

# Father Kentenich`s Christmas Letter to the Schoenstatt Family

**Rome, 13 December 1965**

My dear Schoenstatt Family!

The approaching feast of Christmas suggests more strongly than usual that we look back on the past years. Heart and mind, memory and imagination like to pause at Christmas 1941 and its surrounding events. There are many and important points of comparison between then and now.

The focal point is the Miracle of the Holy Night and the Candlemas Vision. The Family has so deeply internalised both events that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon them.

The Miracle of the Holy Night is for us the elemental breaking in of the divine into our Family, its breakthrough into our own inner lives, as well as its breaking out into the entire personality and the community. We are awaiting the loosening of outward fetters for our work, its master workman and its workers, as an outward and visible proof of this penetration of the divine and elevation of the individual and community. Both were given to us in rich measure during and after the first imprisonment.

The second imprisonment from 1951-1965 was tangibly borne by the same great hope and longing. On 22 October 1965 we were able to look back on the past fourteen years and sing our Hymn of Thanksgiving even more than in 1945. We could state that not only the outward oppressive fetters, but also inner fetters have fallen – both to such an extent that for the moment the Family is not yet aware of how extensive the spirit of freedom from self, and for God and God's wishes and will, has become. We still can't comprehend fully today how the character of the child, father and community has become a new reality in us, but also how at the same time we can expect it as a permanent gift to all generations of our Family. ... This does not mean that until now we have not had a clear concept of this threefold character. We also know that year after year the individual features have been more strongly impressed upon and developed in the individual and community. We are equally aware that this threefold character can be developed and adapted until the end of our lives. This will continue until it has attained its final form in the *visio beata* (the vision of God). However, we may not overlook the depths to which this transformation has taken place at the end of the second imprisonment.

This applies, first of all, to the image of the Father. For us, God the Father was always Love. This is shown in the strong emphasis we placed on the world's basic law; it has determined and permeated the spirit of the Family from the beginning. We know, not just in theory, but also in practice, that the reason behind all reasons for all God's actions is ultimately love. Everything proceeding from him happens out of love, through love, for love. We have always seen it as our special mission to make this divine basic law the

basic law of our lives and education. We also knew that we have to include and understand that the most characteristic mark of God's love is his merciful love. However, what is new for us is the extraordinary extent of this divine, merciful love. Until now we have allowed ourselves to be guided by the idea of just love, that is to say, by the attitude that we have to merit this love by the way we live, by all sorts of loving sacrifices. We still uphold this belief and conviction today; we continue as before to try to please the heavenly Father in the way mentioned above. However, with regard to evaluating it, we are on the way to not taking our own co-operation quite so seriously. Only God the Father and his merciful love are important to us. Ultimately he loves us not so much – as we taught at the beginning of our Family's history – because we have been good, but simply because he is our Father, or because he is able to pour out his merciful love most richly when we joyfully affirm our limitations, our weaknesses and miseries, and become aware that they are the most essential means to open his heart, and for his love to pour through us. In future, therefore, we will invoke two titles more than before in relation to God: his infinite mercy and our unfathomable misery. We gladly join our hands and pray: Dear Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt, see to it that we experience that we are miserable children of the King who are worthy of mercy, and hence go through life in a special way as the favourites of God's infinitely merciful fatherly love.

With that we have in our own way characterised St Thérèse's image of the Father, and chosen it for our ideal. Like her we want in future not so much to be oblations of justice, but of mercy, that is, we do not want to highlight so much all the good we have done, and the right to a reward we have gained; on the contrary, in every circumstance we trust far more in the infinite mercy of God the Father, and our own misery, insofar as we joyfully affirm it and remain aware that as a result we draw down God's mercy in a unique way on ourselves, our Family, on the Church and the whole world. *"Everyday Sanctity"* puts it this way: When a child recognises and admits his or her weaknesses, it makes the child all-powerful and the Father powerless.

This at the same time characterises the new image of the child that we have lived and experienced in the past fourteen years, and that we want to pass on to the coming generations.

Our image of the community has timeless features that are characterised by the holistic quality of our covenant of love. We have always known that the covenant of love with our dear MTA has to be understood and lived as the expression, protection, security and means for our covenant of love with the Triune God, and the covenant of love with and for one another. Year after year we have experienced more deeply this closer connection of the covenant with one another. Since, in the normal course of events, the degree of the covenant with the supernatural world determines the corresponding degree of the covenant with one another, it is easy to gauge how true it is when we are able to state at the end of the second imprisonment: The melding of hearts with one another, that is, between father, mother and children, and the children among themselves, has attained a mysterious depth that can only be explained to some extent in the light of faith, and on

the basis of the breaking in of the divine into our Family. Today we take it for granted that we have all arrived at an ineffable community of destiny, tasks and hearts that is probably hard to find anywhere else. All have together carried the same cross that was planned from eternity for the father of the Family and placed on his shoulders at the proper time. All without exception have in their own way placed their own shoulders at his disposal. This happened, in its turn, in such a way that the cross lost some of its weight, because no one had to bear the heavy burden on their own. Thus we live together with our souls united with, in and for one another in such a way that we only now understand correctly what the new person in the new community is like. We also guess that as a result we are approaching an ideal towards which the Church of the future is inwardly urged to reach out, and will be justified in applying to herself the praise: See how they love one another!

When we look back briefly on the past years in this way and see a summary of the results of God's dispensation and guidance, it is natural that two basic attitudes are awakened and deepened in us. First of all, it is the attitude of inexpressibly deep gratitude. In gratitude we want to reach out to our dear Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt as the visible hands of the Triune God. We also want to reach out in gratitude to one another for the loyalty with which we carried our common cross, and promise one another unswerving love and loyalty.

I regard all the many gifts I received from all sides – that is, from all the formations and members – on the occasion of my eightieth birthday, and which I warmly acknowledge, as a symbol of the indissoluble surrender of hearts to me personally as the representative of the Family and reflection of the Triune God. I know that they were meant in this way; I also know that they were intended as a symbol of your own hearts. Offering and acceptance, therefore, express a reciprocal fusion of hearts that is probably not commonplace in this way and to this degree in salvation history. God's wisdom and the Blessed Mother's motherly care obviously require the experiences of the new community in this way as an example for the new experience of the Church for which the Council Fathers so ardently long for the Church at the new shore, and towards which they all want to reach out.

When we summarise all that has been said, our hearts and souls will never tire of repeating our "Hymn of Thanksgiving":

Let me thank you, Mother, for everything, absolutely everything,  
and entwine you with profound and fervent love.  
What would have become of us without you,  
who cared for us in such a motherly way?

For you have saved us from the greatest need,  
and chained us to yourself with faithful love:  
I thank you, and want to be eternally grateful,

and dedicate myself to you with undivided love.

As in the past in similar circumstances let us not forget the axiom also in this situation: Gifts are tasks! Day by day we want to conquer again what we have inherited from our fathers in order to possess it, and continue to pass it on to the coming generations as a holy tradition.

All in all: The Miracle of the Holy Night has become a reality this year to a degree that has never happened before. It is a guarantee that year after year it will have a more perfect effect until the Family experiences its continuation in eternity. How exceedingly wonderful and profound it will be one day when we may savour and enjoy the new character of the child, father and community in our "Schoenstatt heaven" for the whole of eternity, when the saying of St Augustine has come true: *Videbimus et amabimus in fine sine fine!*

Among the other things surrounding the feast of Christmas, the Candlemas Vision has a pre-eminent place. We know how we have interpreted it. We know what it was like at that time, but we also know the shape and form it assumed at the end of the first imprisonment. Since that time we have been striving for the Candlemas Vision for our Holy Father, that is, for his deeper understanding of Schoenstatt's nature and mission. All that has been sacrificed and done in the past fourteen years in this regard will one day be studied and described by historians. The following generations will marvel at the unrelenting persistence with which the Family has upheld this mystery and tried to bring it about. At the end of the second imprisonment we may state with great joy: Our Holy Father has been given the longed-for Candlemas Vision to a not inconsiderable extent. This is the only explanation for the repeal of all the decrees; even more so for the way in which it happened. This, in its turn, is the precious fruit of the fateful events of the past. It is probably less well known that appointed members and sections of the Family are now trying with great commitment to explain the same mystery to the bishops and cardinals of the individual dioceses and parts of the world.

Whoever ponders on all this at Christmas will be inclined to sink to their knees and admit joyfully: What would have happened to us without you? That is to say, without the powerful supernatural leadership, and without the heavy blows of fate that divine, motherly wisdom planned, foresaw and carried out in the Family.

The leaders of the Family, who have gathered here in Rome, live from the great realities briefly described here. Day by day they try to understand the inner connections more deeply, in order to understand God's plans better. The more they are inwardly filled with divine light, the more strongly they feel the need to appoint one day a month on which we can repeatedly re-live the great events we have now experienced. They are concerned here with a day of remembrance and renewal, in addition to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of every month, that leads the Family as a whole into the supernatural worlds and milestones.

When I send each member and section of the Family warm Christmas and New Year wishes, you will now understand what is meant: God's blessing on us all in the sense of the past years and our mission for the future.

With warm greetings and my priestly blessing, J.K.

*Translation: Mary Cole, Manchester, England*