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Presented during HOME retreat (April 2021)

From the first time I heard the song “Let Go of the Shore” by Karen Drucker, my thoughts went to three different groups of people who let go of the shore ... the first were my grandparents who let go of the Italian shore in order to come to the United States and begin a new life here.

The second group was Mother Theodore and her companions and the third was Sister Marie Gratia and the group of five sisters who left the shores of this country for China. While my grandparents’ story is an interesting one I’ll set it aside, along with the story of Saint Mother Theodore, and focus on Mother Marie Gratia. Let us take a look at the words of this song alongside the words taken from “Against All Odds.”

LET GO OF THE SHORE.

On August 11, 1919 when Mother Mary Cleophas met the assembled sisters, she told them: “Those who go to China need never expect to return here – except on their way to heaven they may pass through Saint Mary’s – that would be all right. Prepare your heart; it is all sacrifice.”

LET GO OF THE SHORE.

On September 29, 1920 we read, “Before Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at 2 p.m., sisters and friends of the foreign missionaries had said their farewells. All was in readiness for the departure. Immediately after Benediction, the entire student body of the academy and the college, followed by the postulants, novices and professed sisters formed a procession out the west door of the church, and in absolute silence lined the avenue on both sides down to the outside road. The missionary band and the sisters who were to accompany them to Chicago or to the Pacific Coast entered the automobiles which were stationed on the plaza of the academy. While the cars passed down the avenue, the students sang the beautiful hymn, ‘Holy God, We Praise Thy Name’ in full chorus.”

LET GO OF THE SHORE.

LET GO OF THE SHORE AND LET THE WATERS CARRY YOU.

At last the day dawned for the final departure. On Saturday, October 16, 1920, at 1 p.m., the sisters said their final goodbyes to sisters and friends in San Francisco and boarded the *Shinyo Maru*, which set sail a few hours later. After a few days out at sea, Sister Marie Gratia related in her letter to Mother Mary Cleophas that “all the sisters were taking the sailing fairly well, but not so the priests; they seemed to be poor sailors.”

LET GO OF THE SHORE AND LET THE WATERS CARRY YOU.

Twenty-eight years later, the sisters were forced to seek refuge in Taiwan, as the political situation in

China became quite grave. They traveled aboard a ship, the *Lee Kung*. "The ship left the harbor in less than an hour after the sisters had boarded. Four Sisters of Providence, 13 Providence Sister-Catechists, and Elizabeth Kuo occupied 3 cabins with 6 bunks each. The ship was ill equipped to carry 2000 people since it was built to accommodate 600 persons. As the sisters stood on the deck of the *Lee Kung*, looking at the fading coastline, no one dared to speak, for home-sickness and apprehension about the future already filled their hearts."

LET GO OF THE SHORE AND LET THE WATER CARRY YOU.
LET GO OF THE SHORE, FLOAT INTO THE MYSTERY.

Sister Marie Gratia wrote to Mother Mary Cleophas that some persons in Shanghai advised the sisters not to go into the field of their future labors. But the bishop said that he had not received any news from his priests in Kaifeng that it would not be safe for the sisters to come. With her usual faith, Sister Marie Gratia wrote:

"All these conditions were foreknown by the omniscient God and still He sent us and so we go. It would be cowardly to turn back in face of difficulty, and you will be happy to know that not one of your daughters has swerved from the path of duty. All are hopeful and rejoice that we may begin our work with sacrifice. Of course, we do not know what awaits us but all have the disposition to accept whatever that is, and we hope to be true to the legacy of our saintly foundress and if need be 'to die and say nothing about it.'"

LET GO OF THE SHORE, FLOAT INTO THE MYSTERY.

In another letter to Mother Mary Cleophas, Sister Marie Gratia wrote: "Well, dear Mother, God only knows what is before us. I know He loves us and brought us here to do great work. ... He knows what the future structure is to be and how we can be best used in the foundation in order to support and strengthen it. It is wonderful how God brings about His designs when He is left to work it out."

FLOAT INTO THE MYSTERY.
YOU HAVE ALL YOU NEED, IT'S ALL INSIDE OF YOU.

While Sister Marie Gratia often doubted her abilities to lead the mission, in this passage we see a moment of grace where she acknowledges her God-given gifts. She writes: "I have only one desire and that is to accomplish His holy will and that in whatever may please Him without regard to anything personal. I tell Him every day to use me as He pleases. ... Pray for me, dear Mother. You know that God has given me much and He will require much from me."

IT'S ALL INSIDE OF YOU.

In "Against All Odds," Sister Ann Collette writes the following: "Sister Marie Gratia's prayer life was the storehouse from which she drew her strength. In quiet moments when she sat with bowed head and with eyes closed, one knew that her whole being was absorbed in prayer, though her lips never

moved. It was as if her next move was made only at the direct inspiration of the God she served.”

YOU HAVE ALL YOU NEED, IT’S ALL INSIDE OF YOU.

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND BREATHE, AND KNOW THAT YOU ARE SAFE.

I know that this is God’s work and He has His great designs for it. The winds that blow with such fierceness will only serve to make the tree stronger. No one can come between God and His designs.

KNOW THAT YOU ARE SAFE.

Immediately following Mother Marie Gratia’s death on Oct 29, 1964, words of praise for her life covered the newspapers in Taiwan. One such article ended this way:

“Mother Marie Gratia really carried out Jesus Christ’s spirit throughout her whole life. Forty years in China seemed to her only one day in the work of mission and education. She welcomed poverty, nourished virtues and upheld justice. She bore hardships with patience and always worked for ideals. Now Mother Marie Gratia has accomplished what she desired. She is at rest in this land of China which she would never leave. Her smiling countenance as well as her achievements in education will forever dwell in people’s heart and never be forgotten.”

KNOW THAT YOU ARE SAFE.

NO NEED TO MAKE A PLAN, YOUR HEART WILL BE YOUR COMPASS.

When my mind becomes occupied about the future of this foundation, it seems a matter of such importance that I almost sink through weakness and can only get strength by casting it all into the arms of God’s Providence, living one day at a time, expecting everything from Him. I often upbraid myself when approached by some difficulty for my want of courage and my anxiety when we have had so many proofs of His care and orderings which have all proved that it is God’s work. He has taken care of it from the beginning until now, and will never fail us.

NO NEED TO MAKE A PLAN, YOUR HEART WILL BE YOUR COMPASS.

JUST LIFT YOUR SAILS IN FAITH, AND TRUST THAT YOU WILL ARRIVE.

Once the sisters arrived in Taiwan they were to take a train south to Taichung. Again, in “Against All Odds” we read:

“Promptly at 3 a.m. the train pulled into the Taichung station. Though she was not expected at the station at that hour, the first person the sisters saw as they looked out the windows of the coach was a former student from the Ching Yi school in China. As Sister Mary Liguori prepared to step off the train, she turned and remarked to Sister Ann Colette, “December 15. Our Foundation Day in Taiwan.”

JUST LIFT YOUR SAILS IN FAITH, AND TRUST THAT YOU WILL ARRIVE.