

Dear Friends,



We are coming to the end of a hard and difficult year with ever increasing conflicts, which we ourselves have created and about which we have no idea how we are to resolve them, or how we are to cope with them in the present political and bureaucratic set-up. There are all sorts of wars, conflicts and crises, even in proud and enlightened Europe. The crises seem to rob us of all hope in everything human forces have built up until now. They have negative consequences we all feel in society as a whole, as well as in institutions and our own personal lives: Discouragement, sadness, restlessness, fear, and above all, hopelessness. The ways in which people tried "to create a good climate" by looking elsewhere, or by thinking things would work out somehow, have failed. ...

Faced with the challenge of religious indifference and the lack of active faith in whole areas of society with a Christian background, our bishops gathered with our Holy Father to try to discover what can be done about "New Evangelisation". The Synod Fathers passed 58 suggestions so that these initiatives can reach their goals. Prior to this our Holy Father had asked us to celebrate a Year of Faith – and he gave us his reflections and ideas about it in *Porta Fidei*, as well as his wonderful meditations on the Childhood of the Lord.

It is in this context that we celebrate Christmas. It is time for society and the Church to build themselves up anew and to renew themselves in the hope God the Father gave us in Christ Jesus. This Advent we have become aware that the only possible start for this hope has been given to us in the stable at Bethlehem.

Surrounded by all the challenges and uncertainties, the Church asks us to look once more at Bethlehem, and to meditate on the reality and mystery of Bethlehem ... It wasn't the scribes or the legal experts at Herod's court who came to the Crib, although they knew the place and time of the Messiah's arrival; instead it was the simple and humble of heart who saw the Child "wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" in the company of a simple woman, Mary, and a silent father, Joseph. They rejoiced with HIM and went away to bear witness to what they had seen and heard.

We trust in the words of Schoenstatt's Founder, which he personally lived and experienced in such a remarkable way. According to him, every form of crisis reveals the weaknesses, indeed even the illnesses, that lie at the roots or the foundations of what has been built up, and they offer us the opportunity to purify and heal them in the strength of love, truth and justice. We even dare to say: in the strength of the covenant of love.

The international Schoenstatt Family is working towards the Jubilee 2014, and over and above all the necessary preparations, allocations and negotiations of competences and

responsibilities, of prudent considerations and talks, it seems that the Blessed Mother again wants to draw our attention as a Schoenstatt Family – internationally – to the mystery of Bethlehem, as she did in 1914. It is the mystery of the Original Shrine ... of Schoenstatt, that is obviously called to be the stable at Bethlehem. ...

She wants to educate us accordingly, so that we come there with this in mind and with the simple, committed, courageous and poor attitude of the simple shepherds and humble Wise Men who left their power behind them to become simple and open pilgrims who saw Mary close to her Child. It is the attitude of the prominent children and disciples of Fr Kentenich. She does so in the hope that is given to us with the Year of Missionary Faith and with the faith in the Covenant of 2014, the renewing grace of 2014. It is a living hope and real faith in so many who are preparing for the Jubilee Pilgrimage in 2014, and who are working with such commitment for it.

Like the shepherds and the Wise Men they know the foundation of their hope.

From the shrine, and in this year of missionary service, I pray and intercede that we may open our lives to Mary's educational actions, so that with Fr Kentenich, and as an international Family, we may draw close to the Shrine-Bethlehem like the shepherds and Wise men with their gifts, and with the attitude of humble adoration. I pray that we may bring as our gifts the projects of our Covenant Culture, and become witnesses to its hope and builders of a covenant culture for our time.



HAPPY CHRISTMAS from the shrine in Madrid

and with my priestly blessing,

Fr José María

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