

*As a praying heart in and for the Church,
the female contemplative life is
the guardian of gratitude
and of rich apostolic fertility.*

Pope Francis

(Out of Vultum Dei Quaerere 5 and Cor Orans)



Dear friends,

We are happy and grateful for the great care of our Pope Francis for the contemplative sisters. This year he gave us 'Cor Orans' ('Praying heart'). That is the instruction and application to the previously released constitution 'Vultum Dei Quaerere' ('Seeing the Face of God') which is a spiritual essay. These documents are specifically addressed to us, female contemplatives. They serve to support us in this day and age and to focus on our vocation.

Our pope not only calls on us, he has also given an apostolic exhortation for the world 'Gaudete et exsultate'. He writes: 'The way to holiness is a source of peace and joy that the Holy Spirit gives us, but at the same time we must "keep the lamps burning" and remain alert.' (GE 164) 'In distinction it is not about what more we can get out of this life, but how we can better accomplish the mission that was entrusted to us in our baptism.' (GE 174)

These are encouraging words that we try to express and experience in our daily lives.

We were able to experience this in our encounters with primary school pupils, other young people and young women that wanted to get to know our life. Furthermore, various groups of, among others, Femma, Samana and Neos came by. There were thinking days of Oasis, De Akker, Taizé and ... let's not forget the visit of the beautifully dressed Princes Carnival!

We were very happy and grateful to be the guest community of the province of Limburg for 'Kerk In Nood' (Church in Need). Monsignor Lobo, a sister and a seminarian from India came to speak about the situation of (and for the benefit of) the Church and the Christians in India. Sister Jeanne Devos also spoke about her work and the social and religious situation in India. In conclusion, we expressed our solidarity with the world church in a solemn Eucharistic celebration with our Monsigneur Hoogmartens as main celebrant.

This year we were enriched and strengthened by the conferences of Rev. F. Tercic, a triduum of Rev. F. Luc Van Hilst and our retreat led by Rev. F. Martin Moors. The monthly evenings of spiritual reading with our fellow brothers from Sint-Truiden gave us the opportunity to penetrate deeper into the spirituality of Francis and Clare. Also our visitator sr. Rosa Olaerts visited us. They were always good get-togethers.

According to annual custom, the Fast and Advent recollection for the deaneries Sint-Truiden and Borgloon continued in our convent. We were allowed to receive the abbesses of the Poor Clare communities of Flanders for their annual reflection day, accompanied by Rev. F. Bob Van Laer. On the lecture day for the Friars and the Poor Clares, sr. Angela Holleboom, Poor Clare of Megen, made us think more deeply about 'our desire for God and God's desire for us'.

We were able to welcome our two fellow sisters from Tongeren a few times for a day in our midst.

In Ostend we intensely enjoyed our encounters with our fellow sisters on our annual Poor Clare-day. In the afternoon Geert Fierens brought us a vivid evocation: "Francis speaks". Thanks to sr. Martine and her fellow sisters for all the worries and effort to make it a wonderful day!

Our Dean Wim Ceunen and his team try tirelessly to give the people of Sint-Truiden every opportunity to grow in faith. According to annual tradition, we were present on Pentecost at "An Evening of Churches" where everyone is invited to pay a visit to the many churches with various events. We went to the St. Gangulfus Church, in front of our monastery and with many people present and with hundreds of lit candles we prayed the evening prayer. In the time of Fast we sang the vespers every Wednesday evening with many people present.

Our city 'Sint-Truiden' was founded by Saint Trudo – a monk who built an abbey here in the 7th century. The Trudo Year was festively opened with a light procession and the Trudovespers. It was a great and majestic event that brought together a multitude of people in friendship, prayer and unity. These events show the best of our church!

Anyone who wants to join in with our Taizé celebrations is welcome every third Saturday of the month at 8.00 pm.

Our annual Clare celebrations were very festive: a Transitus celebration on the eve sung by the choir, 'de Schalmei' and the sisters. The next day there was a solemn celebration of the Eucharist with the Gregorius choir, led by Mrs. Magda Jossa. Saint Francis was also celebrated gloriously. The beautiful Transitus celebration was sung by the choir 'de Schalmei', led by Rev. F. Bob. Everything was surrounded by Mrs. Nele Daenen and her beautiful violin. The solemn Eucharistic celebration on the feast brought many people together. Afterwards, we were able to celebrate our two founders with our friars at the table. What a blessed fraternal and sisterly gathering!

After 14 years of restoration, the main church – the Church of Our Lady – of our city has become a gem. Under the expert guidance of Mr. Polly Vanmarsenille, we went to admire it. This church has such a rich history. We can recommend you to go have a look yourself! What is also worth a visit, is the museum 'De Mindere'. It's the only Franciscan museum in Belgium and very close to our monastery. Rev. F. Bob invited us to visit the renewed exhibition.

As far as our building plans are concerned, we still haven't even started yet, notwithstanding many meetings and patience.

Pope Francis asks us all to make work of our being-a-Christian. We do our best to give you the opportunity to pray and celebrate with us -welcome! There are still many beautiful celebrations up ahead. We would like to invite you to join us:

- On every Sunday of Advent: the 2nd, 9th, 16th and 23rd of December for evening prayer at 4.30 pm.
- On Saturday, December 15th at 8 pm for our Taizé celebration.
- On Thursday, December 27th at 5 pm for a Christmas concert, sung by the Gregorius Choir, led by Mrs. Magda Jossa.
- On Monday, December 24th for the Christmas vigil at 8 pm.
- On December 25th, Christmas, for the Eucharistic celebration at 9 am and the evening prayer at 4.30 pm
- On December 26th for the Eucharistic celebration at 9 am and the evening prayer at 5 pm.

For all this you are welcome at your Poor Clares in the Diesterstraat! More info: www.zustersclarissen3800.be

Finally, we would like to express our great gratitude for your friendship and support. Thank you! We in turn assure you of our prayer. That we can bring each other closer to God!

May the Lord bless you and all who are dear to you with deep joy and peace.

We wish you a blissful Christmas and a blessed 2019. Peace and all that is good!

your Poor Clare sisters from Sint-Truiden