



# THE GIFT OF GOD

*Reflections for  
Advent,  
Christmas and  
the New Year*

BY SERVANT OF GOD  
SISTER IDA PETERFY, SDSH



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SOCIETY DEVOTED TO THE SACRED HEART  
2016





With joyful and grateful hearts  
we share with you the spiritual thoughts of our  
beloved foundress,  
Servant of God Sister Ida Peterfy.

Sister Ida's life was rooted in God's 100% love shown forth through the Incarnation of the Son of God. Seen in simplicity and truth, the profound beauty of this event can never be exhausted. Every Christmas Eve, gathered around a humble crib, Sister Ida would share her insights with her Sisters, thus enriching our lives and the lives of those we teach. May her words inspire you to look anew at this amazing Gift of God.

Sisters of the  
Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart

*In presenting this booklet, we declare our sincere submission to the teachings of the Catholic Church.*



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# Preparation for Christmas

Look at God working for you and for your Christmas. From the beginning of the world, from the very first moment, He is preparing that Christmas, and He is thinking of you.

Christmas, Christ, Mass are bound together. From eternity, the coming of Christ and the Mass, His offering Himself on the cross for us, are one and the same thing. When we are preparing for Christmas, the best preparation is through the Mass: Christ-mass.

S	-	shepherds
A	-	angels
V	-	virgin
I	-	I
O	-	offering
U	-	urgency to give self to Him
R	-	return

Shepherds and sheep, these are the most common objects in Christmas decorations. In God's eternal providence, whenever we see sheep and shepherds, we should always think about that one Shepherd and ourselves who are the sheep because God thought of us. How long ago? How long have I lived? 18, 20, 40 years? Or as long as God? This would be

the literal truth! I have lived as long as God! I was in God's mind from eternity. And how long am I going to live? As long as God! Am I aware of this? This is reality! It lifts up my heart! To know this can fill me with sunshine and free me from every fear!

This is what Christmas means: the tremendous love of God! God showing how important you and I are to Him! He has been thinking of you from all eternity! He is a jealous God. He gives everything except His glory; He will not give that to another. We are involved in His glory whether we like it or not. If you are loved, that makes up His glory. It is His business to make us successful, and He does everything to make us successful.

It is interesting and symbolic that the first shepherd was Abel (Genesis 4). And that was the first death on earth. Abel was murdered by his own brother. He was the figure of the One whose birthday we will celebrate.

Abel was a shepherd who sacrificed lambs to God; his was a highly acceptable sacrifice to God. This tells us much about God's Christmas greeting and God's Christmas gift. The lovable Lamb of God, this is God's gift to you. That same lovable Lamb of God who, at the end of the world, is interceding for you and for me; that Lamb of God who was the Shepherd, was sacrificed for us, He is God's gift to you!

This is why, for me, the word “Christmas” must be ever broken-up into its components. And every representation of a shepherd and sheep must enable me to hear Christ’s “Mass,” Christ’s sacrifice. The Lamb of God – His Christmas gift to me!

He was laid in a manger in a cave hollowed out of one of the hills in Bethlehem. And Almighty God was the sculptor. Only “in the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4) would He consider His work finished. It took Him centuries to arch the span of that roof; no one born of woman can say that he does not have the best Christmas gift!

Wind and rain are instruments in the hand of God who is working for you. This is how the cave was fashioned. When you find yourself in the midst of spiritual storms, you will know that God is hollowing out a little birthplace for His Son. Even the hardships we have to go through, spiritual and physical, have a place in God’s personal plan for us. Providence, God’s providence, means that He is providing for everything. Seemingly, that wind and rain are negative forces, but in the hand of God, the result is positive.

In my own life, the storms, the hardships, the giving up of myself, bending my will, etc., what good did it bring? Tremendous good! I am preparing a place for Christ to be born anew within me. My soul is a

manger for God! Did I achieve something ordinary for myself? Nothing is ordinary which is done with God and for God! The shepherd can remind us of this.

The shepherd's song: the first Christmas carol. We can remember the shepherds of the Old Testament: David, Abraham. It is no accident that David was a shepherd, a singing shepherd. Jesus was born in David's town, of David's line, inheriting David's throne. He speaks of himself as David's son. Because David was a shepherd, it isn't impossible that he was herding his sheep into the very cave where Christ was born.

Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd, nothing do I want." We should sing it often during Advent. It is a prayer of thanksgiving and praise. It is a song about me and my God, the Shepherd and the sheep. It will give me peace, that peace which the angel proclaimed that first Christmas. That was the first song, by a man who never heard Christ tell the parable of the Good Shepherd (Luke 15:3-7), or say to Peter that he was to feed His lambs (John 21:16). Can I see God helping David to know so much about Him? Psalm 23 was composed by a shepherd who never heard Christ pray that there might be one fold and one Shepherd (John 10). Yet, how personally He spelled it out - SAVIOR!

“The Lord is my Shepherd, nothing do I want.” I might be wanting many things, in many ways, and still lack absolutely nothing that is necessary for my eternal merry Christmas! This is true for all people. They do not lack anything if they just realize that they have an eternal merry Christmas. I have to be the first to realize it in order to tell others. God has given me a gift which is perfect! Just what I wanted! Just what I needed!

We were born in exile. Our parents were displaced persons. Neither they, nor we, could ever get back to our native land; the distance was infinite! Sin made it that way. We were far more distant than the prodigal son. I was the stray sheep, completely lost, totally lacking the ability to get back to the fold. And He found me! He went after me! God called into play His omnipotence not only to shape a manger, but to bring forth the miracle of God-made-man: Christ and Mass!

He was the sheep for my sacrifice. His sacrifice was my salvation. God not only “wishes,” He “wills” me a joyful Christmas. God is able to make my Christmas joyful. Only my free will can stop it. Look, see Him wishing you, willing you, a joyful Christmas. And give your consent, your grateful consent. Realize, acknowledge, accept His great gift!



## Signs Pointing the Way

Have you noticed how the commercial world is competing for our attention? They tell us what Christmas is all about and the heart is taken out! Christmas, in commercials, in ads, is all about what? They say, "Make sure and don't forget." What should you not forget? To spend money!

But what are we celebrating? Why are we especially loving to each other at Christmas? This is what is missing!

In the Bible, stars are quite important in the Christmas story. Stars show the way. Stars can lead you where you need to go and not allow you to be misled and go the wrong way. (Once I was skiing with a friend in Czechoslovakia. We were getting further and further away from the lodge. We lost our sense of time, the sun went down and it was dark. We had to go through the forest. We missed the trail. We were lost! The only way we could find the trail was, not by looking down but, by looking up to the sky. We could see the stars through the trees. Then we saw a straight line, our trail! Then, keeping an eye on the stars, we found our way back!)

In the Bible, a star led people from far lands...kings/magi/wise men (Matthew 2: 1-12)...to find a baby

– God incarnate! God-become-man, who took our humanity upon himself so that we would see what God is like in human terms.

How many people saw the star in neighboring Jerusalem? Where was this star leading? Not too many people were interested. In our lives, how do we follow the signs God is giving to us to arrive into His presence? To really “discover” Him in our lives? It isn’t necessarily a star in the dark sky. It can be anything that gives us “light,” that helps us to remember that God is not far away, and that He loves us and is with us.

For some people, that “star” could be nature, and all the beauty God is creating: the sun, the flowers, fresh air, etc. See the beauty! For others, the mere fact that we can walk, and move, brings us joy. What a miracle that we can see! Our vision is “built in” and in color! What a marvel we are!

Members of the family may be the ones talking about the presence of God – in the little children, in friends, in the kindness of another person. What are the signs in your life that will help you to “discover” God’s presence in your life? What are those signs which you can miss, or you can use, and they will help you to live in the presence of God?

During the Mass, there are readings. One of the



readings is a letter from one of the Apostles. Letters were never so exciting for me to receive as when we received letters from our Sisters in Taiwan and Hungary! Opening and reading the letters, our Sisters were here with us! Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, I am amongst them." (Matthew 18:20) At Mass, when we are praying together, it is a reminder that God is with us. He appreciates coming into our presence.

In our daily lives, we need to help each other to "discover" God's presence – in different situations, in our activities: cooking, cleaning, waiting, driving. Many times we might be upset because we have to wait, but if we know in Whose presence we are doing this, it is not so difficult! Enter that "inner space," talk to our God, "discover" His presence in that situation – in sorrows and joys. He is with us in our joy, He is present to wipe away our tears; He gives us that inner strength to go on.

Talk with others about this. Reflect: Who? What? are the "stars" that remind us of "God-with-us" and lead us to Him?

Nowadays we hear so much news, so many messages reach us. In Greek, the word for "messenger" is "angelus." From this comes the English word "angel," which means, "a messenger of God."

God likes to speak to His people. He speaks in person or He sends a messenger to those He loves. We would be scared if God would directly speak to us. He gives us free will, He respects our free will. And God trusts us. He wants us to use our freedom to discover His goodness, His tremendous love for us, and to respond to His love freely.

People who lived before us heard the same things we are hearing: "This is the worst age possible! Times are so bad! Our world is so vulnerable!" We may wonder, "Lord, how can this universe survive?" God's answer: "I am taking care."

We need good news! Good messages! God sent His angel to tell about the coming of God in human form. The angel Gabriel spoke to Mary: she is the person to be the Mother of God-become-man. She accepted the role.

Angels helped people to get to the new-born Savior. Angels spoke to the shepherds about peace: peace to people, and glory to God. (Luke 2:9-13) The shepherds went and discovered Jesus, the Son of God become man! They sang His praises, the glory of God, and they were filled with peace.

This is what is so good about listening to God: we receive the message that we need to hear! Listen with your heart! Then you realize that that message,

which sometimes comes through people, is actually God's message of "good news" to you!

Whenever I do an act of kindness, somehow God lets me know that He is so appreciative of that kindness. (During the war, I did not know what had happened to Sister Hermine. I was in Budapest, Hungary, and she was in Czechoslovakia. I helped an old priest, walking him to the railroad station. I had to walk 10 miles back alone; it was dangerous. At the train station, I met a man and heard the news: "Sister Hermine is doing well!" I was so happy to hear this news! I did not have to go for that walk, I could have said "Sorry, Father," but I did an act of kindness, and in return, God allowed me to meet this person who brought such good news!)

Many times when we hear good news, we do not realize that it is God touching us! We have to listen with our heart! Read Luke 12:22-32. We have to trust in His providing love.

What are the areas in your life where you would like to have some answers? You need to listen and discover God giving you His wonderful messages through Jesus our Lord. How does He look at our lives? Our needs? Our worries? Our problems? This is something God communicates to you privately, in your heart, which does not mean that later you

cannot talk to your spouse, or friends, or family about it.

Give Alleluia to God! "Hallel" and "Yahweh" = "Alleluia", which is "To Praise God" for the tender, loving words He has given to us!

## Called to be Family

Notice in the Bible that when God calls someone, He does not call that person to a lonely life; He calls the person to a family, to a community. Look at Moses, Abraham, Joseph. God is always coming into a home. He is coming not to the individual, but to the person who belongs to a family, a community. He is always coming as the God of comfort and consolation. He is always coming with thoughts, plans, desires, ideas that are not our own. God is always coming more and more intimately. Do you see Him coming? Do you wait for Him? Do you accept Him?

Jesus came to this world that we might have an idea of what God is like, of Who He really is. God is the One who is always coming; He comes into the life of each one of us and into the life of every family. When God is coming, there are no banging doors; He comes in quiet and hiddenness. It is easy not to notice that He is at the door. If He would bang, we would notice, but if we don't notice we just keep the door locked.

How different each family is; it all depends on the spirit of the family. God is the One who gives meaning, who gives "spirit" to our lives. Jesus says, "If you love me, I will make my home

in you.” (John 14:23) You are baptized, confirmed, married: He is there in your home, His home, and He does not want to be evacuated. We have the Spirit of God; we are His children, we belong to His Family!

What is a home? It is a place where I am loved, cared for, missed, accepted as I am, where I belong. This home is offered in the Heart of Christ to each of us. He said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there.” (Matthew 18:20) It is home! He wants to be accepted and be part of our lives. When someone gets married, they marry into a family. The family of God is: the Church, the parish, your home, next door, the world! We cannot love God unless we love His Family.

Marriage is God’s invention. The union between a man and a woman was His idea. In several passages of the Bible we see that He compares married love with the love that God has for His people. (Hosea 2: “I will not desert you...I am the source of love...I will lure you into the desert and speak to your heart...”) The world does not encourage faithfulness, it does not support fidelity. You, married couples, have to support one another. The Church saw that we are all in the same boat – Peter’s boat! You are the “domestic Church,” just as our religious Community is the “ecclesiola,” the little Church. It is not easy to build a community,

a family. When God calls someone, you always end up with a family, a community. God loves families. Our holiness comes from being in God's family as adopted children.

What sacrifices do you make to be holy? God's love is given to us freely, uniting us, taking us into His Family, sharing His life with us. Allow God's love to shine through you and expose yourself to His love. Your vocation as a parent is a noble vocation. It takes a lot out of you; you are leaders in your family. You are a noble people to assume the responsibility of being parents. Who is your support? Where does your affirmation come from? From the Lord and from each other. Look at the source of parenthood and look at His home, His world, the dream and plan He has for you. God is like you – a Parent! He did not “have to have us” but He wanted us, He wanted children! You are in good company with God our Father, you are sharing in His heartaches and joys, too. Do your work with love, add the love of God, His 100% love to it, then it will be totally your work and totally His work.

God reveals Himself in tender images: a hen protecting her chicks, as a mother, a father... Problems will be with us as long as we live. Can we look beyond ourselves, each other, our children and see the good and loving persons who are there? Have the compassion of God. He is our Parent who

puts up with us, who never gives up on us. His faith, trust and love in us and to us comes through to us in so many ways. God tells you “I am grateful for your fidelity. I am coming to you through your spouse and through your children. I will bless you and offer you the consolation and the help you need.” In this spirit, give thanks to Him and bless His Name.



## Know God - Know Yourself

Use a mental picture. Consider the earth: how it is held together by the forces of its own center, yet it is kept on its course not only by its own force but by the sun which is above it and outside of it. And from the sun, the earth receives warmth, and light, and fertility.

Think of how the rays of the sun are kept away from the earth by certain things produced by the earth: vapors, clouds, etc. The sun is always there, yet some days are cloudy, some days are cold and dark. The earth produced the obstacles that are in the way of the sun.

Ask for the grace that your eyes would be opened to see the realities of God. Compare how God's love is always there, how God is unchangeable; how He always attracts us, and yet we do not see Him. According to our mood, because we do not feel anything special, we project it out to God as if it would be God who one day loves us and the other day does not.

Ask God for the grace to see, and in proportion to a greater sight, we would love Him more and serve Him better.

Think of how man, how each of us, is held together by a central force - the soul. That is what makes us smile or grieve, and be active and search for things. Yet the soul is not the only thing that keeps us in existence. God is the outside force, like the sun for the earth and a million times more, who keeps us on our course and whom we need very, very badly in order to be happy. Just as the earth needs the light and heat of the sun, the human soul needs the grace of God, needs the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity.

Our relationship to God is very different than the relationship of the sun and the earth. They cannot change their course; the earth must go around the sun. But the human soul is different. We can decide for ourselves. And even though God is the main attraction of the soul and He is the One who can really make us happy, we can still turn away from Him and turn toward our own central attraction and fool ourselves that we are happy. We can look upon our own perfection, so to say, what we consider our own greatness. What could we consider as our own central attraction? Somebody might think of his or her talents, or their own importance, or their own comfort, or their own opinion. We might think, "This, nobody can take away from me. What is in my head is my own!"

We can be so proud. And in our own sight, it may

look like we are doing pretty well. If we turn toward our own self, and close ourselves away from the life of our soul, nothing worthwhile will come out of it. We will be leading ourselves in the wrong direction. Here we arrive to a very interesting thought – the great importance of human free will, my free will, what I prefer. Do I prefer my own greatness, my own perfection? That is a great trap which the devil tries to put before us: our own perfection. That means I would have the ideal of myself – what a “good person” should be like, and I try to work up to that ideal. And sometimes the things I should be doing seem to be interfering. Watch out! These are the danger spots!

In a certain sense, I should forget about my own perfection, and prefer God to anything else. Prefer God, not with a false piety, like “I don’t care what others think, I love God, and I want to hide and pray.” The realistic way would be to realize that God uses people to express His will: your spouse, your boss at work, etc. This is the way we can show that we prefer God’s will to our own imagination of holiness; we prefer God’s will manifested to us through others, and in many other ways.

The proverb or good saying of St. Teresa of Avila is “Humility is truth.” It is not humility if I deny the gifts I have received from God. If we tell others, “Oh, I am not good at doing that.” That is not

humility. Humility is truth. And we will be truly and really humble if we will learn to say things the way they are, if we will learn to see who God is and who I am. That will put me in the right spot!

The more I know about God, His greatness, His perfections, the more truthful my ideal will be about myself, and the more honestly I will be able to judge the things I do, and the more realistic and sincere I will be in looking at my faults and failures. The more humbly and sincerely I can look on these, the more humble I will be; it will be truth. I will know who I am, not compared to my next door neighbor, but compared to God!

We are influenced by many things. We are influenced by our senses; we are drawn by our senses to do or not to do things. We are influenced by others. We are influenced by moods, by attractions. And then we don't see who we are or where we stand because these things color the reality. I may feel moody, blue, not feel like doing anything, or feel that no one understands me, that everybody is picking on me. When I feel hurt, I start arguing or wanting to hurt back. In all this, I manifest myself as a proud person because all these side-things are blurring my vision. For a while, I do not realize who I am or who God is.

At other times, I go to the other extreme: I am in

a good mood, I would do anything, everything is dandy, others think I'm a lot of fun, others appreciate me, accept what I say, etc. This too is a false view because I will tend to become too involved in my relationship with others and what they think of me, etc.

So what is humility? True humility is to know that, of myself, I am nothing. But with God, I am able to do anything! In the Prayer of St. Francis we say, "Lord, make me an instrument of Your Love."

Even though we are able to choose our own central attraction or be fascinated with ourselves, God is a very warm-hearted and jealous lover. He loves us much more than to let us go astray. If we are foolish enough to deceive ourselves, He will shake us up once in a while to show us who we really are. He gives us an experience of our own littleness. I will see that I am not as great as I thought I was.

We can have two kinds of reactions when we see our littleness. We can say, "Oh well, that's just how I am" or "Everybody is against me, nobody understands me!" Or we can realize that God is trying to show us how little we are and how much we need to depend on Him.

We do not want to run on our own fuel-power. We want to live by Faith, to look out for His will.

Humbly tell Our Lord, "Thank you Lord. Thank you for showing me to me as I am. I beg your help because I need your help so badly." This is what humility is: to accept, to ask, to depend on Him and on His help.

Be attentive to find out what God wants, not what I feel like doing but what He wants. Then I can be sure everything will turn out the right way. And the "right way" doesn't always have to be my plans, my success. God can carry out His plans even through our failures. But we have to do all that is in our power. I have to do all that depends on me, then I can expect God's grace.

God is very willing to give us His all! Just think of the love of Our Lord! Of redemption! Or the Mass! We know how man's relationship with God was ruined. All the gold and silver would not be able to open the gates of heaven! Who could? The Infinite God was offended; His power was necessary. In comes Our Lord! He suffers and dies on the cross for us. He was God and man. He died, He gave Himself to the Heavenly Father. But that was His sacrifice; how does this become my sacrifice? What can make it mine? He became man; He wanted to share the nature I have. He became our brother, looked like us, spoke our language. He established the Church, His Mystical Body, so that we are not only brothers but His members. We belong to Him

so closely that we have one and the same soul - the Spirit of God!

When we are in the state of Grace, Christ's Spirit is our own Spirit! He established the Holy Eucharist. He wanted to be food for our body and soul. He hid Himself in the bread. He invites us to Mass, which is going on every day and minute all over the world. And He made His sacrifice, mine. But there is still one thing needed – my will. I have to go to the Mass, and offer my heart, and unite myself to Him. He gave everything, yet my will is still needed so that His sacrifice would be mine.

God is willing to give us His utmost, everything! But it is still necessary that my will would be united to His. If I want to go my own way, I miss the boat. I have to unite my will to His. It is a matter of telling Him, and proving it, by using all the opportunities He sends.

Bow down before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Thank Him very wholeheartedly for His all-giving love. Ask Him sincerely to open your eyes to see the great reality that is Himself, and myself. Ask Him to make my heart meek and humble according to His own Heart.





## Some Thoughts on Prayer

Prayer is not bound to any certain place. When did our Lord teach that? When He was talking to the woman at the well. (John 4) He told her, "You have to pray in spirit." It means that the most important thing when we pray is that we would pray "in spirit," that is, that there would be a spiritual contact between yourself and God. It isn't just about an outward posture. The outward posture just expresses what is going on inside. Our contact with God should be deep and sincere.

If you think about this woman who was talking to our Lord, and afterwards our Lord reads her thoughts, and her life, and everything about her, how foolish it would have been if this woman would have pretended, or just talked without meaning the words, or talked without being aware that every word meant a great deal to the One listening because He has a Divine Heart, a Divine Mind.

Or, think of the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5-7) There our Lord tells us some things about prayer. First is a negative: "Do not pray like the Pharisees." Do not seek publicity. Rather, be sure that you are not disturbed. God is in secret, so pray to Him without seeking anything else outside of Him. He sees you, and He will repay you. And the greatest

is His answer: all of a sudden, it will not be so hard to pray to Him because you really are seeking that privacy with Him.

Our Lord has another comparison: “Do not pray like those who are just saying words,” (Matthew 6: 7-13) like someone just repeating words or sentences and thinking that the more times they say it, the better God will hear them. It does not depend on that, it does not depend on how many times you say it, but on how you say it.

There was a holy Brother, who is going to be canonized. He did not do anything special, but he had tremendous faith in the power of prayer. He kept saying, “The dear Lord knows what we need and He will come to our aid.” Our Lord knows what you need; He will come to your aid. But if you are not sincere, then you cannot be so sure, because you won’t even remember what you said.

As a bitter complaint our Lord told the Pharisees, “This nation praises me with their lips, but their soul is far from me.” (Matthew 15:8) This is what He wants – that your soul would be united to Him, that your heart would be united to Him when you go to pray. This is what it means to “pray in spirit.”

Another time when Jesus was teaching us how

to pray, He said, "Pray always." (Luke 18: 1-8, cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) Could He advise something that He himself would not do? Impossible. What He preached, He did. He was working, quite a lot; He was preaching and doing good. He could not have meant this advice literally, could He? Then how can we understand this advice of our Lord? What He means is that you should be constant in your prayer, not giving up. He talked so often about that constancy and how good it is when someone keeps on asking. There are many examples: the woman who did not give up and asked Him to heal her daughter (Matthew 15:21-28), and even though she was refused, she went on asking. While they were taking the dishes off of the table, she was probably still there asking. She did not do this asking as a special activity, it was part of her life, to get help for her daughter.

We should think of prayer not as something where you have to sit down or kneel or be in a special place. It should be part of our life, and we should not care at all where we are when we pray. Then we would pray much more. We have to make our whole life into prayer. St. Paul says, "Whether you eat or sleep, or whatever you do, do it for His glory." (1 Cor. 10:31) St. Augustine says, "Your whole life should be a psalm. You should never cease to be in the presence of God." So when you pray to God,

do not do it with your tongue only, but also with your good deeds, and then there is no time when you are not praising Him either with words or good deeds.

What we should strive for is that closeness to God; strive to live in His presence. Of course there are many things, practical things, which require all your attention. But even then, if you start a work that requires all your attention, for a moment, make it a point to unite yourself to Him. Perhaps you ask His help for this work. After a while, it will become second-nature for you to go to Him. So often in life, a mother has to work and do something with her full attention, and at the same time, she does not lose sight of her child. This "silent attention" is possible for us. It is made even easier if we remember that whatever happens to us, He is truly with us.

He would not let anything bad happen to you just to make you miserable or unhappy or so that you would be a failure. Far from it! Whatever happens has a meaning. If you cooperate, if you learn from it, you will be a much better person. We can be grateful, not only for the marvelous things, the great things, but even for those things which, humanly speaking, are not the most pleasant. And if we try to awaken this union with God before every work, then of course the work will be better. You cannot

always pray with words, but with your soul, yes, you can.

One of the pieces of advice which St. Ignatius gives is: if you say a prayer like the Memorare to our Blessed Mother, or the Anima Christi, or the Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel, if you take the prayer word-by-word, stop after each word and make it a conscious act to ask what it means. Say it with all your heart. Be convinced that what you are saying in the prayer is true. Say it. Then it brings a tremendously great benefit; it helps you to meditate. Then later, when you say that prayer, you will pray it better.

St. Paul says, "Without love, without charity, nothing really matters." (1 Corinthians 13) Prayer without charity is cold and empty. How can we make prayer better? Only if it is filled with love!

Going through each sentence, each truth, and seeing whether we agree with it or not, whether we would state the same or not, is a wonderful practice. If you run out of material, take any prayer you usually say. Stop at each truth. Never be afraid of running out of material for prayer. You are actually making way for the Holy Spirit and the actual graces He wants to give to you.

We are not flattering God when we are praying to

Him. These prayers which were set down were not put down just to flatter Him, like a poet writing a poem to a king or about a king. There is the human element there of wanting to get something from the king. That is flattery. What the poet says may be true, but can he agree with it? Can he say it with his whole heart?

If we have to do many preparations for a work so that it would go smoothly, preparation for prayer is even more important. Try to unite yourself to God before each work during the day, then, if before prayer, you put yourself in the presence of God, your prayer will be easy because you were already doing that all day long. It is already a habit, it is already second-nature to you. This is why it is so important to do this during the day. But if you are absent-minded during the day, and you do not lift your mind and heart to God, then of course it will be harder to do it when you want to pray; you will be too tired, sleepy, etc. But if during the day you practice, then it becomes an act of the will, and it will be easier to pray when sleepiness or tiredness wants to make it harder.

# The Message of Christmas

Have you experienced the Posadas in the days before Christmas? We walk with Mary and Joseph, finding a place for Jesus. The way we walk with Mary and Joseph can be so inspiring and encouraging; it was for me! I was very happy to hear the tone of welcome: "We have been waiting, please, come in!" Welcome expressed in strong, clear voices!

Once we arrived to the chapel, we experienced the Word-made-flesh as we listened to the Scriptures; we heard the prophecies that speak about Jesus. We adored Him as a little baby in the crib, and we adored Him in the Blessed Sacrament.

It was such a contrast for me to see Jesus in the crib and Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. In the crib, I see God coming to us in love and in total helplessness, exposing Himself to our good will, or not, to accept Him.

As a baby, the Son of God, Jesus, is in need of a warm place; as a baby, he suffers from the cold. He is totally dependent on bodily care. And He can be hurt in his body. A baby cries when he is treated roughly; when his skin is cut, he bleeds.

A baby, really and truly does not do anything to

merit our love. He is not loved for what he does, he is loved for the person he is. This is what God wants to tell us today: "Love Me for WHO I AM, not just for what I can give to you. Care for Me, give Me a home."

In the Blessed Sacrament, we see Him above and beyond bodily needs. The cold does not hurt Him, heat cannot harm Him; in the form of bread, when cut, He does not bleed; no one can hurt Him physically any more. Only our intentions matter: our coldness, our indifference, our lack of love for Him. In the Blessed Sacrament, He is the Risen Lord coming to us! And when He wants, He can speak to us.

Listen, and you can hear him giving us the message of Christmas again and again: "I love you, I came to be united to you. I miss you! I cannot contain in my Heart my love for you any more!" Jesus asked St. Margaret Mary to tell people how much He wants His people to come to Him, how much He desires to be united with each one in the Blessed Sacrament, and He asked her to encourage His beloved people to receive Him frequently in Holy Communion.

What is Jesus' message to us today? During the four weeks of Advent, we were saying to Him: "Come, Lord Jesus!" And then, at Christmas, we recognize that He has come. He is here with us now! We



can hear His desire and command at the end of every Liturgy: "Go, you are sent." He tells us "I am sending you to make Me present amongst my people. I am Emmanuel, God-with-you and within you. I will help you, I will give you the strength to be my messenger."

There is one more thing that Jesus, as the babe in the crib, tells us: *I am asking you not to forget how vulnerable the body of the human person is. You are now my Body. You can hurt me in my beloved people. You need to see everyone who is baptized as belonging to my Body, and all the others as potential members of my Body. "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you are doing to me."* (Matthew 25: 40) If Jesus rewards us for a cup of cold water given in His name, imagine the gratitude of His Heart for bringing His beloved people to a deeper knowledge of Him, and of the Father and of the Holy Spirit.



# The Gift of God

A friend and I had a very interesting conversation about friendship, about love, and how we can love more than just one or two friends. I realized that we love people in their uniqueness, we don't just love someone when they fit a certain image. If we would give our love only to those who fit a particular image, we would run out of love very quickly.

If you are connected to the Lord, then according to His uniqueness, you will not run out of love. That I love one of my Sisters does not take away my love for another Sister. Love is not given by percentage. And when we have more Sisters, I am still not going to run out of that love. Why? Because I love each Sister for who she really is and not for what she does or does not do. I will always appreciate the uniqueness of each person, and the loveableness of each person. This is how our love is infinite.

God's love is not comparative. We can all agree that our Blessed Mother is most loved by God, and she is our model. Yet God does not say, "When you will think, talk, feel and act as Mary, I will love you." He loves you, He loves you for who you are. The minute you accept God's unconditional love for you, you are ready to respond as Mary

did, and your thinking, talking, feeling, and doing things will resemble more and more the way Mary thought, talked, felt and did things.

God sees the fully blooming amaryllis or rose in each of us when we might only see the gray bulb or awkward green leaves. I was very impressed by a talk I heard from Henri Nouwen. He said, "Don't believe what the world is telling you – that you are what you do, or, you are what people say about you, or, you are what you have. No! You are the beloved of God."

Do you really see and appreciate and enjoy your uniqueness? Really, who are we? Only God can help us to see the real person that we are. Christmas time is a good time to ask yourself this question: "Who am I?" Christmas is the time when God made Himself visible to us in the Person of Jesus. With our human eyes we can see who God really is. Let us turn to Him and ask Him to share with us His vision of who we are to Him.

Who are we? Jesus says, "You are the gift of the Father to Me." Another time, in His priestly prayer (John 17), He says, "I am giving you as a gift to the Father," and "both the Father and I give you the Spirit, our Spirit, the Holy Spirit." We do not give gifts that we ourselves do not appreciate.

If we are the gift of the Father to Jesus, this means that we are God's masterpieces – His work of art, one of a kind, unique, unrepeatable, infinitely precious gifts of God!

We are each of us "originals." This is what we need to see in each other. We do not need to be bothered by each others' originality, we do not need to try to cut down each others' originality but, rather, make the very best of it. We are so loved by God that Jesus came for no other reason but to tell us about this love and to call us to a loving, grateful union with God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And He asks nothing of us except to love Him back. The only way we can return that love is to spend our life saying, "God, I love you too."

How do you see yourself? Who are you in the eyes of God? I chose 12 dimensions we can look at; these are ways of expressing the reality of our Baptism. Our Baptism tells us who we are.

At Christmas time, we receive gifts. But if we do not open the gifts, we will not receive the benefits. One Christmas we received the gift of little blankets; if we had not opened the gift, we could just be whining or complaining that we are cold. Gifts were given to us at our Baptism, but unless we savor and use these gifts, we will not benefit from them.



One gift or dimension of our Baptism is: we are **freed from sin**, (Deuteronomy 7:6) we are forgiven. This reality means that the division which existed between God and man is gone.

This is what Our Lord did for us: sin was really and truly nailed to the cross. Because of the self-giving sacrifice of Our Lord, there is no sin which cannot be forgiven. We experience the joy that comes from knowing that we are “the blessed” because we are forgiven; we are united to Jesus and to the Father.

Another dimension of our Baptism: we are **adopted sons and daughters of God**. (Romans 8:14-17, Ephesians 1:3-5)

The Father has placed his hand on us saying, “You are my beloved,” just as Jesus heard it said of Him. This needs to re-echo in our hearts: “You are my beloved in whom I find my joy.” And we can say, “And you, Lord, are a Father to me.” He sees all. He says, “Since you are my child, is there anything I would not give to you?” How much He wants to give to us!



Another dimension is: **divine life**. (John 15:1-7) This is what we are: an expression of God's life

on earth. We live the life of the Holy Trinity! We receive life from the Father and the Son, and give it back to the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. We live in the best possible company now and forever.

Another dimension: we are a **new creature**, (2 Corinthians 5:17) a totally new being. Love is not satisfied with giving only things. God did not stop with giving us the whole world, He gave us Himself, sharing His life with us. We are a “new creation,” high above any other; created to rule, to have life with God, to be in His family now and forever, surpassing all other creatures.



Another dimension: we are **members of Christ**, members of His Mystical Body (1 Corinthians 12: 12-30). We belong to Him. We are cared for, protected by the Lord as “the apple of His eye” (Zechariah 2:8) never to be separated from Him. We have a deep union with Him, deeper than any other human natural union which is based on blood or family ties. Our union with Our Lord far surpasses that. In Him, with Him we can do all things.



Another dimension:

we are **co-heirs with Christ** (John 16:23-27, John 17). This is the treasure we inherit. We are co-heirs with Jesus. This means that what belongs to Jesus, belongs to each one of us: all His

virtues, all His gifts, all His merits, all His life, His body and blood, all His goodness, all His kindness, all His loveableness, His Mother, His brothers and sisters. All is mine! All is open to me!

Another dimension: we are a **temple of the Holy Spirit** (Galatians 5:22-25); we are the place where God lives, the place He calls home. Here is where I can come to rest, to prayer and adoration, to security and joy.



Another dimension: **King/Prophet/Priest**. In our Baptism, we are anointed with chrism. We are really anointed as priest, as prophet, as king. These are not just beautiful titles, this is reality!



**King:** (John 18:33-37, 1 Peter 5:2-4) We have to go to the depths of the concept, the heart of what it means to share in Christ's kingliness. He is the one who



says, "My kingdom is not of this world." It is not about ruling over people. In the biblical sense, the king is the shepherd, the one who takes care, who protects and safeguards and provides; he knows each by name. To share in Christ's kingliness means to care for others, not according to the standards of this world, but according to the kingdom which is to come and which has already come in the hearts of those who have accepted Jesus.

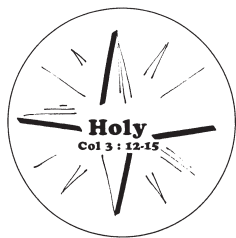


**Prophet:** (John 1: 19-23) God does not impose His will on us. His will comes from His love. He wants only good for us. This is why He gave us commandments. The prophets are the ones who remind us of God's love, His care, and that He is so close. As John the Baptist did, we too want to prepare His way and make His presence known.

**Priest:** (Hebrews 2:16-18) Jesus gave Himself through the sacrifice of the cross; He is giving Himself under the species of bread and wine. The priest is the mediator



between God and His people, offering the best possible sacrifice with Jesus in the Eucharist. In carrying our crosses, we also are giving our life, drop by drop, day by day; this is our priestliness.



Another dimension: **Holy** (Colossians 3:12-15). It is so right that we should pray for this. Holy is another word for God. It is more than ordinary goodness, it is to be as good as God is good: striving to do all with love, not with self-

interest or calculation. God's goodness extends to bad and good alike. This thought struck me very early in my religious life: the sun ripens the fruit in the garden of the good and of the bad. God is so generous, He is such a blessing! To be holy is to be a blessing for others.



The final dimension:

**Witness** (2 Corinthians 4:7-18, 2 Timothy 2:8-13) We witness to the truth. God is Truth. With the Church we are witnesses, martyrs of Christ, laying down

our lives for Christ so that the world would see who He really is. There is no greater love, no love which is stronger, than to lay down your life for the one you love. People cannot miss the reality of this truth.

I am very happy to share this spiritual gift with you; I hope you will have a very good prayer because of it. Remember that preciousness, that great dignity which you have, that absolute uniqueness which you are. For this, give glory to the Lord! "Rejoice, beloved. You are precious in my eyes because I love you."

# **A good friend, a rare treasure:**

## **Isabel Piczek**

November 14, 1927- September 29, 2016

Isabel Piczek was a world renowned ecclesiastical and sacred artist, as well as a very good friend of Sister Ida. Born in Hatvan, Hungary, she graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest. While she was still a young student, she began to visualize the possibilities of a new sacred art form - a new liturgical vision. She realized early on that there would be no opportunity to create that vision in Hungary as it was then part of the suppressed world behind the Iron Curtain under Communist rule. Just after the end of World War II, Isabel and her sister, Edith, fled the Communist regime in Hungary and escaped across the border into Austria. They continued on to Rome, which would become their home for the next three years. In Rome, Isabel won the International Grand Award for her painting at the Galleria di Roma. She was commissioned to paint a 400 sq. ft. true fresco mural at the world famous Pontifical Biblical Institute owned by the Vatican, an unheard of distinction for women. (*In 2011, this piece was named a Vatican Treasure.*)

Declining a scholarship to move to Paris, Isabel and her sister briefly lived in Canada before making the decision to come to America in 1956. It was in



Edith Piczek, Sister Ida and Isabel Piczek standing in front of one of their murals

Canada where Sister Ida and Isabel first met and an instant friendship blossomed that would include all aspects of their lives, especially their spiritual lives. Isabel and Sister Ida would often have long talks about faith and the love of God and these are reflected in Isabel's artwork.

Isabel's body of work is nothing short of astonishing and includes majestic colossal-sized murals, mosaics, paintings, stained glass windows and tile works for almost 500 buildings, churches and cathedrals in seven countries and on three continents. In 1992, Isabel, along with her sister Edith, was honored by Pope John Paul II in recognition of her prolific artistic achievements. In addition to being a world class artist, she also became an internationally known physicist, recognized for her study of the Shroud of Turin. Considering the hundreds of art works she has created, Isabel frequently referenced among her favorites the art work she had done for Sister Ida in the Sacred Heart Chapel at the Heart of Jesus Retreat Center in Santa Ana, California.

Isabel and Sister Ida had a great appreciation for each other. Sister Ida referred to Isabel in an early letter to the Sisters as an "excellent little - or rather, great soul". In the eulogy at Sister Ida's funeral, Isabel said, "Sister Ida introduced into this world a new concept of sainthood. What she has shown us is that God Himself is the real Joy, Hope and Energy, not someone to fear and hide from, but to love, to thoroughly enjoy and to realize that He is Fun, more so than anything and anyone else on earth." Isabel Piczek was honored to design and install 6 Marian windows in the Heart of Jesus Retreat Center Convent Chapel in 2012, which was also named "Sister Ida's Chapel."

In her theological and artistic description of the windows, Isabel states, "According to the personal wishes of the Sisters' foundress, Sister Ida, the immense impact of the Marian Life will be shown in the embrace of the Life of Christ."

## ***The Birth - Cover Art***

*excerpt taken from Isabel Piczek's Theological and Artistic Description of the stained glass windows in the Heart of Jesus Retreat Center Convent Chapel*

The whole of creation was breathlessly waiting for the Incarnation of God. "The Incarnation represents the ultimate communication of God to His creatures." "The Incarnation of God was fitting to the perfection of the Universe, of which Man, in a sense, is the supreme achievement."

The fact that the Word became incarnate to save Creation does not make Him any less the End for which all things exist. His Incarnation constitutes the created Order in which God is the most loved.

The Incarnation of God happened in a cave in a small town on a small globe through the obedient consent of a young Virgin, Mary. The significance of this is infinitely more than what even the best of us are capable to understand.

The window of the Birth of Christ takes at least a symbolic suggestion of virgin birth. The Body of the Christ Child appears lifted by light out of the intact body of the Virgin. He is not the usual "sweet baby" of Christmas card tradition. The body is in crucified position, He is the world's Savior born. Mary shows great joy. Her God given task was completed. No mere creature ever had a love for the Father as Mary had. Her one hand is lifted up toward the Father. This is the Father's Divine Son born. With the other hand she is protecting the Savior who was born also to be a man. The crib is beside her. Joseph, in total amazement, looks up praising God and protects Mary and the Child by holding a cloth behind them.

Humans and Angels are coming to worship the greatest Being ever present on earth and galaxies and stars remind us that this Child came to save all.



Sister Ida pictured: age 1; age 16 in the snow; before the Creche in our first Convent in America; praying during a Posadas on Christmas Eve, and with the Christmas tree on Christmas Day



# Servant of God

## Sister Ida Peterfy, SDSH

1922-2000

Foundress, Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart

When does a Religious Community begin? Who are the people God chooses and calls for such a task of extraordinary faith, zeal and love?

This is the story of the dynamic action of God in the life of Sister Ida Peterfy and the Sisters of the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart. There were no extraordinary signs given to her; only the interior call of God which she recognized and responded to in the silence of her heart.

It was the summer of 1939 and the Mayor of Kassa, Hungary, requested that the Girl Scouts direct a two week camp for underprivileged children. Ida, a vivacious sixteen year old at the time, was enjoying a summer vacation in the beautiful northern region of Hungary. She was asked to take the leadership role and, unhesitatingly, she gave up her vacation to fill the need. Her heart went out to the 120 little children who needed to develop a relationship with God and with each other. To teach them, she developed a method with lively dramatizations and imaginative visual aids. In the summer of 1940, Ida once again led the two week camp program. At the close of the camp she made her first three day silent retreat.

It was during this quiet time of prayer and reflection that God spoke to Ida in a way which would penetrate her heart and alter her life. With no external signs nor miraculous gifts, it was simply, yet profoundly, the Word of God finding a home in the heart of a 17 year old girl. The deep realization that "God knows me by name, and loves me personally" and "God cares for the children facing the threat of Nazism and Communism" brought forth the response in her: "But who will teach these children about God?" The stereotypical answer: "The Church will do it," did not sound right to her anymore. In prayer it became obvious to Ida: "You are the Church, it is up to you; you need to work that they would know God." The extraordinary had taken place, the reality of God's personal love had been heard and responded to.

With the support of the Retreat Director and with the approval of Msgr. Nicolas Pfeiffer, her spiritual mentor, Ida was ready to offer her life to God. Upon her 18th birthday she made private vows of chastity, poverty and obedience in the Franciscan Church in Kassa, before the Blessed Sacrament and in the company of one of the first members of the sprouting Community. Thus began the fascinating and inspiring ministry of Sister Ida Peterfy and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart which, in time, became a fully approved Religious Congregation in the Catholic Church, the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

While Sister Ida was organizing the youth to participate in the Consecration of the city of Kassa to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sister Hermine Jaschko, Sister Aurelia Majorossy, and Sister Eva Batta were drawn by her zeal and also committed their lives to God in the Community.

The years of World War II, followed by the Communist occupation, seemed to be the bleakest and least stable time in Europe. Yet the innovative teaching methods of Sister Ida and the growing number of companions proved to be the message of hope in God's love to many of Hungary's teachers, youth and children. Undaunted by the threats of the Communist regime and the imprisonment of Sister Aurelia in a Russian labor camp, the Sisters continued their work and apostolic accomplishments. They never considered leaving Hungary. However after the arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty, Sister Ida was encouraged by Church leaders to leave the country with the Sisters in order to continue their work in the free world. It became apparent to Sister Ida that God had very different plans for her and for the Community. She continued to trust and follow God's call.

On February 14, 1949 Sister Ida and a companion escaped from Hungary to Austria and prepared the way for the Community to follow. In June 1949, Sister Ida immigrated to Canada and made preparations for the Sisters' voyage. On August 15, 1950 Sister Hermine Jaschko, Sister

Eva Batta, Sister Aurelia Majorossy, Sister Agnes Raday, and Sister Helen Clare Nagy arrived safely in Toronto.

It took insight, courage and determination for Sister Ida and the young Community to not be diverted from their original religious education ministry because of the language barrier. Conducting a summer school for the children of Hungarian tobacco farmers led to the Sisters' actual labor in the tobacco harvest. Through this hard work, they acquired enough funds to establish a printing shop. Thus they chose to work with their hands, while gaining fluency in English, rather than compromise their original goal of religious education.

By 1954, the Sisters were ready to share their spiritual knowledge and teaching methods in English. They formed volunteers to be catechists and through their leadership programs the youth of Toronto actively participated in the Marian Year. The Sisters reached out to the newly arrived Chinese college students, and with Sister Ida's *Five Step Illustrated Method*, the Sisters were delighted to find that they could communicate and teach well, ethnic and cultural barriers melting away.

With the impact of their teaching and the example of their lives, news of the Sisters' work began to spread. By 1956, the Canadian edition of Time Magazine had published an article on the Community.

Recognized by several Bishops during the Religious Education Congress in Buffalo, New York, Sister Ida was asked to bring the Community to work in several dioceses. Accepting Bishop Robert J. Dwyer's invitation in November 1956, a convent was established in Reno, Nevada in 1957. Simultaneously, upon the invitation of Cardinal James Francis McIntyre, the Motherhouse and Novitiate of the Community were opened in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, California.

The Community's steady growth could be seen both in numbers and in accomplishments. Sister Ida, Sister Eva, and Sister Agnes were the first to give Teacher Formation courses in the Archdiocese and the Sisters participated in Religious Education Programs and in Summer Schools of Religion. Young women from Southern California, the Midwest, the East Coast, and from Hong Kong entered this vibrant, joyful and dedicated Community of the Sacred Heart Sisters.

During the 1960's, the Sisters led Youth Retreats, popular now, but a striking innovation at the time. In their new country they continued their favorite program: summer camps for children. The camps provided an opportunity for the children to hear the Word of God and to rejoice in God's love in the midst of created beauty. Schools of Prayer for adults and Family Retreat Camps were established to support the family unit.

In 1970, the Sisters' most expansive ministry

was to be realized: they reached out through the media to vast numbers of children, producing twenty-seven, half hour religious education programs "*My Friend, Pookie*" for ABC-TV, at the request of the LA Archdiocese. The Sisters were, unknowingly, honing the skills and talents which would later be used to produce the celebrated Video Catechesis Series, the *Sacred Heart Kids' Club*.

Confirmation of their ongoing work took the form of the Society's First General Chapter in 1976. The Chapter reestablished Sister Ida as Superior General and sanctioned the Constitutions re-formulated by her. The Constitutions were approved by Cardinal Manning in 1980 and received the approval of the Holy See in 1985.

While Sister Ida remained the spiritual inspiration of the community, the 1982 Chapter elected Sister Eva Batta as Superior General. In 1988, Sister Jane Stafford became the first American to hold the position of Superior General.

The end of the seventies was marked by a boom of blessings, as the Sisters launched the Heart of Jesus Retreat Center in Santa Ana, California. The generosity of a loving benefactor, combined with the spirited fund raising led by Sister Ida and Sister Jane, produced the necessary resources to acquire the 23 acre Sacred Heart Retreat Camp at Big Bear Lake, California and a Lodge to accommodate 200 people was built in 1980. Both of these centers established unique locations for the

Sisters' continuing work and steadfast commitment to the spiritual enrichment of children, youth and adults, with special focus on family apostolate.

In 1985, after prayerful consideration, the small Community recognized the need to establish a mission in Taiwan. This ministry provides help to the people both within the fields of medicine and religious education.

Sister Ida and her Sisters could be found in a variety of Religious Education ministries from teaching children, youth and adults to directing parish religious education programs, sacramental programs, RCIA, indeed any place where the Word and love of God need to be proclaimed. In response to a growing need for catechist formation, Sister Ida produced a video course, *Be a Dynamic and Effective Religion Teacher*. Through it, her unique catechetical method, *The Five Step Illustrated Method*, brings success to catechists and educators in places previously beyond the Sisters' reach.

The spiritual needs of Hungary and the surrounding countries in Europe are close to the hearts of the Sisters. In 1992 they sent a missionary team of Sisters back to Hungary, the place where Sister Ida initially received the inspiration of the Lord to begin the Community.

Sister Ida's leadership in the Community continued through teaching the novices, giving retreats and monthly seminars to the Sisters, being actively involved in the Community's government

and traveling as a religious education speaker both nationally and internationally.

A diagnosis of non-Hodgkins lymphoma in 1995 did not deter Sister Ida from making the Father's love known. While undergoing chemotherapy, she gave a 30 day retreat to Sisters who had recently made their perpetual profession. She spiritually led the Community in the anticipation and celebration of the Great Jubilee in the year 2000 and was the first to cross through the Holy Door erected for the event.

Sister Ida's life on earth ended as it had been lived, focused on the One she had given her life to and surrounded by her Sisters who joined her in this love. She passed on to eternal life on February 8, 2000 in the Motherhouse of the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart in Northridge, California.

The celebration of the Mass of Resurrection was indeed a celebration. Cardinal Roger Mahony, the main celebrant, mentioned the special and wonderful grace of this moment, "These are moments that we read about in the lives of holy men and women. We were blessed, for whatever reason in God's providence, to have Sister Ida here, to have the opportunity to know her and love her... we also pray that we would be able to capture that spirit of Sister Ida in our own commitment of faith in Christ, and in our lives we would live out the discipleship which she lived out to the full, and



shared with us in such a visionary fashion."

"The Joyful Apostolate must go on," said then Archbishop Justin Rigali in his homily at the funeral. "Sister Ida, in her legacy of generous love still speaks to us." This rite of Christian burial "is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving for the love of God manifested in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and reflected in the gentle life and zealous devotion of our Sister Ida."

Even though Sister Ida's earthly life has ended, the Joyful Apostolate continues on through her Sisters' catechetical works in her spirit. While the list of credits to the Sisters of the Sacred Heart grows with greater speed than the presses print them, it is worthy to note that it is God who moves the hearts of these dedicated women. The Sisters' untiring faith, work and humility, reflect a strength and wisdom that is heart warming and life-giving. It is obvious that they take Sister Ida's final words to them to heart: *"I think my message was, from day one to day last, that if you don't love God, you don't love Jesus, you don't love each other, and then the people, then somehow you are missing the point of life."*

The significance and impact of the Sacred Heart Sisters' accomplishments have been, and continue to be globally recognized. Yet, to know Sister Ida's Sisters is to know the love, grace, and simplicity that is the power of Jesus Christ.

## Ask Sister Ida's intercession

Most Loving God,  
you called Sister Ida to teach and live  
Your Truth and Your message of love  
in a joyful and inspiring way.

May her example also inspire us  
to live in faith and draw others  
to Your Sacred Heart

Through the intercession of Your Servant,  
grant us the following grace which we ask  
from Your loving kindness:  
*(here make your request).*

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.

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For more information, to request materials,  
to share a testimonial of Sister Ida's heroic virtue,  
or to report any grace obtained through her intercession, contact:

*Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart*  
10480 1/2 Winnetka Ave., Chatsworth, CA 91311  
*sisterida@sacredheartsisters.com*  
**www.sacredheartsisters.com**



*A letter written from Toronto, Canada, December 16, 1949*

With loving anticipation, I have been waiting for the opportunity to write to you. Today is the deadline. Maybe it will arrive late because of the Christmas rush. I entrust it to the Christmas angels!

The enclosed letter is not “lofty literature.” One insight is like a flame in my heart, and that is what I would like to express. Somehow I can see that the Lord made it possible for everyone of us to give a very great Christmas gift to the little Jesus. It is a strange feeling but it is in my heart: I almost want to thank each and every one of us in His Name.

The Savior is born. Light has come to our dark earth. The first Christmas was about 2000 years ago. Do we just “remember Him” today? No, He is not a “memory.” The fact of redemption does not belong to the past. As long as babies are born, redemption is happening over and over again. The Son of God became man for us! He assumed human life for you, to show you that life is worth living, and He showed you how to live on this earth.

In spirit, we are in Bethlehem. We fall on our knees before our Savior and give Him thanks.

♥ your Sister Iola

**Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart**



**[www.sacredheartsisters.com](http://www.sacredheartsisters.com)**

Cover art by Isabel Piczek

*The Birth*, Heart of Jesus Retreat Center Convent Chapel

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