

Dearest family and friends,

Winter greetings from Lithuania! I know we have already begun ordinary time in the Church calendar; however, I still want to wish you a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. As always the sisters kept very busy during the holiday seasons, and now since the big feasts have passed, it's time to catch up and get back into the swing of things of daily life.

First I would like to mention two activities we had for the children and the youth during the Christmas season in our parish in Pumpėnai. With the kids in the Oratory, we help them put on a Nativity play which turned out very beautiful in which the kids were able to work hard and have a great time acting for those who came. Some of them live 8-10 kilometers outside of Pumpėnai and they would come for the practices by bike even in the midst of the snow and rain. For most of them, their families don't have a car or much money to use the bus. So if the kids would like to go somewhere, they must walk, even if it's far. (Something I think most of us aren't familiar with.) For me it was something very impressive and made me think twice when I got in the car and they got on the bike.

We also have a group of Daughters of Mary, for young girls. This year during Christmas, they made Christmas cards and cookies for the elderly and homebound in Pumpėnai. We walked door-to-door through the town covered in snow and delivered our homemade cookies and cards while singing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" in Lithuanian. The elderly whom we visited were deeply moved by the joy and singing of the girls who visited them, since they are quite lonely and cannot leave their home due to sickness or age. Afterwards, we went back to the parish where we had a great hot lunch to warm up from the winter cold and snow.



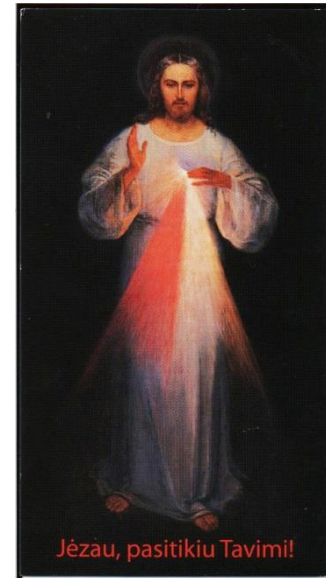
As some of you know, the winters in Lithuania can be pretty brutal and long. For the past month, the temperatures have been between -20°C and -10°C (2°F - 14°F) during the day and as low as -30°C (-22°F) at night. I can assure you that those temperatures are really cold. Yet, in our Church it's



even colder than outside. That's because the Church is built of stone and is very old and it neither has heating nor water. It was the first time for me, where I saw my own breath *inside* a Church. Also something really impressive is that in the middle of December, we brought all the water and wine from the church to Father's house because the wine started to freeze, yes, the wine started to freeze. So for Mass, we have to heat the water so it's hot and sometimes even the wine just a little before Mass, because even in that one hour, the water freezes. Father must also be

careful when drinking from the chalice in order to not get his lips frozen to it! 😊 It's always an adventure, even in the little things.

As for me, Lithuanian is still coming along, very slowly, but happily moving forward. I can speak very simply but my longest conversation last about a minute or two, then I've used up all the words I know or that I can understand. In conversation, I really can only pick out some words in their general sense, but still nothing complete. I may have said it before, but Lithuanian is taking me a lot longer to learn and takes much more study than the other languages that I have learned. However, everything is possible with God's grace, even in the midst of our human limitations. I'm very happy to be in the Year of Mercy while studying Lithuanian, it's something very encouraging to think about when it seems like I'm getting nowhere in the language. All God asks us to do in life is just to push ahead, following him as our guide and to keep moving forward, no matter what pace each of us go. He will supply what's lacking on our end. When he sees all our efforts, struggles and frustrations but still a heart determined on loving and following Him, can we ever doubt that he won't help us finish the race that St. Paul speaks of? God doesn't want to take away all the crosses in our life, how else do we prove to him our constant love and steadfast will if we do not fight long and hard? Everything that we experience whether great or small, God uses for our perfection to help us grow in great virtues like humility, patience and self-abandonment, especially by using even our weaknesses and failures. Many times, we are the one who makes that cross God gives us heavier by our unwilling spirit or our complaining self-love. It's only when we accept every cross, for love of God, do we find true peace and joyful suffering.



Well, I think that enough ramble for today. Again, I wish everyone a blessed new year and please know that I continue to pray for you and your intentions. As well, I also ask for your prayers and support as I continue to find God's will for me here in Lithuania and the mission he calls me to. May God bless you and may Mary's protection guard your families.

In His Sacred Heart,

Sister Mary Rock of Constancy