to contemplatives through a constitutional enclosure?

How do we make a universal culture of justice our *lifestyle*?

Moving forward beyond 200 years, how do we live the *shifts in consciousness* that the Congregational Leadership Team asks of us? What needs to happen for us to move from a mindset of scarcity to abundance, from a sense of diminishment to generativity? From parts to what is whole. Mary Euphrasia, "How do we do this? Teach us! Enlighten us! Help us use our imaginations and RISK – just as you did when you first began, facing the many obstacles and challenges.

May we allow the Spirit to part the waters of chaos and fear, indifference and discouragement so that we can walk in Light and freedom, gladness and creativity".

And so,

LET US CELEBRATE! LET US DANCE WITH JOY! LET US SHOUT OUT OUR GRATITUDE! LET US PONDER!

² Pope Francis, General Audience, 13 January 2016 : the other face of God is Mercy.

Just as the ancient Israelites pondered and prepared themselves to enter the Promised Land, let the bells ring for our sacred Jubilee. Through the daily bread of the Eucharist, attentiveness to God's Word and entering the Joy of the Gospel, let us drink the living water that ever flows from our God who is alive and who walks synodally with us. Let us celebrate life, embrace one another through the gift of story-telling, the oil of forgiveness that offers a balm of healing, flavour our relationships as salt adds taste and allow our gaze to sweep gently in appreciation. In friendship and love, may our lives be as a song that accompanies the rhythm and beat of the music of our senses and may we be fully alive.

How else can we live Jubilee?

RITUAL for the OPENING OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE JUBILEE: NOVEMBER 11, 2024

We need a bigger-sized candle with the words '200th Anniversary' with ribbons carrying the names of countries where there are contemplative sisters.

REFLECTION

- Jubilee Song: "We are the Ones" – Jubilee Song in 3 languages
- Call to Worship / Welcome Message - Joan Marie Lopez
- A drum beat after each of the following are solemnly proclaimed by different readers, including Mission Partners:
 - 200 years of profound gratitude for God's PRESENCE in our lives and in our Congregation
 - 200 years of contemplative community life
 - 200 years of faith, hope and love amidst vulnerability that called for God's power and strength
 - 200 years of forgiveness and reconciliation
 - 200 years for all our sisters: saints and sinners and friends
 - 200 years of praying for the ministries of our Apostolic Sisters
 - 200 years of developing our capacities for contemplation, friendship and unselfish love

During the Liturgy or Service the following are offered:

- Dough/Yeast to represent our profound desire to live a life totally-surrendered to God.
- Salt as a symbol of community life with its ups and downs
- Sugar to signify the sweetness and intimacy of friendship with God
- Water as the sign of the Spirit in our lives
- An egg that speaks of the fragility of our lives but from which rises New Life
- Soil and seed the growth and the spread of the contemplative life 'wherever there are people becoming the human being we are called to be'.
 - Jubilee Prayer

We encourage you to join us in planting a *Tree of Life* symbol of our Unity and New Life. We have lived 200 years and our earnest desire is to bring this forward to the next 200 years, “*the dawn of a new day*”.

Jubilee Prayer



Holy One, Divine Shepherd of the Universe,
From the beginning you have guided our search for You –
how can we ever thank you?
The Spirit alive in our hearts
and deep within all Creation cries-out to you
our praise, thanksgiving, wonder and joy!

We thank you for giving us Mary Magdalene
patroness and guide for *all* who are called
to a personal relationship with you.
You told her to announce to the world that
we are your sisters and brothers
who first belong to you, and then to one another
together responsible for all Creation
to You, the Living God
before whose Presence we never depart.

We thank you for Mary Euphrasia our foundress
who carried in her heart the charism of Mercy and Reconciliation
inherited from Jean Eudes.
She urged us always to look to God for new stars being born
and new horizons that point to fresh beginnings but always,
Grounded in Love as we *become* PRAYER itself.

We thank you for the gift of Life everyday
For one another, for our families and friends
and all the clouds of witnesses on whose shoulders we stand
and who encourage us towards fruitfulness.

May the next hundred years speak to you of our hope
that our communities be your Dwelling Place.
Help us help you build a Kingdom of Peace and Justice,
Where Forgiveness and Friendship
reign with you forever and ever.

Amen.
Thank you.
Amen.

Bicentennial Committee with the CLT contemplatives

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