

**LETTER No 12 TO THE KNIGHTS OF THE IMMACULATA** (Dated: 14<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

**IMMACULATA YOU MOST HUMBLE ONE!**

Dear Knights of the Immaculata!

As this year Good Friday is on the 25 March, the Divine Providence wants to direct us on how to sanctify ourselves meditating the two greatest mysteries of our faith in one!

What unites the mystery of Incarnation with the Passion of Our Lord?  
HUMILITY!

In both mysteries we assist at a total summit of humiliation: On 25th March (at the Annunciation) God became man and annihilated himself so to speak unto almost nothing; the Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and earth regards herself only as the humblest slave of the Lord.

On Good Friday both Son and Mother are annihilated in the deepest ignominy of being considered as wicked, 'worm and not man', reject of humanity, lepers...

All we have to do is to follow and imitate the Immaculata in her humility. Why did she become the greatest of all saints? Because of her humility! Through Her humility, the most Blessed Virgin Mary radically turned away from Herself, emptied Herself of all that is not of God. Her soul is poor, completely devoid of anything "owned". It is like a precious, gold chalice. In order to be filled with a precious liquid, the chalice must be empty, devoid of the slightest speck of dust. The precious liquid must preserve its freshness without blending with anything else.

The life of Mary is a continual streak of deeds of humility, humiliations. Her life is an immovable state of the most humble soul. It should be noted ,a priori, however, that there is a significant difference between Her humility and the humility of all other people. The latter can see first of all their miserable state caused by original sin and by many personal sins. The humiliating sight of the ruined palace of their soul is the main source of their humility.

The humility of Mary is not caused by an awareness of sinfulness, for Mary never committed any sin. The humility of Mary is the humility of love, the humility of a friend who receives the friendship of Her God, knowing that this friendship is a completely disinterested, pure gift, a totally unmerited grace. The beloved spouse, knowing the immeasurable greatness of the gift bestowed on Her, answers with an act of total devotion and self-denial.

This unique humble soul is so delighted with the beauty of God, so engrossed in the grandeur of God, in His infinite perfections, that all She wants is to praise Him for everything that He gives freely to Her. The greater Mary's awareness of what God is and of what God gives, the greater Her humility. And She sings in Her canticle, *Magnificat*: "Because He that is mighty, hath done great things to me; and holy is His name". Thus what happens in Mary's life is the reverse of what happens in our lives. The more we discover our virtues and talents, the more we develop them, the greater for us the danger of ascribing everything to ourselves and taking delight in ourselves. To show off in front of an audience, to delight others with oneself, to attract attention, to be praised – these are all classic examples of pride filling our life.

Mary was aware of the treasures in Her soul, but She remembered Who had placed those treasures there. We, however, ascribe our talents, strengths and virtues solely to ourselves. God as the gift donor disappears from our sight. We forget the wise words of Saint Teresa of Avila: "Humility does not consist in disregarding God's gifts but in learning where they come from."

Considering specific events in the life of Mary we also learn different properties and expressions of humility. Especially at this point it is worth asking ourselves questions that should come up during all our meditations on the secrets of Mary, namely: do we live out these profound truths?; how do we ourselves imitate Her, who was given to us as the finest and infallible model of life?

First (after Her Immaculate Conception and birth) we see Mary as a young child in the Jerusalem temple. Many Church Fathers and many theologians write that she received *scientia infusa*, and so from the very first moment of Her existence Mary was granted by God a special privilege of universal knowledge. Thus she knew perfectly not only all the holy scriptures but also their deepest meaning. Yet for many years not only did she hide that knowledge from people, but also patiently subjected herself to being raised and educated by the temple authorities. She patiently listened as the temple priests gave lessons on Jewish casuistry. She also listened to the teachings of the scribes whom Lord Jesus later accused of killing the spirit while keeping the letter.

Here is an example: "At what time should one begin morning prayer? At dawn, when the light begins to stand out against the night blue. But what blue? Mountain blue or sky blue? Besides, with what sight: moderate or piercing?" The student had to know all the interpretations and know that one master taught one way and another master another way!

So Mary had every right to be simply bored and critical of what she experienced. And yet She remained subject to the temple authorities. This aspect of humility is *docilitas* (docility, subjection). Certainly at this time She learned some grand and fine things, which she used for still greater charity. The reverse happens with us. Once we acquire some theological knowledge, then upon hearing it repeated by someone we are quick to show our boredom. If it seems to us that we know more than someone, then a proud sense of superiority arises inside of us and we love to show to others our despise. And yet we could profit from such situations, because even if only ten per cent of the knowledge is new to us, or if we discover a new aspect of the subject known to us, we can come closer to God.

Besides, the mysteries of God are infinite, and for such an act of humble *docilitas* God often gives more than one can acquire for years of serious studies. Out of divine inspiration did Mary consecrate Herself to God, making a vow of chastity, which features in the Liturgical Calendar as the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The temple authorities had a very negative attitude towards virginity, considering each childless woman cursed by God. Therefore they did not know any decent way of life for a woman but married life. In those days parents decided on the marriage of their children, and when a girl was sent to serve in the temple, the temple authorities took over parental responsibilities. No girl in those times was asked if and whom she wanted to marry. They simply chose a husband for her. So they did with Mary, choosing for her Joseph of the house of David.

It is easy to see how much humility it took for her not to rebel against people who did not understand anything about the state of Her soul; how much patience and trust it took for Her not to be overcome by fear of how Joseph would react to Her intentions of remaining a virgin. In such circumstances girls usually rebelled at heart, complained to God and murmured against God.

Mary remained in a state of humble trust. A great expression of humility is to trust divine Providence blindly. When we do not find a solution to a problem, when everything is about to be a failure/disaster, when everything seems to be already lost, when we have exhausted our own resources and we experience our helplessness, then without confusion or anxiety, even without inquisitiveness, one should entrust everything to God and wait patiently – this is the summit of humility. A person who is humble and aware of his misery and nothingness tries hard to do God's will but expects everything from God, Who always and everywhere gives everything anyway.

The most important moment and the greatest manifestation of humility is the Annunciation. At that moment everything was humility and humility alone. The great angel Gabriel (the name means "the might of God") bowed down deeply before the girl in utmost humility. Then there was the manifestation of Mary's humility, and at last the *summum* of humility - God's incarnation in human flesh/nature.

What was going on inside Mary at that decisive/crucial moment? We know that She was busy contemplating the essence of God, His Majesty and His infinity. She adored the truth that He is the absolute Lord of all things. Yet when the angel stood in front of Her, she was deeply moved. She was similarly moved when she heard the angel's greeting. No one had ever heard such words! She understood perfectly what "*gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta inter mulieres!*" meant. "Who having heard, was troubled at his saying" - so she could not see the reason behind such an honor and could not understand why She, of all people, the littlest, received such gifts. The angel spoke. And it became clear that She received the greatest honor, the greatest gift that God could bestow on His creature. She became the mother of God and was introduced into the intimate life of the Most Holy Trinity. What was Her answer to that? Here are the first words She uttered: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" This is Her only concern - to do God's will. She understood beforehand that doing God's will consists in devotion/consecration to God in holy virginity.

And God solemnly confirmed Her virginity by giving Her St. Joseph as a husband. This man not only respected Her vow of virginity, but had exactly the same ideal. And thus by the gift of virginity she could give herself wholly to God and open herself boundlessly to His mercy. And now she was about to become the mother of the Messiah. Since in the natural order it is not possible to have those two realities, virginity and maternity, at the same time, She asked the angel for an explanation. And the angel explained the great miracle foretold seven hundred years before by the prophet Isaiah: "Behold a virgin shall be with child!" In the face of the conclusion that for God nothing is impossible, Mary said Her *fiat*, she gave Her consent.

Even a very pious/saintly person in such circumstances could feel at least a little satisfaction that God had chosen just her. It was easy to think: "How splendid to be so honoured, how much good I will now be able to do to others, How kind of God to let me be so honoured". It is difficult at such moment not to take the slightest delight with oneself. And She? Although She is blessed among all creatures and was chosen to be honoured in the greatest manner possible for a human being, she knew perfectly that it was all God's gift. The Most High, driven by His mercy,

regarded the humility of His handmaid who, despite her great mission, was of herself nothing. She was brought out from the void by God's act of creation. She did not have anything of herself. All that is beautiful in Her, and we know that everything is beautiful, was given by God. Considering this double infinity: the infinity of God's majesty and the infinity of her own nothingness, Mary drew a logical conclusion: "You are everything, I am nothing. You are everything in me. Be it done to me according to Thy word. Behold your handmaid!" We know that this total devotion moved the oceans of divine love which in turn poured forth out of God's nature bringing relief to the lost world.

Three times a day we remember this mystery in the Angelus prayer. The number three stands for fullness, wholeness, immutability and duration. Threefold prayer means that during the day we should continually imitate in ourselves the humility of Mary. Thereby the Church not only underlies the importance of the Annunciation for the salvation of the world, but also the importance of the virtue of humility. In this event humility is shown in its deepest essence as total renunciation of oneself and total devotion to God and turning to Him. How telling is Mary's answer: *Ecce ancilla Domini*. The personal pronoun I is absent from this utterance. We only see a word by which human language can convey greatest complaisance, namely *ancilla* – a handmaid, a slave! She was always the most humble and considered herself to be nothing before God.

At Annunciation her humility was tried and put to the toughest test. Mary received a message that she was superior not only to all people on earth but also superior, infinitely at that, in terms of dignity, to all the angels in heaven. The Queen of heaven and earth, the supreme, the greatest, the mightiest one, save God Himself... Indeed, one can feel dizzy upon hearing such a message, while Mary, although so immensely honoured, grew peacefully in silent adoration of God, Who alone is holy and great, of Himself and in Herself.

Her humility was manifested immediately after the Annunciation. She hurried/hastened to the house of Zachary and Elizabeth to do housework/petty jobs and thus help her cousin.

She sought the company of the humble and even of the humiliated. Only among such people did she feel good. Zachary and Elizabeth belonged to those few humble ones who, contrary to proud Pharisees looking for justification in the regulations of the law, waited for help and salvation from the merciful God through faith and trust in His promises. Besides, they were humiliated by the public opinion. With a childless marriage they were regarded as punished and even cursed by God. The community believed that there was a tangible proof of this curse for at one moment

Zachary became dumb, he finished his service of God dumb. Many believed that it was God's punishment for his hidden sins. Therefore they despised him. Yet he did not give any excuses, nor did he explain even in writing or in sign language.

That is another great manifestation of humility. Since we are all nothing before God, a humble soul likes those who acknowledge this truth. And since on earth humility always entailed humiliation, a humble soul is drawn/attracted to humiliated ones, especially to those who accept the humiliation at the hands of God with resignation. In this context one should understand that it was during her visit at Zachary and Elizabeth's that Mary opened Her heart and sang her canticle *Magnificat*.

Another aspect of humility is remembering that which is the most important, namely about divine mercy, about the greatness of the heart of God which wants to fill the nothingness so much. Yet God wants to do this only to souls who are humble. The song *Magnificat* is a multiply compounded prayer conveying the state of a humble soul who cannot but continually search for new ways of praising the One Who is omnipotence. Another aspect of humility is suffering. The very act of humility (which is a state of the soul towards God) often results in suffering with regard to other creatures. As the humble soul opens itself before the greatness of the heart of God, God gives her a share in His infinite mysteries. And since they are infinite, the soul cannot, and at times even must not, tell others what is going on in her heart. Even her closest friends no longer understand her then. They suffer because of this and so does the soul. They feel misunderstood, maybe even rejected and they withdraw and then an old friendship and closeness may gradually disappear/die out. It is in this sense that the sufferings of St. Joseph should be understood, when he found Mary to be pregnant/with child. He saw no other possibility but to leave the beloved person, withdraw, disappear from the environment of his most beloved person. The readiness to disappear was an act of acknowledgment that he was nothing! Such readiness was also an act of humility in the face of the mysterious ways/decrees of God Whose majesty overwhelmed St. Joseph.

Yet God always rewards acts of humility. If need be, He does it even by working miracles! And humble souls trust God not only in their joys but also in their sufferings. Finally, humility in the world is virtually always connected with humiliation. In the case of us, fallen creatures, it is impossible to acquire the virtue of humility without humiliations. Although Mary was in a different situation for she was preserved from the stain of original sin, she voluntarily accepted humiliations, infinitely greater and more numerous than ours, in order to be a model of humility in this respect, too. Only proven/tested humility is true. From the moment the

words "there is no room for you" were uttered in Bethlehem, Mary participated in the humiliations of Her Son. He endured them in His body, while She kept them in Her heart: the humiliation of giving birth to the Son of God in a crude cave, the humiliation of being fugitives, the humiliation of the indescribable exile in Egypt, the humiliation of poverty in Nazareth (whose telling testimony is the Loretan house!), numerous humiliations during the public mission of Jesus Christ, when she herself experienced increasing hostility of evil people towards her Son.

All this led to the summit of humiliation when Christ went for a total physical annihilation. At that moment Mary, spiritually annihilated, stood beneath the cross and she stood there unmoved. She showed humility which when put to the toughest test does not withdraw, does not waver, does not hesitate, does not complain and does not rebel! More than that, it was a humility of a person who was completely resigned from showing her noblest traits.

Mary, who lives only for her Son, in lieu of Him received us as her children! Instead of the most Holy One She received sinners, instead of divine love she received our coldness and indifference, instead of beauty – monstrosity. And she accepted God's will wholeheartedly! Behold the summit of humility! May these considerations help us, especially in this holy time of Lent to enter into the humble sorrowful Heart of the Immaculata and ask Her to help us to become also humble of heart! Then the graces flowing from His pierced Heart will abundantly fill and sanctify and transform us!

General Santos, 14 February 2016

Fr. Karl Stehlin

(TOWARDS FATIMA:

As this letter is already very long, you will receive another letter at the beginning of March relating the events of the 13 May 1917)