

Salvatorians: On Fire with the Spirit

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USA Salvatorian National Assembly
June 20-25, 2016

I am deeply honored to have been asked to speak to you during this week of Assembly. The theme, "Salvatorians: On Fire with the Spirit" is no small or superficial theme! So fitting for this time, our time of graced assembly, and so much that can be said.

In looking over the many questions given to us presenters, I immediately was drawn to focus on the important question given to us about Mother Mary. The question is this:

"What resources do we find in Mother Mary's writings in reference to being enflamed with the Holy Spirit and how did these influence Mother Mary?"

As I began to think about this question, I said to myself, "Let's look for words that Mother Mary wrote or said that give us internal evidence of being enflamed by the Holy Spirit." And then I said, "Well, let's also look for external evidence in the actions of Mother Mary, that is, descriptions of activities that she did, projects that she undertook, people whom she met, collaborations that she made, perceptions of Mother Mary made by those who lived with her, etc., that can indeed show us in even greater detail that Mother Mary, in her Salvatorian vocation, was 'enflamed'."

And above all, even before I begin to look, I must always remember that God gave Mother Mary the gift of the Salvatorian charism. As a result, she became engaged totally in the Spirit-driven apostolic mission of Jordan. This has to be the central truth of this presentation. Prior to and during the time of her total engagement in the mission, Mother Mary was indeed enflamed by the Spirit. She revealed to Father Jordan, by her very life, that his vision of women and men as co-equal apostles, co-equally graced by the Spirit, could indeed be realized. And Jordan, by never turning back in his invitation to Mother Mary to join the fledgling Society, revealed that women were indeed to be welcomed, could find a home among the Salvatorians and could work with mutual and collaborative spirit. In this mutuality, Salvatorians give a tremendous gift and witness to society and to the Church, the people of God.

Next I then think about us here today. God has given to us as well this gift of the charism. What does that mean for us? What does this look like? What shape does it take? What energy does it exude? A few thoughts and perhaps some insights about these questions will be presented in the final part of this session. Along with this, I ask myself, "Given what I have learned about Mother Mary, and given the fact that she was indeed enflamed by the Holy Spirit, what would impel her today? What would fill her heart with tears and with song? What facts, what images would urge her into action, as so often was the case in her life?" And so, let us begin.

When I looked at the sources, I immediately saw that Mother Mary confided in her spiritual directors over a period of many years, but she wrote little in her diary, gave little internal evidence that would directly reveal the Spirit's working, if we are only looking narrowly. As I studied the diary, on the surface I see a "who's who and what's what." Mother Mary writes so as to remember the people she meets, the activities of the house, her communications with others, the happenings that are important to her. She rarely, if ever, refers to herself personally. This is not her style. We don't often

find words that she said in prayer, articulations whereby she expresses her unfolding perception of her vocation. We don't read utterances that describe her leaning on God or other sentiments that are commonly associated with this type of deep and prayerful communication. However, the sisters who knew her often speak about her being swept up and totally engaged in prayer.

However, there are a few hints about the working of the Spirit in Therese's life. For example, let's take ourselves back to 1875. This is the year at the very beginning of the diary when she describes her move from the Castle to the house in Neuwerk.

By November of that year, Therese is now 42 years old, which may seem young for us but in the nineteenth century signalled a more elderly very respectable age of life. Therese is still trying to put the pieces together in her life that would allow her to live out her vocational call. She had been in and out of several convents, not because the sisters sent her away, but because, in the end, in her honesty before God, she knew that she was not living her missionary call in the way that she felt God had meant her to live it. After moments of deep stillness, no matter what other people would think, she always moved on whenever she had this intuition to do so from within. I call it being enflamed from within. Moved by the Spirit, she was restless and looking around for answers like many people whom we may know today who are searching for meaning and happiness. Now we see her back home, with her father and of course all the relatives and friends still wondering what was Therese going to do? Of course, her father would have loved to have had her manage the affairs of the castle.

In the early pages of the diary, we read her matter-of-fact description of how she began her new life at the old Benedictine Abbey in Neuwerk. On the very first page of the diary, she tells the story about how she read in the newspaper that a new renter was needed for this old Abbey in town as of November, 1875. The lease would be for nine years. She talked to her friend, the local parish priest in Neuwerk about her wish to rent, with the option of leasing it out again if necessary. The local parish priest, Msgr. Dr. Von Essen, advised her to pray much about whether this be God's will.

Now within 24 hours, unbeknownst to Therese, the parish priest talked to the mayor who was in favor of Therese's rental of the abbey. Therese, a woman so sensitive to the Spirit at work, immediately saw this as the will of God because, as Therese says in the Diary, "if God wanted me to rent, He would have to show it by pointing out a helping hand to me."¹ Later on, Therese speaks about the mayor's help in the obtaining of the abbey. Some of the immediate obstacles were 1., that the current inhabitants, again in Therese's words, "did everything in their power to stay," 2., that there was some snow which would make moving from one place to another very unappealing, and 3., the lease was complicated; there were eight proprietors. So, despite the roadblocks and with the help of the mayor, Therese was now the renter of the convent as such, with the garden, the orchard and the surrounding land excluded from public bid.

Now, Therese has her convent and her dreams. But does she move in right away? No, first she wants to go on retreat, to listen more closely to the Spirit. After the retreat, Therese writes these

¹ Mother Mary, Diary Mary of the Apostles 1875-1907 (Rome: Study Group "Mary of the Apostles, 2010) 4.

beautiful words, “I decided ever more firmly with God, to move into the convent right away... – **to shun no obstacle in following the call of God...**”²

More complications followed. However, as of March 24, 1875, the lease was finally established.

After the signing, Therese continues, “This done, I had to go about my task – to calm the family, think about furnishings – persuade people to move out – to repair the interior somewhat (the interior of the convent had been completed neglected for the past fifty years), to think about getting helpers....A girl who lived with me at Myllendonk volunteered immediately.”³

Remember, this is a woman who is about to embark on a truly unique journey, at least as perceived by the people of her village, her community. Yes, women and men were leaving their families to enter religious life and priesthood, but Therese had already tried to do that and had already learned that this was not to be her path. She had this yearning to take a radical step, but how? Where?

I am reminded of an autobiographical account that I recently read about a Doctor Rachael Consoli, a young woman who had spent three years working as an obstetrics and gynecological surgeon and clinical instructor at Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts General Hospital and two other health centers in Massachusetts.⁴ Like our Mother Mary who had travelled as a young woman, Rachael too had travelled and could say that she had been to every continent on earth except Antarctica. When she was ten, her family moved to the Dominican Republic to minister to the people there for the next fifteen years.

While serving as a doctor in America, Rachael, in her own words, “felt that God was calling her to ‘do something radical’ with her life.” This is the enflaming that I think that Therese also felt. For Therese, to leave the comfort zone of her home and the supportive presence of her father, to take action knowing that the village was familiar with her past history and perhaps not too supportive, this was truly a courageous step to take. Rachael too took a courageous step. She heard that a Catholic Mission Board had long been searching for an OB-GYN surgeon for its Safe Motherhood program in South Sudan. She was uneasy until somebody from the organization called to tell her how badly she was needed. So she listened to her parents and siblings instead of to the U.S. Embassy, which had warned that the country was dangerous and, despite the warnings, Rachael signed on for a one-year medical mission.

Now, back to Therese, who is on her own personal journey. Therese continues, “Slowly and almost in secret, the necessary household items were purchased and brought into the convent, together with my furniture from Myllendonk. Finally, on November 13, 1876, I moved in quietly, saying goodbye on the following day. I had asked Katharine Bohlen from Allrath to come to the church in Neuwerk to meet me on that day. She was just 17 years old – a very reserved but optimistic character. From then until the New Year, the house was cleaned, things repaired and the household established.”⁵

² Mother Mary, 5.

³ Mother Mary, 5.

⁴Dan Stockman, *Questions and answers with Rachael Consoli - delivering babies in a war zone*. Document downloaded from Global Sisters Report website at the following link: <https://globalsistersreport.org/blog/q/ministry/q-rachael-consoli-delivering-babies-war-zone-39651>

⁵ Mother Mary, 6.

The Holy Spirit in Therese's life? Yes, we see it here. The Spirit is now moving Therese to once and for all leave the parental home and once again to make concrete her dream, her missionary call. The Holy Spirit had already guided Therese by giving her many insights from her experiences during the first 40 plus years of her life. Yet, despite the pain and uncertainty of her many unknowns and her lack of female missionary models to give Therese encouragement and support in her part of the world, Therese's focus never shifts and the interior sense of her vocation never wavers. Unable to directly realize her missionary desire at this stage of her life but yet already firm in her growing understanding of her self-identity as an apostolic woman, (Where did she get this identity, I ask? It had to be the Spirit.) she continues to listen to God and to grow in her passion for all things apostolic.

During the time 1875-1882, Therese continued to explore possibilities for missionary activity. Dr. von Essen stressed the importance of founding missionary groups especially during the time of the *Kulturkampf*. The bishop of Hong Kong, who came to visit, also encouraged the same. Therese felt that if she could found a German mission group for women, she would also see the fulfilment of her own early dreams. Of course, these dreams were the gift of the Spirit to her. She said, "Mission sisters matched my inclination exactly – making a start myself, less...".⁶ Rather than start the mission group herself, she looked around for possibilities of joining her group to another of similar spirit. And, in addition, in 1875, Therese made a private vow to devote herself totally to the missions.

Yes, indeed enflamed by the Spirit!

Around this time, we also see more insight coming to Therese. She no longer thinks only of the missionary vocation as a call that takes a person to faraway lands. As I think about this gradual unfolding and revelation to Therese, I also ask, "Do not more insights also come to us as we try to listen to the Spirit speaking to us about what it means to work with our missionary call to be Salvatorian?" Some insights simply don't come all at once. Therese wrote a letter to her father in March, 1876. In the letter she talks about the beginnings of the house in Neuwerk and also gives some insight into the revelation of her missionary vocation. Reflecting on that house, she states, "So in this old convent, I will, with God's help, begin a charitable institute, a kind of hospital, with some young women. All of this has been well thought out...So my steps will not lead me to France, Belgium or even Asia, but right close by...Didn't I also feel directed and drawn toward it myself in view of the former unsuccessful attempts at a true religious life and of the present situation in

⁶ *Life Sketch, Mother Mary*, as quoted in Ulrike Musick, *A Short Biography* (Rome: Study Group Mary of the Apostles, 1989) 26.

Germany.”⁷ Therese is already having many experiences in Neuwerk of people of all ages coming to her Institute with their many needs and others wanting to join with her in her work. She is seeing that missionary efforts can be as close as the neighbor nearby. Yes, the Spirit continues to teach and to work in all kinds of situations, including those that seem hopeless, with problems that seem almost insurmountable, such as familial, governmental and societal opposition.

We find a revealing insight into God’s enflaming of Therese in a notation dated November 21, 1879, which incidentally is also the feast of the presentation of Mary in the Temple. As part of her efforts to locate another group of similar missionary spirit, Therese visited the mission house in Steyl for one day and was overjoyed to be there. She says, “What is more beautiful than to work in the spirit of sacrifice, even of martyrdom, for the salvation of souls! Oh! How happy I was in the house which strives for this spirit! If only I could do something so that such a spirit would be enkindled in the souls of many young women. – I was there to speak also about this matter.”⁸ One can almost imagine the dialogue happening here, when Christians gifted with similar missionary impulses, meet, share and rejoice!

Little by little, the Holy Spirit is working, preparing Therese for the event that was to be the true turning point of her life, her time of Annunciation. This would be the time when she first learned about the Apostolic Teaching Society. Now comes the time of her realization that the Society was everything that she had ever hoped for, everything that matched her missionary call.

In turn, I ask us today, “What was it like for you when you had your first mature moments of self-discovery of the charism present in your own personal life? When you first knew that the Salvatorians were what you were seeking? Was it an all-of-a-sudden moment or was it a gradually-unfolding time in your life? What was the role of Salvatorian communal experiences in your early days with the Salvatorians? When did you first begin to recognize the joining of your own charism to that of the Salvatorian charism as you stood in the midst of a powerful Salvatorian communal moment?” And today, do you still retain your curiosity and commitment to that which the Spirit will continue to reveal to us as we are moved by the Holy Spirit into our Salvatorian future?”

We all know the story about how Therese read the newspaper advertisement on April 12, three days after Easter Sunday of 1882. Thirteen days later, she wrote a letter to Father Bonaventura Lüthen, offering her convent to be used with her sisters for incoming missionaries. She was willing to set aside her own thought of a Congregation of sisters. Notice here the spontaneous and joyful response of a woman so full of zeal for all things apostolic. Like the disciples of the early Church described in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:32-35), she was ready to lay all things before the Society and to simply follow as a fellow apostle.

In her zeal, she had herself inscribed into the new Apostolic Teaching Society on April 20, 1882, eight days after she had first read the advertisement. She says at that time, “Oh! Everything that concerns the missions always has such a special attraction for me: if only I could do something for them here through this convent!”⁹ By late September, 1882, probably through Therese’s zeal, already 30

⁷ Therese, draft of letter to Theodore von Wullenweber, 30 Mar 1876, in ASDS (cf. Chr. N., Appendix I, p.1) as quoted in Musick, 28.

⁸ Musick, 31.

⁹ Mother Mary, 27.

persons were also inscribed and another 12 were subscribing to the publications that the Society offered, particularly to *Der Missionär*. On October 24th, Therese mentions that one of those enjoying hospitality at the Saint Barbara Institute, a humble priest, became a member of the Third degree of the Society, certainly through Therese's apostolic efforts.

Fast forward to 1897, the feast of the Annunciation. We are in the poverty of Tivoli, in the workroom where everything is decorated beautifully, even with special lighting. You can almost hear the little speeches and songs that are being sung. Why? Because some sisters are going to the missions. With travelling money in hand, given to the missionaries from their families and friends back home, they are headed to Milwaukee and later on they will go to the West Coast to teach and to establish a hospital. Mother Mary writes simply in her diary,

“Oh! That they may help to spread the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit!”¹⁰

Now, let's turn to another good resource in our Salvatorian library, Therese's poetry. It is in her poetry where we find some clue as to Therese's inner life. It is in her poetry where we catch an insightful glimpse into the working and the enflaming by the Holy Spirit, the shaping of Therese's Salvatorian vocation. As explained by Sister Miriam Cerletty in her introduction to the English translation of Therese's poems, “Two qualities characterize Therese's life and vocation: an apostolic and a mission quality....This single twofold apostolic-mission impulse energizes Therese's spirit. It gives her direction, governs her choices and motivates all her endeavors. In short, it distinguishes her life, her vocation and her vision. Here lies Therese's greatness: in her love, fortitude, fidelity and willingness to give everything to live out her vision to the end.”¹¹

If we can equate the energy, joy, vision, desire and passionate love found in her poetry as signs of the enflaming action of the Spirit, if we can hear her words as a precursor of our own Pentecost moments, then we understand how the Spirit works in the lives of all who discover and welcome Salvatorian life.

One can easily catch the exuberant, free-spirited, Spirit-driven inner life of Therese in her poems, particularly after her momentous first meeting with Father Jordan. One cannot help but be inspired by her simple joy and her idealism, something we all need at times in our lives. Eighteen days after she met the founder in July 1882, she wrote in this exceedingly transparent way,

“O holy, venerable, eldest Society! Apostolic, soul-zealous, great-hearted Society! Grow steadily, increase, spread everywhere! Embrace and renew the universe!”¹²

Elsewhere, Therese gives insight into how the Holy Spirit works in her poem *True Happiness*,¹³ composed in 1857. It was at this time in her life, during her attendance at the Jesuit parish missions,

¹⁰ Mother Mary, 175.

¹¹ Miriam Cerletty, *Spiritual Journey in Poetry: Poems by Therese* (Rome: Studia de Historia Salvatoriana, No. 2, Section 2.11 MM, 1994) ix-x.

¹² Cerletty, 95.

¹³ Cerletty, 71.

that Therese learns about Jesuit discernment and “Finding God in all Things.” She very much sees this finding of God as the action of the Holy Spirit. Listen to her words,

“Happy are they who come to view whatever is and happens through faith’s transparent light. The Spirit, through inner radiant rays, illumines them with wondrous insight and fills their hearts with love ablaze...”

Later in the same poem, Therese turns her thoughts to the Church, a Church taken up with the “life and struggle for the good of all!” Notice that Therese is very aware of the Church’s social action, its charity, its care of the poor.

Therese’s passion for apostolic life flares out in her poem, *A Quiet Song*.¹⁴ In the early stanzas of this poem, written in 1873 when Therese is still at the Castle, she reflects about the rhythm of daily life, when day turns into evening stillness, allowing time for a review of recent events and with that, a sentiment that rises from the heart, “Truly, you experienced a beautiful day!” Suddenly, the mood shifts and out of seemingly nowhere come the impassioned words,

“For God and for souls! Everything! Each one in his or her own way, quietly – (working, praying suffering)...Each day brims over with opportunity. Oh! Spin, my soul! Spin ardently!...Contemplate God’s doings with faith-filled eyes; out of your hope new strength will arise...”

I am fascinated and caught up here by the choice of the word that Therese made when she thinks about spinning. “Spin ardently,” she says. The word “ardently” comes from the Latin word, “ardens,” a burning, an enflaming. I do not think that Therese was simply choosing this word because it fit well into the poem. I think that Therese has made a deliberate choice; she is expressing here her experience of the action of the Holy Spirit.

One final mention. The year is 1875. In April of that year, Therese made a private vow to dedicate herself completely to the missions. Later that same year, Therese wrote a poem called *Urgent Request*¹⁵ shortly after she makes a note about the new Mission House founded in Steyl, Holland by Arnold Janssen. In just a few short months, Therese would be finding out about the possibility of renting the Benedictine Abbey in Neuwerk. In this poem, Therese uses enflaming imagery with these words, and notice here the notion of enflaming joined with the notion of apostolic life:

“If I could only spread the true light with steadfast trust! O Lord! You must have cast a spark of love into my heart or some small flame, for when I think of unbelievers, I feel deep pain!...But be still, little one, - just pray as you know you ought; God will guide you along the way. Yes, pray and give yourself, until God illumines your thought and show you his will....Good Savior mine, breathe, oh breathe forth your divine spirit...Yes! – Could I but devote my life and my all to promote the work of Jesus our Savior. Could I but labor to spread faith’s light and lovingly capture souls, - I would live from delight and die of rapture!”

What would it be like to have Mother Mary among us today? Well, for one thing, she is with us. After all, we are fellow Salvatorians together. We are already walking (or should I say flying!) a

¹⁴ Cerletty, 79.

¹⁵ Cerletty, 85.

similar route; this is what joins us to her. She so beautifully modelled in her day what being Salvatorian is all about and she continues to join her prayers to those of Father Jordan to intercede before God on our behalf. When we read Father Jordan's writings, when we behold the example of Mother Mary, we share in some of the same struggles and questions that these early Salvatorians had, we see how great missionary members came to be and we gain insight into how the Holy Spirit shaped and formed and continues to shape and form and grow our Family. One thing for sure, over and over again, in examples too numerous to mention here, we see the total commitment that Mother Mary and the other early Salvatorians made to the aims of the Society and its growth. And now this daughter apostle, along with Jordan, rests quietly in our midst.

First of all, Mother Mary would not be a woman to change her focus. She had spent far too long seeking and seeking. She was ready to move on, to give herself, no matter what age, to a Society vibrant, young, a true gift of life. She was totally convinced of the need for Salvatorians to be apostolic; passion for God and passion for the needs of the people were her top priorities. She was ready to help create and embrace a lifestyle of apostolic religious life, a new movement of the Church that was only just beginning. Father Jordan and she saw new possibilities of service and whenever she dreamt about the future, her energy and her happiness only continued to increase.

So, what about today? One of the other questions that we have been invited to address is, "What is the Holy Spirit calling us to (as Salvatorians) as we move into the future?" I remember so well my reaction last fall when Salvatorian Sister Leaders from Europe met together in Rome. Like many others, I was looking for practical answers to a question similar to the one just mentioned. Challenges unique to European Salvatorian sisters were being posed. I wanted to go away from that meeting feeling like we had done something to meet these challenges, like we had made some decisions, tied the package together neatly and we could forget about this topic for the next several years. Wrong! The guest speaker, Sister Dulcelene, a very fine Salvatorian sister, reminded us that her job as a presenter would be to simply raise the questions and to build some awareness about the beauty and strength of the Salvatorian charism which could then help us to understand what we must do. Although the practical side of me still felt disappointed, I also went away with new knowledge, much comfort and great gratitude. Life teaches us that it takes time to discern and to make the common decision that the community can truly call its own. This common decision, reached after deep discernment and collaboration, can only be the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jordan constantly called Salvatorians to spread the Gospel. Mother Mary was committed to this too. But how do we avoid the complete feeling of frustration that happens when we read statistics from the United States that tell us that the "nones" are the fastest growing group right here in the United States where we find ourselves today? These are the persons who, when asked their religious preference, say that they are atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. They simply are "nones." The Pew Research Center made a study in 2007 and then conducted its second similar United States Religious Landscape Study in 2014. It published its results in 2015.¹⁶ The study says that, when comparisons are made between 2007 and 2014, the percentage of Christians fell from 78.4% to 70.6%. In contrast, the unaffiliated "nones" experienced the most growth, from 16.1% to 22.8%. The study also tells us that one out of every five United States adults was raised in a religious tradition

¹⁶Pew Research Center, *America's Changing Religious Landscape*. Document downloaded from Pew Research Center website at the following link: <http://pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

but now claims no affiliation. What do we do with this information? We already know this reality because we live in it, are surrounded by it. Now to what does the Spirit call us? How do we continue to love and cherish the charism, see its beauty and strength and, at the same time, totally embrace the core Salvatorian call to be among the people and the great issues of today?

Again, Jordan called us to work with the youth. I met Greg Darr, a lay missionary with the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, at a workshop for new vocation ministers in 2009. A few weeks ago, Greg wrote an article about the perceptions of the youth of today which was published this past April in the *National Catholic Reporter* newspaper.¹⁷ In the article, Greg talks about being in a booth at a huge youth convention in Indianapolis. He hung a map called a Hobo-Dyer Equal Area Projection map correctly on a board, but to all appearances, the earth appeared suddenly to be upside down. Looking at the world upside down challenged the young people (and us) to see countries from a new and unfamiliar perspective and to perceive one's own country's relationship, in this case the USA, in a new way. Our traditional world map is poorly suited to perceiving and understanding global relationships. The Hobo-Dyer map is a tool that calls us to a paradigm shift, a change in our perception of things, a change in our point of view, a change in how we see the world because the map itself is not centered on the northern hemisphere but rather on the Pacific Ocean. Today's youth (along with our scientists, theologians and artists) take for granted an emerging image of a world so large and yet so small in the vastness of space that it's impossible at times to tell what's up or down. Maybe for some youth, this doesn't really matter. It's the vastness, the expanse almost beyond belief that counts, a vastness of universe that we couldn't even measure just a few short years ago, an infinite expanse of God's presence and mercy in which our world strains and turns. And we Salvatorians have feet planted in all of this newness. And to what does the Spirit call?

And we can go in the other direction as well. We can also read about and paint images in our minds of other new kinds of explorations, in physics, for example, where scientists are showing us how small the particles of matter truly are, far smaller than we learned when we ourselves were in school. And this new knowledge being discovered every day is the reality in which we Salvatorians walk. We don't want to ever run away. This new knowledge calls us into new mystery, deepened relationship and a new reverence that shapes our thinking about our Saving God who is the midst of it all. What is the Spirit saying to you, to all of us at this time?

Speaking of our young, the Salvatorian Teen and Children's Team published some information in the May 19, 2015 edition of *Update*. Here are some of the facts that we Salvatorians received at that time:

In the United States,

A public high school students drops out of school every 9 seconds.

A child is arrested every 24 seconds.

A child is born into extreme poverty ever 68 seconds.

A child is arrested for a drug offense every 4 minutes.

A child or a teen commits suicide every 4 hours and 11 minutes and

A child dies from abuse or neglect every 5 hours and 30 minutes.

¹⁷Greg Darr, *Mercy turns the world upside down*. Document downloaded from National Catholic Report online website at the following link: <http://ncronline.org/blogs/soul-searching/mercy-turns-world-upside-down>

When I learn things like this, along with other facts such as human trafficking and migration, I find myself in a kind of deep stillness and pain, and I know you do too. That's because we bear the Salvatorian gift of the charism. At times such as these, I know only three things, namely, I cannot shed the charism, secondly, the charism will continue to challenge me and call me until the end of my earthly journey and thirdly, I am surrounded with like-minded Salvatorians, who also carry within them the burning question, "How shall we respond?"

I need not remind us that our times, like the times of Mother Mary, like the times of Francis Jordan, are filled with uncertainty and challenge, along with the sunny side of great potential for dreaming and new doing. Along with all of this, we are not starting from scratch. We walk with a rich tradition of role models and service that calls us to constantly ask ourselves, "What do we keep and what do we leave behind?" My comfort is the thought that the Spirit will never leave us and that together, buoyed up by the strength and gifts we see all around us as well as the gift to make collaboration happen, we say once again that we are willing to proclaim "yes" totally with everything we have for the journey to which we are being called.

In closing, when I think of Salvatorians and how we respond, I like to think about some of the beautiful impulses of life that we find in nature that can teach us about how to respond as individuals and as a community. I know that even before I realized that I was being called to be a Salvatorian, I was already joined in an evolutionary journey that links me to, to use a Franciscan term, my sisters and brothers of the animal community of creation. One of our fascinating friends in that kingdom is the starling bird who, in nature, is often called to respond. I am indebted to Kathleen Duffy, a Sister of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, who has presented some very interesting information about starlings in a pattern of response. In order to appreciate what she had to say, perhaps it would be best to view a brief video about starlings¹⁸ without any words of explanation and later, after some words of explanation, see the video one final time.

(Presentation of brief video), then:

Starlings are relatively drab birds-short and dark with light speckles-but, when they catch the light, their pearly feather tips shine and, like oil on water, their bodies give off an iridescent purple and green glow. When aroused, starlings exhibit exquisite swarming behavior. The flock reacts by swirling, pulsating and sailing through the sky, behaving like a huge single organism, creating one of the most graceful patterns in nature.

Starlings engage in collective behavior as an effective strategy. A pressing need ... drives the starlings to interact coherently. Often the flock presents itself as a large single bird and mesmerizes whatever is approaching. **Each individual bird accepts a goal larger than its own and thus encourages the flock as a whole to cooperate in a highly organized way.** Clearly, the flock is more than the sum of thousands of starlings; instead, it is a self-organized dynamic system exhibiting intelligent behavior.

¹⁸ *Starlings flying/starlings murmuration*. Video downloaded from the YouTube website at <https://youtube.com/watch?v=QOGCSBh3kmM>

Recent *You Tube* videos of swarms of starlings have heightened public interest in the mechanism that holds the flock together. Scientists have learned that a swarming flock has no single leader. Instead, **the flock's cohesive movement is created by interaction among the birds in the flock as a whole (very much a community and assembly event!).** When threatened, the flock becomes a decentralized, self-organized dynamic system. Cohesive movement is not controlled by external forces; rather, **each bird cooperates to maintain order.**

The scientists found that the birds follow two simple “rules.” The first rule is: Birds stay equally distant from their five to ten nearest neighbors and keep a safe distance from the bird in front. Each time one bird turns or speeds up, the flock responds. Since the distance between birds is not fixed, **flock shape is flexible, capable of expanding and contracting as needed.** The second rule: Birds at the edge of the flock tend to bunch closer together, actually constricting the flock so that it tends to fly as a whole in the same general direction.

Let's now see the video again. (View video second time)

So I close by asking, “Where are you in this flock? Can you sense the new Pentecost? How long do you and we need to roost? In what ways are we flying already? Do you sense that we getting ready for new flight? And are we on fire to go in the same general direction?”

Thank you.