



*Praise – by day and
by night*

NEWSLETTER FROM GRANDCHAMP 2019

Praise overflowing into universal love...

The theme of praise has been such a strength to us that we decided to take it for this year as well... and let Mother Geneviève speak, as we marked the 75th anniversary of her arrival in Grandchamp. For her, to praise in the midst of the creation was a constant source of inspiration. As it is for us today. In the mountains we can rediscover our true place. Like tiny dots on mountaintops, we realise how small and fragile we are, completely dependent on God and on the creation surrounding us. There, praise springs spontaneously in our hearts. That is also why Geneviève Micheli had a hermitage built for the community in Engadine, as a perfect place of adoration up until today.

On the 6th November 1940, Geneviève Micheli, snowed-up in her chalet, wrote to our sister Marguerite saying: *“What silence, what grandeur, what purity! It seems to me that God is here, and that everything is resolved in adoration and in a love that melts the heart causing tears of joy to flow. – What infinite grace.”* And in our community retreat Brother Richard of Taizé began with these words: *“At Taizé, there is a lime tree where a blackbird sings in the morning, and again in the evening, right from the top of the tree. I have often spoken about this blackbird to young people, telling them that we are all called to find the place which is just right for us in creation; and that this perfect place is a place of praise and song.”* Creation speaks so well to us of God and of ourselves, when we are receptive.

We too can be in our rightful place, praising God for who God is, just as the blackbird does from the top of the tree. These times of praise strengthen our inner being who, when the moment comes, will be able to look for God even in the night, and praise also when the times are difficult.

In fact, praise does not exclude combat. If we accept to go through it and dare to withdraw into our inner self, in silence, then praise can well up. Yes, of course it is a risk because silence lays us bare and our masks fall away, leaving us naked face to face with our past. But little by little, we are freed from this place of combat, with all its shadows, violence, pain and sometimes despair, if we are ready to place ourselves under God’s gaze. Light can then filter in, until it becomes the light of Resurrection. And we discover ourselves capable of singing the blackbird’s song from within that sacred space which is in each of us, in every person. So yes, that is when we can, with our whole being, sing our wonder, our gratitude, our thankfulness for Life.

Mother Geneviève’s own journey illustrates this very well. This year it will be 75 years since Geneviève Micheli came to settle in Grandchamp to be the Mother of the emerging community, responding to Sister Marguerite’s call a year earlier. It was a time of harsh combat for Geneviève Micheli; whether to give her *yes* to what she felt was a call from God. A *yes* that led to the total offering of her life. And for

us today it is a moment to praise as well, because her struggle and her *yes* enabled the community to be built on firm foundations, and to flourish.

A critical experience marked her whole life and prepared her for this total *yes*: it was the tragic, accidental death of her husband when she was only 27 years old with three small children. It was the moment of a very profound revelation of God's love and of Life in Him, of Christ's victory over death, of resurrection. A founding event that enabled her to write: *"Now I could go back alone to Geneva. God had conquered death. There was no more terror or anguish. There was no greater love than God's love."*

Another important event was when Mother Geneviève, with a small group of friends, the 'Ladies of Morges', decided to begin retreats that invited to *"silence, to have all stripped away, to give all to God"*. The theme of the first retreat in Grandchamp in 1931 was *"God is love"*.

That first retreat allowed her to experience the praise that overflows in universal love. She said she lived the most beautiful hours of her life in that retreat, that all seemed marvellously beautiful, each stranger she passed in town seemed beautiful to her because *"it is beautiful to love each other"*. And in 1933 she wrote to Sister Marguerite, even before they started the community:

"God is asking us for everything, but above all he gives us everything. I see him at the centre, above all as the One we love. Everything finds order, all finds its worth, and it becomes liberating to have everything stripped away. That is how I see the Kingdom of God within us: God as Master of all... Beyond the demands I see grace. I see such grace as marvellous, and God's love seems to me so enthralling, so captivating, and intoxicating that I no longer see the sacrifice, but only the heart that gives and the heart that receives... So then going into oneself one finds God, and finding God so near to us is surely the secret of a radiant life, and is surely what it means to become human, more compassionate, more tender to others as Jesus was."

Praise and total letting go are linked and allow us to become more human, more authentic, freer and hence vulnerable, making us so much more sensitive to the other and to the Other. In that way we accept our proper place as a creature, like the blackbird, able to respond from then on with a song of love and of praise.

Jean Vanier, who passed away this year, was a great witness to this vulnerability, to the point of living it through his whole life, thanks to the fragile people he lived with. He touched the lives of so many different people, witnessing to the value of the person, of every person. He liked to repeat: *"At the heart of each man and woman, there is the mystery of the person, behind the culture, the religion, there is you! Very fragile. And I need you. We are born with great fragility and we remain vulnerable all our lives. You with your heart, which needs to be loved and to love, which means to live in relationship, in a true encounter. Which encounter has given life to you, has changed you, has given you the desire to live?"*

Praise that overflows in universal love! To live encounters of this quality implies working on one's inner life, on our connections with God, with oneself, with others and with nature. It's what Pope Francis calls *'integral ecology'*. He sums up his encyclical *Laudato Si* with the words: *"Everything is gift, everything is connected"*.

Elena Lassida added: *"Everything is fragile"*. Today we hear clearly the urgent call to change our lifestyle in order to save our planet. But more deeply, it is about a call to true conversion. That involves our spiritual life, and the need to look after it, to care for it by becoming ever more conscious of the sacred dimension, the divine side of our life, by being attached to God as Christ revealed to us. This personal journey is embodied in living together in peace: in communion, in community, in close relationship with others, and sharing life together. May the lives of witnesses like Jean Vanier, Mother Geneviève and many others inspire us anew today. Praise to the Master of the Universe is located there, praise that flows day and night and leads us to find our place in creation amongst all the other creatures.

Here once more are words of Mother Geneviève that can inspire us on our journey of praise:

- *"I have to say that it is of such extraordinary beauty that one is transported into the realm where there is only adoration in the Spirit. - All is flame and fire."* (In October when all the larch trees are the colour of fire in the Engadine.)

- *"This autumn I have had some troubled days; one morning I woke up very early, and I saw from my window the quiet, meditative beauty of nature not yet seen by human eyes, as if a secret at dawn and yet miraculously and perfectly beautiful. It consoled everything in me and I said to myself: this beauty always exists, it simply is. It doesn't matter that I don't always see it, it is a reality, and that is all that counts."*

- *"Yes, we have to abandon ourselves. After weeks of painful and futile struggles, I can do that. And I am alive again - full of wonder at God's love. Everything is wonderfully recolouring again and a song of thanksgiving rises from my heart."*

- *"At all times, God is there, he enfolds us in power, in beauty, in love and we do not perceive that he is there. I think that when Christ was on the earth, his meeting with a human soul had all the fullness and power of a silence filled with God."*

May we always, again and again, find our good and rightful place like the blackbird that sings morning and evening! In our nights, may we remember our founding experiences and the encounters that have given us life and enabled us to sing of universal love. A Love that unites people who are vulnerable enough to welcome it, just like a child (Luke 18:17).



Sr. Anne-Emmanuelle

Four sisters share about praise

God created us to give him Glory... A theme that carried and nourished me through the whole year, changing my attitude and way of praising the Lord.

The litany that we sing: *"You who call us to be praise in the midst of the earth..."* expresses it all and is a great comfort to me. *"We sing your praise in the midst of suffering and tears"*: in wars, attacks, acts of violence, terrorism, natural catastrophes, diseases, death, and so many other difficulties and suffering that affect us more personally in our families and among those who are close to us.

In spite of all that, praise is always there as an inner strength that makes us stand firm and offer praise. It is an inner strength drawn from our personal relationship with the living God and the communion that exists among us.

I also think of a way to praise God without words when I take the time to enjoy life in God's world: savouring the taste of fruit, listening to a bird sing, sensing wonder as I watch a sunset... I let the world inspire me with praise for the one to whom it all belongs, and the beauty of creation makes me sing to God. There is beauty even in weeds. When I consider all the wonderful things that the Lord silently accomplishes for me each day, I realise that my list of praises is far longer than my requests. It gives me yet more reasons to praise him.

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Once I was so struck by the hymn at the beginning of the Letter to the Ephesians, where it says three times that we were created to be *"for the praise of his glory"*, that it has never left me. I have the strong conviction that this is the whole meaning of our lives, both as individuals and as a Community.

My experience of Judaism reinforces this focus on praise even more because the liturgy of the synagogue and the personal prayers are, for the most part, praise and thanksgiving. Yes, Jews say that we should give thanks for everything that happens to us. So gradually I have developed a whole litany of praises for when I wake up in the morning:

- for the breath God gives me each new day,
- for my body; its organs, its joints, its muscles,
- because God saw me, because he lit a light in my night, and that he opens my ears each morning to listen.

And on my walk to the lake I praise the Lord for all that surrounds me, for the moon and the stars, for the sun which will rise, for the mountains and hills, the fields and meadows, for the clouds and rain showers, the glaciers and the mountain springs, for all that waters the earth and makes it fruitful, for all that grows and feeds people and animals. For the animals, and for the humans created in God's image and likeness, for Jesus the most human of all humans and for the human person I am and that my sisters are.

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The litany *"You who call us to be ..."* has a biblical reference: Isaiah 62, 6+7. That seems to me important because these verses reveal an aspect of praise that we haven't spoken of much:

"I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth."

There is a connection between keeping watch and praising. The watchers call on God day and night to intervene. By our praise we too remind God to take

care of our world. That is our job. Then it is God who will establish Jerusalem as "praise on earth". That is his job. So, our task is to be "to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1).

How can we be, and always become more, "to the praise of his glory"? By becoming simpler. By just being there, available to his Presence, to what is. By tasting life with its joys and sorrows. By living the 'God's today'. By going through difficult and testing times. In short, by welcoming everything that has been given, with a heart of wonder.

Something that is already given to me is our praise in community (the 'office') four times a day. There we enter into something given by tradition, with the ancient words that have been sung and proclaimed for centuries, and sometimes even ancient melodies.

I live much through singing: as I sing, I access a deeper, more intimate level of the Word of God; it soaks into me and flows through me and I express it by my voice, with my breath and with all that is in me.

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Being praise is much vaster than just singing praise. It is in some way being fully present to the present in order to discover life. Life that lives with goodness and beauty, in the creation and in each person. It is an inner attitude, an awareness of what lives, not something 'to do' strictly speaking, but 'to become'. Too many things weigh me down for me to 'be praise', but I can choose which way to face.

When I let praise echo in me, I understand that it is rooted in the Cross of Christ. He went that far for me, and for us all, whoever we are, to free us from violence. There I keep silent, before the depth of that love - and praise becomes silence.

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A rich and blessed Year

Yes, the theme of praise has carried and nourished us in a daily round that sometimes made us acrobats. We have been:

- strengthened by the times of community meetings, the Council this summer in particular. It is always a vital moment in the life of the community, a time for listening to each other, so that our differences increasingly become a source of mutual enrichment, Also a time of opening new horizons. Gloria Wekker, anthropologist and professor at the university of Utrecht, and Twie Tjoa, supervisor and coach of diversity, from the Netherlands, guided us to work on our identities over two days, and broached delicate subjects like colonialism and racism, using Gloria's book *White Innocence*¹. A story that continues to influence the way we look at others and at ourselves.

- renewed by times of formation and retreat. Nicole Fabre came in February to help us to understand better the Letter to the Hebrews; and Brother Pierre-Yves from Taizé gave us a workshop about the Eucharist. In the week before Pentecost Little Sister Gertrud Veronika of Jesus invited us to meditate by sharing about the lives of Brother Charles de Foucault and of Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus, in this year when the Little Sisters are celebrating the 80th anniversary of their fraternity.

- stimulated by rich encounters and missions. Many sisters have been on the road: to the retreat of the Fraternity of the Suffering Servant in Brazil and in

¹ Gloria Wekker: *White innocence*. Duke University Press. Durham and London. 2016

Switzerland; to Madrid for the Taizé Pilgrimage of Trust; to the Kaire meeting in Görlitz; to the 70th Anniversary of Church and Peace in Berlin; to a meeting of CIR in Montserrat... And to express our friendship and our communion with other communities: Bose which was celebrating its 50th anniversary; the Monastery of the Fille-Dieu celebrating 750 years (!). Sister Anne-Emmanuelle was at Monte Oliveto for the abbatial blessing of Brother Mark-Ephrem and in Pomeyrol, with Sister Pascale for the blessing of Sister Marthe Elisabeth, the new prioress of the community. Sister Pierrette and Sister Siong went to Rome for the funeral of Little Sister Jeanne of Jesus, the right hand of Little Sister Magdeleine throughout her whole live.

Sister Siong went to give a retreat to the Little Sisters of Jesus in Tubet, and Sister Pierrette and Sister Marie from the Jerusalem Community continued their reflexions with the sisters of Eygalières, Sister Anne-Emmanuelle and Sister Regina were invited to take part in a meeting in Mazille bringing together 16 communities *'on a journey of ecological conversion'*. A time of reflection and sharing with Elena Lassida, economist and theologian, and Simon, one of her students, who has been in these monasteries, on the theme of *'integral ecology'* developed by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si*. Sister Gesine joined other novice masters and mistresses at a session in Cîteaux. Sister Maatje returned for two months to Israel/ Palestine to meet our friends there.

Finally, and it is a great joy, Sister Pierrette and Sister Siong stayed for three months on the hill in Taizé - living in the old fraternity house that our sisters left 30 years ago! - at the request of Brother Alois who wanted also women to be present on the hill

alongside the brothers after evening prayer to listen to young people in the church. We shall go back there next summer...

Two ecumenical events among others:

- A moving piece of news. The 'Polish Council of Christians and Jews' - www.prchiz.pl - have attributed the title of *'The 2018 Figure of Reconciliation'* to Sister Michèle: *"in honouring her, we express our gratitude for her attitude, her activities and her contacts with Poland and with the members of this Council in particular. In addition we are delighted to express our gratitude to the Grandchamp Community"*, signed by the co-presidents Stanislaw Krajewski and Zbigniew Nosowski. The ceremony took place on the 4th August at the 'Centre for Dialogue and Prayer' in Auschwitz - www.cdim.pl -, a very moving occasion of fellowship. Sister Michèle was already there to lead another contemplative retreat with Karin Seethaler; each time it is a journey of reconciliation experienced through prayer and spiritual combat.

- The Faith and Order commission of the World Council of Churches has asked us to prepare the prayer booklet for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for 2021! At the beginning of September, representatives of the WCC and of the Pontifical Council for Unity came to Grandchamp to put the finishing touches to the work with us.

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At Sonnenhof, the little group of sisters, now numbering 7 since the arrival of Sister Ursula in July, where welcoming many guests with precious help by members of the Freundeskreis who take turns in helping with the many and various jobs to be done! In May there was a weekend of celebration and

thanksgiving for the 5 years since this Freundeskreis first started, and it has become a great help for the sisters.

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Each year we propose a day to thank the persons who share their talents with us and help us with our practical needs; the last one coincided with the harvest celebration! There was real joy at bringing and sharing our gifts and thanking God together. To each and every one of you a huge 'thank you' for your help which is so precious to us and so full of creativity!

We can also extend our thanks to our volunteers, and to all of you near and far who support us so faithfully by your

gifts, your friendship and your prayers...

Christmas, the mystery of a birth... Birth into heaven for our sisters Claire-Irène and Laure and for our friend Julia Esquivel. We thank God for their lives and for many others close to us who have left us this year. Especially P-H. Molinghen, pastor in EREN.

Christmas, the mystery of a birth, the birth of a God who becomes a child to join us in our fragility and darkness.

To you all we wish a time of celebration filled with light!

The Grandchamp Sisters



Grandchamp 4, CH - 2015 Areuse

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