

At Mother Paul-Marie's School

by Sister France Bergeron

The Real Joy of Christmas



Dear Marianna,

This is the Christmas season. Outside, thousands of lights sparkle and fill us with wonder. Young and old alike cannot resist the magic of the luminescent colors. Yet, as this feast day draws near, the Christian origin and meaning of which are so sadly forgotten in favor of a society of consumption, profit-making, comfort, getting into debt and dissoluteness, before the overabundance of bright decorations adorning buildings, streets and store windows, Mother Paul-Marie expressed her strong disappointment and her suffering, and we could even sense a certain disapproval.

Moreover, in our religious houses, she did not want any of those garlands aglow with lights, and she hoped that the crib alone, simple and beautiful, would be given a place of honor, as a reminder of the great mystery of the Birth of Christ. Even the traditional Christmas tree which the novices who had just recently entered the religious life had thought of decorating one day would have to be sacrificed. The religious spirit of this feast day had to take precedence in our hearts consecrated to the Immaculate within a Work of redressing and renewal.

Yes, Love, the Love of God for us, there you have the meaning of the feast of Christmas we are evoking, dear Marianna, as we consider that, today, this Love is drawing even closer to us who have the grace of contemplating the life and teachings not only of the Son who came to teach us to love, but also of the one whom God designated as His Daughter. And it is so pleasant to recall the Love of our dear Mother, her thoughtfulness for each one, as she constantly forgot herself.

One day, as we were drawing closer to Christmas, Mother Paul-Marie received a gift: a beautiful red velvet rose which opened up like a small jewelry box, in the center of which we discovered, resting on an immaculately white satin base resembling a large host, a Nativity scene. Our Mother really enjoyed that present which she would contemplate with sentiments of love of God. This well-chosen gift could not have been more gratifying for her at Christmas.

However, a few years later, a short time after having "seen" at very close range, in a grace, the fine veil which made her think of "her sister death", Mother Paul-Marie in turn gave away this "rose-crib" which she liked so much. At the time, she said to one of the Sisters close to her that this was a detachment because she liked this rose very much which, besides, re-

mindful her of a faithful lady correspondent with whom she had a very special Marian bond. Well practised in detachments and the spirit of poverty, making do with very little and constantly forgetting herself for the benefit of others, our Mother indicated that when one is advancing towards death, one no longer keeps anything.

On the other hand, the person who received this gift from our Mother had been so deeply touched by this maternal thought in her favor that she understood, as she would later write in a letter to her, that there was much more in what she had just received than a simple material gift. Given with the thought that, soon, she would no longer be among us – even if it would be eleven years later before Mother Paul-Marie died –, offered also in a spirit of detachment, this gift represented our Mother's Love, that love which is giving. And that Love could only contain, at one and the same time, all she left us in teachings, virtues and upsurges, as seeds of eternity which we are called upon to receive like a pressing appeal to let ourselves be transformed by her Spirit of Love.

This gift of Love, Mother Paul-Marie gave it to each one of us, in fact, constantly sowing it in hearts. It is now our duty, we her Sons and her Daughters, her Knights, her Paulians, to spread it, so that it may flourish throughout the world.

At the same time as we keep in mind our Mother's examples, so full of light, may this feast day be lived in an effort of simplicity in

which the mystery of the Infant Jesus dominates in our hearts freed from all the commercial enticements and the solely material concerns of this season. May it also be the occasion for a wonderful and sincere fraternalism which encourages us to bring a soothing comfort to the suffering of others – often present even on feast days and at times even more keenly –, to give joy to those who are alone and to the sick, to support and understand those who are sorely tried, as our Mother did. Thus, as we go forward along this path of love which is giving and which she set out for us, we will be able to offer the most precious of all gifts, that love which all of us need. Then, we will experience the true joy of Christmas every day.

Before the crib and nourished by the double Eucharistic presence, let us then seek that love which changes everything. Then our hearts will become a "rose-crib" upon which the Lady will look with Love.

Sister France Bergeron, O.F.F.M.

