

For First Vespers on November 30, 2024

Dear Sisters,

This evening we begin the vigil of the First Sunday of Advent, a time of preparation for the coming of our Savior, who carries many titles: Mighty God, Prince of Peace, Lord of Lords, Wonderful Counselor, etc. However, the most beautiful may be Immanuel, “God with us”, because this speaks to us of a God who never leaves us, who is always FAITHFUL.

As we begin our year of Jubilee, God’s faithfulness is at the forefront of this as well. For it is the Lord who has brought us to this day.

This year of Jubilee, which is an idea we take from the Old Testament, is a good time to step back and “take the long-view”. This is something we learn as we look at Salvation History. For instance, when we take a broad overview of the beginning of the Old Testament, we see God calling a people to be His own starting with Abraham, we see Him blessing, multiplying and guiding His people. And we see how He leads them out of slavery in Egypt and eventually into the Promised Land. In these events, we most certainly see God’s Hand at work and God’s overarching faithfulness.

However, that does not mean that the story unfolded without challenges and hardships, not the least of which is the fact that the Israelites found themselves enslaved in Egypt. We know very well also that after the Exodus, the Israelites wandered forty years in the desert, often complaining and even feeling abandoned. But none of this changes the fact that God was with them and God was faithful. As the psalmist states, “For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” (Ps 100:5)

This way of seeing is our call and challenge as well, so as not to lose sight of the bigger picture. If we look closely **at the details** in our 150-year history, we see the seemingly good, as well as the bad and indifferent. We see how Mother Foundress was gifted with the grace of her personal charism and the charism for the Congregation, how she was blessed to find those who could guide her spiritually, and received the grace to courageously send half the Congregation to a faraway land because she trusted the Lord. Yet, we also recognize her confusion and uncertainty, which demanded deep discernment and trust in the

Lord. We see the hurtful misunderstandings that took place and even conflicts with Sisters who held different visions.

We can look too at our Martyred Sisters, each of whom had fears and struggles, and whose lives ended amidst a story of brutal tragedy. Yet, today they are a source of pride and an extraordinary example of heroism and the living of our charism.

Nevertheless, the long-view of the past 150 years, paints a fuller picture: We can see the growth of the Congregation, the blossoming of the Charism, the expansion to 14, and God-willing, soon-to-be 15 countries, the evolution of ministries based on the *signs of the times*, the numerous institutions established, and the hundreds of thousands of people ministered to...because God is faithful. He brings fruit from dry lands, increases grace during suffering and brings light from the darkness. Yes, God is faithful!

The same may be true in our own lives and vocations. In addition to the moments of joy, and fulfillment in our lives, we may be acutely aware of the pain, stumbles, and even scandals that we have experienced or witnessed. However, when we take a step back, often at our own 25, 50 or 75-year Jubilees, we can recognize the amazing path on which the Lord has led us for the good of our souls and the good of others.

Thus, at this time, it is only right to ask the question posed by the psalmist, "How can I repay the Lord for all the good He has done for me (for us)? We will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord. We will pay our vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people." (Ps 116:12,17-18)

Of course, this is not the end. This is a beautiful and meaningful moment to stop, appreciate, be grateful and rejoice. But it is also a moment that leads us to ask the Lord, "So what next?" For we must never grow weary of doing the good and seeking His will. Therefore, let us, with hope and trust, surrender all to the Lord. "For God is the One who, for His good purpose works in you both to desire and to work." (Phil 2:13)

Dear Sisters, in a moment we will continue our evening prayer. So, now I would like to conclude this reflection with some lines adapted from a prayer poem by Mother Foundress...

"I desire to commune with You, Lord
To cooperate faithfully only with You
When Your will and pleasure
Puts this holy task upon me
So that I may enter into this Kingdom of Your Love
Which You have brought from the heights of heaven

So I may implant it into souls, and I myself in unity
With You, my Lord, I live most closely
That I may be Your good instrument forever
O come, my Jesus, I beg You."

Amen.

- Sr. Angela Marie Mazzeo