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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

A very blessed PASCHAL SEASON to all of you. As you know the Paschal Season is a time of renewal, of new beginnings. It marks the triumph of good over evil, of light over darkness, of life over death.

Especially at this point in our history, our people are yearning for their salvation – from the almost unbearable poverty they are living in, from the unrelenting corruption on all levels of our society, the insensitive blatantly self-seeking stance of those in power, the continuing extra-judicial killing (Rebelyn Pitao as the latest victim) involuntary disappearances, harassments and violation of human rights (our own Sr. Stella Matutina and her companions as the latest examples), the continued rape of our environment. This is the prevailing Good Friday of our life today.

However we do have glimpses of hope. There are many groups today sincerely wanting to have fundamental changes, not only of people but of systems, of politics, of structures, of consciousness. Chief Justice Puno is building chapters of his Moral Force Campaign. A multi-sectoral group called PADAYON, has outlined the concrete changes that they want to bring about and are building mechanism to concretize these. There is the KAPATIRAN and the School of Good Governance who are trying to build a new type of politics, who are looking for alternative candidates, etc, etc. We need only a tangential energy that could bring all these forces together to trigger a qualitative leap for change.

As we enter the Holy Triduum and look forward to Easter Sunday, let us unite ourselves in prayer to all these forces of good. Let us pray that all of us could truly wipe the shame of our nation (as being the most corrupt nation in Asia) and to truly bring back our honor, dignity and integrity as a people. May we all rise with Christ on Easter morning!

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

S T A T I O C O N F E R E N C E

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, April 5, 2009

By : S. Josefina G. Nepomuceno, OSB

In every parish in the Philippines the Palm Sunday events come to life.

Palm Sunday in the Philippines is most dramatic. To commemorate the entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, Filipino Catholics bring their palaspas or decorated palm fronds to church to be blessed by the priests. It is always a sight to behold when young fresh coconut leaves called ibus are transformed into intricate forms and shapes. Children hold them liked prized possessions. It is one great spectacle to see the brimming Sunday congregation eagerly wave their palms as the priest passes by to bless them. The event is simply joyful. (*PALM SUNDAY'S PALASPAS by Elmer Nocheseda in Filipino Dictionary in Google*)

This joyful living out of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem connects us to the boisterous, noisy, triumphant first entry.

“ Many people also spread their cloaks on the road while others spread leafy branches from the fields.” (Mk 11:7) “Those who walked ahead of Jesus and those who followed him began to shout, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest.’” (Mt. 21:9) “So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him. And they cried out, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel.’” (Jn 12.13)

But not everybody was delighted. Some Pharisees were scandalized at this public display and said to Jesus, “Master rebuke your disciples.” But Jesus answered, “I tell you, if they were to remain silent, the stones would cry out.” (Lk 19:39-40)

Why were the Pharisees so upset with the demonstration? Did they recognize the messianic significance of what was transpiring right before their eyes? What were these symbols?

Messianic Symbols

The Cloaks spread on the path of Jesus

It was a common custom in many lands in the ancient Near East to cover, in some way, the path of someone thought worthy of the highest honour. The Hebrew Bible (2Kings 9:13) reports that Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, was treated this way. Both the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John report that people gave Jesus this form of honour.

The colt or donkey

The Babylonian Talmud preserves a question asked by the Persian king Shevor: *Why doesn't your Messiah come riding on a horse? If he lacks one, I'll be glad to provide him with one of my best.* (Sanhedrin 98a). Indeed, why should the Messiah come on a donkey? The answer stays in the symbol of the donkey, which in some Eastern traditions seems to be seen as an animal of peace, versus the horse, which is the animal of war. Therefore, it was said that a king came riding upon a horse when he was bent on war and rode upon a donkey when he wanted to point out that he was coming in peace. Thus, the

king riding *on a colt, the foal of a donkey* complies with the epithet *gentle* or *lowly* (Hebrew *anî* - poor, afflicted) and strongly implies the message of peace. This message of peace was always fundamental with Jesus, but it is not clear how well understood it was in those days. In fact, John declares: *These things understood not His disciples at the first* (12:16). It is highly probable that the public enthusiasm of the day saw the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem more like a declaration of war against Israel's enemies than a message of peace.

The Palm

John specifically mentions palm fronds. The palm branch was a symbol of triumph and of victory, in Jewish tradition, and is treated in other parts of the Bible as such (e.g. Leviticus 23:40 and Revelation 7:9). Palm branches have been used by all nations as an emblem of joy and victory over enemies. (*Catholic Encyclopedia*)

Psalm 118

The sacred scenario of the Triumphal Entry, including chants from Psalm 118 and palm branches, is, in fact, a huge Messianic development. It is true that Psalm 118 and palm branches are used during the Sukkot ritual, but the Sukkot (the feast of Tabernacles) itself has Messianic meanings. These meanings become clear during the 7th day of the feast, called *Hoshanah Rabbah* (The Great Prayer). So, it is due to such Messianic meanings that Jewish crowds met Jesus chanting the praises of Messiah by verses from Psalm 118: *baruk haba' b'shem Y'hwah* (Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD; verse 26) and *'anna' Y'hwah, hoshiiah na'* (Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD; verse 25). It is well-known that the Hebrew *hoshiiah na'* (I beseech you, save now) was changed in Greek to *hosanna*, which became a famous Christian term.

But from Psalm 118 were not the only words reported by the Evangelist. We can find, by example, in Matthew 21:9 the syntagma *hosanna en tois hypsistois* (Hosanna in the highest), which combines the *hoshiiah na'* of Psalm 118 with the *en tois hypsistois* of Psalm 148:1 from the Septuagint. We can find references to the Son of David. Everything was used to emphasize the Messianic marks of the day and the strong appeal for the intervention of God.

This entry of Jesus into Jerusalem in precisely the way described by the evangelists was no mere confluence of circumstances. "Jesus has premeditated every step of the Messianic scenario involved here. This is why He resurrects Lazarus in the view of crowds, this is why He enters Jerusalem coming from the Mount of Olives."

(This whole section is from "Palm Sunday in the New Testament" in www. Wikipedia)

And Jesus wept.

But as Jesus approached the city gates in the midst of the crowds of singing disciples and onlookers, his heart was broken.

When Jesus came in sight of the city, he wept over it and said, "If only today you knew the ways of peace! But now they are held from your seeing. Yet days will come upon you when your enemies will surround you with barricades and shut you in and press on you from every side. And they will dash you to the ground and your children with you, and leave not a stone within you, for you did not recognize the time and the visitation of your God." (Lk 19:41-44)

He saw the heart of the majority of the people that he came to love, and already they had rejected him and all the blessings he was to bring. Their shouts of “Hosanna” were an expression of hope and expectation for a return of the Kingdom of David, for liberation from political oppression, a hope far different from the ways of peace that Jesus was offering. So now it was time for judgment. The things that make for peace were hidden from their eyes because of unbelief. (www.billpetro.com/holidayhistory)

The Pharisees had their own compelling reasons for rejecting Jesus. Politically, religiously and economically, Jesus was a threat, a danger to their position and power. Seeing the crowd, they said, “We are getting nowhere; the whole world has gone after him.” (John 12:19) The chief priests took counsel to seize and kill him. Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem but he could not enter hearts which were closed to him. “ [*They*] did not recognize the time and the visitation of [*their*] God.” (Lk 19:44)

That is why, as Pope John Paul II said, “with his entry into Jerusalem, Christ begins his journey of love and sorrow, which is the Cross.” (*John Paul II, Palm Sunday Homily 2000*)

In our days

In our time, the story of 2000 years ago comes alive for us in the liturgy of Palm Sunday which invites us to enter and participate in the events of the most significant week of the life of Jesus and that of the Church. Again we turn to Pope John Paul II:

The liturgy of Palm Sunday is like a *formal entrance* into Holy Week. It combines *two contrasting moments*: the welcome of Jesus in Jerusalem and the drama of the Passion; the festive "Hosanna" and the repeated cry: "Crucify him!"; the triumphal entry and the apparent defeat through death on the Cross. The liturgy thus anticipates the "hour" in which the Messiah was to suffer greatly, to be put to death, and on the third day to rise again (cf. Mt 16: 21), and prepares us to live fully the paschal mystery. (*John Paul II, Homily, April 13, 2003*)

How shall we enter into the Palm Sunday liturgy? We are invited to “Look to [*Jesus*] with renewed and zealous faith. Follow him...he invites you to follow his demanding example, making his exacting choices your own. (*JP II, 2000*)

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us who the Lord is and what he can demand from us.

[The] procession of the Palms is a procession of Christ the King: we profess the Kingship of Jesus Christ, we recognize Jesus as the Son of David, the true Solomon, the King of peace and justice. (*Benedict XVI, Homily on Palm Sunday, 2007*)

What does recognizing Jesus as King mean?

Recognizing him as King means accepting him as the One who shows us the way, in whom we trust and whom we follow. It means accepting his Word day after day as a valid criterion for our life. It means seeing in him the authority to which we submit. We submit to him because his authority is the authority of truth. (*Ibid*)

In the spirit of the liturgy we submit with joy and express our “yes” to Jesus.

The procession of palms is -- as it was then for the disciples -- above all an expression of joy, because we can know Jesus, because he allows us to be his friends, and because he has given us the key of life. This joy, that is at the beginning, is also, however, the

expression of our "yes" to Jesus and of our availability to go with him wherever he takes us. The exhortation at the beginning of today's liturgy therefore rightly interprets the procession also as a symbolic representation of that which we call "the following of Christ": "Let us ask for the grace to follow him," we said. The expression "the following of Christ" is a description of the whole Christian existence. (Ibid)

The following of Christ is a call for every Christian, not just for a selected few. Therefore the "availability to go with him wherever he takes us" is not only for consecrated persons, priests, or missionaries. It is for all. Concretely what does this "following of Christ" require?

For the disciples, it meant the external following of walking with him throughout his journeys. But there was the internal aspect which was "a new orientation that no longer considered as point of reference the career that determined one's life, in one's personal will," but instead "one surrendered oneself totally to the will of an Other. Being at his service had by now become the reason for living," which demanded renunciation and detachment from self. (Ibid)

"The following of Christ" then means renunciation and detachment from self, an interior change of life. "It demands that I give myself freely to an Other -- for truth, for love, for God who, in Jesus Christ, precedes me and points out the way." (Ibid)

What we are talking about here is the fundamental decision to no longer consider utility and gain, career and success as the ultimate goal of life, but to recognize truth and love instead as the authentic criteria. We are talking about the choice between living for myself and giving myself -- for what is greater. And let us understand that truth and love are not abstract values; in Jesus Christ they have become a person. Following him, I enter into the service of truth and love. Losing myself, I find myself. (Ibid)

Who may go up the mountain of the Lord?

Sung during the Palm Sunday procession is Psalm 24, the invitatory psalm we have been singing throughout the Lenten season. It was also used in Israel as a processional song for the ascent to the temple mount. It interprets the internal aspect as "the interior ascent of which the external ascent is an image, and explains to us once again what it means to ascend with Christ." (Ibid)

"Who may go up the mountain of the Lord?" the psalm asks, and proceeds to give two essential conditions. "Those who ascend and really want to get to the top, to arrive at the true height, must be persons who ask themselves about God. They must be persons who look about themselves in search of God, in search of his face. . ." who are attentive to God, who seek God. (Ibid)

The other concrete condition for the ascent is familiar to us: "He who has innocent hands and a pure heart" can stand in the holy place. Innocent hands -- hands that are not used for acts of violence. They are hands that are not dirtied by corruption, by bribes." (Ibid) Our translation has "clean hands and pure hearts."

Hands are innocent, clean which are not held out to receive bribes, which do not succumb to corruption or allow greed to take root.

A pure heart -- when is the heart pure? “That heart is pure that does not pretend and does not sully itself with lies and hypocrisy. A heart that remains transparent like water rises up, for it does not know duplicity. That heart is pure that does not weary itself with the drunkenness of pleasure; a heart whose love is true and not only a passion of the moment.” (Ibid)

“Innocent hands and a pure heart: If we walk with Jesus, we will ascend and find purification that carry us truly to that height for which man is destined: friendship with God himself.” (Ibid)

This ascent is to calvary, as it was for Jesus. It demands renunciation and detachment from the pleasures that gratify the self. It means carrying my cross daily, losing myself like the grain of wheat which has to fall into the ground and die to bear abundant fruit.

The call to follow Christ through internal change is addressed to all Christians. The fruits should be evident in their lives and visible in the social, cultural, economic and political spheres of their society. One does not need to have acute vision nor great discerning abilities to see that in our country, the only Christian/Catholic country in the whole of Southeast Asia, the reality staring us in the face and challenging our Christian values is that of widespread, deep corruption from the lowest barangay position to the highest level of administration. Truth and honesty are savaged and turned upside down. With our gift of turning things into jokes, we Filipinos cover up our cynicism and sense of powerlessness. The messiah who will deliver us from this quagmire of corruption is nowhere in the horizon. To whom shall we turn? What kind of deliverance are we seeking? Is it from the political-economic? Is it from the plague of corruption so that our resources will be more equitably shared and the needs of the poor majority can be filled? Is it from abusive implementors of law? Is it from our people’s disregard for law so that we can have a more orderly society? Like the Jews in the time of Jesus are we seeking to be freed from political/economic oppression that grips our nation? Do we see any deeper reason for the present state of our country, reasons that are not political or economic? Who will deliver us? Where is hope?

The Centrality of Hope

According to Pope Benedict XVI, “The question of hope is truly central to our lives as human beings and our mission as Christians, especially in these times. We are all aware of the need for hope, not just any kind of hope, but a firm and reliable hope. (*Benedict XVI World Youth Day Homily, April 6, 2009*) The quest for hope is not just the aspiration of Filipinos in their desperation. The question persists, where is hope? “Experience shows that personal qualities and material goods are not enough to guarantee the hope which the human spirit is constantly seeking.” Neither are politics, science, technology, economics and all other material resources sufficient in themselves to provide the great hope to which we aspire. This hope "can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain" (no. 31). (Ibid)

In his encyclical letter *Spes Salvi* Pope Benedict delves into the basis of hope:

In what does this hope consist which, as hope, is “redemption”? The essence of the answer is given in the phrase from the *Letter to the Ephesians* quoted above: the Ephesians, before their encounter with Christ, were without hope because they were “without God in the world”. To come to know God—the true God—means to receive hope. We who have always lived with the Christian concept of God, and have grown

accustomed to it, have almost ceased to notice that we possess the hope that ensues from a real encounter with this God. (*Benedict XVI, Spes, Salvi, n.3*)

Hope is already our possession. We received it with faith during our baptism when we stated that we want eternal life. Maybe we should ask explicitly: “Is the Christian faith also for us today a life-changing and life-sustaining hope? . . . Is it “performative” for us -- is it a message which shapes our life in a new way, or is it just “information” which, in the meantime, we have set aside and which now seems to us to have been superseded by more recent information?” (*op.cit., n. 10*)

If our hope is weak, is it perhaps because our hope for change is set on “other things,” not on the promise of real life? “Faith is the substance of hope. But then the question arises: do we really want this—to live eternally? Perhaps many people reject the faith today simply because they do not find the prospect of eternal life attractive. What they desire is not eternal life at all, but this present life, for which faith in eternal life seems something of an impediment.” (*Ibid*) As the Jews in Jesus’ day were not interested in the peace he brings but in the re-establishment of political kingdom, we Catholics today may be yearning more for material prosperity than for the kingdom of God. The morass we are in could really be due to the absence of hope for eternal life as the unsatiable greed for power and money attests. Other hopes – for a better life, for a good-paying steady job, for good education, for good health, for a long life, for peace and security in our land – are legitimate and worth aspiring for. But “anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life (*cf. Eph 2:12*). Man’s great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God—God who has loved us and who continues to love us “to the end,” until all “is accomplished”. (*op. cit, n. 27*)

Pope Benedict emphasizes that we need the real great hope.

Let us say once again: we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. (*op. cit., n. 31*)

How do we attain this hope that we desperately need?

A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me any more, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God. When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, he can help me [25]. When I have been plunged into complete solitude ...; if I pray I am never totally alone. (*op. cit. n. 32*)

Then, some will say, that is “pie in the sky,” very individualistic, even self-centered. That way cannot answer the need for societal change in our country. But Pope Benedict clarifies:

To pray is not to step outside history and withdraw to our own private corner of happiness. When we pray properly we undergo a process of inner purification which opens us up to God and thus to our fellow human beings as well. In prayer we must learn what we can truly ask of God—what is worthy of God. We must learn that we cannot pray against others. We must learn that we cannot ask for the superficial and comfortable things that we desire at this moment—that meager, misplaced hope that leads us away from God. We must learn to purify our desires and our hopes. We must free ourselves from the hidden lies with which we deceive ourselves. God sees through them, and when we come before God, we too are forced to recognize them. (*op. cit. n. 33*)

True prayer then is inclusive, not exclusive. It includes others, even those we consider to be the cause of our dark situation.

“We must learn that we cannot pray against others. . . We must learn to purify our desires and our hopes.” “Hope in a Christian sense is always hope for others as well. It is an active hope, in which we struggle to prevent things moving towards the “perverse end”. It is an active hope also in the sense that we keep the world open to God. Only in this way does it continue to be a truly human hope. (*op. cit. n. 34*)

It is important to know that I can always continue to hope, even if in my own life, or the historical period in which I am living, there seems to be nothing left to hope for. Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love, and that this gives them their meaning and importance, only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and to persevere. (*op. cit., n. 35*)

Hope calls us to work to make things better in our world, to fight injustice, to thwart oppression, to resist and expose evil, to work for truth and honesty as these are precisely being subverted. Without the great hope in the power of Love, in the power of Jesus, would we even consider entering the battle against the evils that press us down? It is this hope that impels us forward to engage the evils of our society in our time, for that is how “we keep the world open to God.” We dare to hope because of what the Lord Jesus has done for us and is willing to do for us:

Crucified for our sins, buried, and then raised from the dead and declared Lord of lords by our heavenly Father, Jesus is still willing to offer to anyone living under any corrupt political, social, or religious system the gift of salvation whenever they are willing to call out to him in faith. (*Ron Ritche, What Really Happened on Palm Sunday?*)

Our celebration of Palm Sunday enthrones Christ in our acknowledgment of his kingship. Our allegiance to him is expressed in the interior ascent with him to calvary. The cross we carry is the weight of our struggle to have clean hands and a pure heart in the strong current of the pull of greed, material power and the attraction of corrupting satisfactions. Indeed the situation in our country of rampant and pervasive corruption brings into question our faithfulness to our baptismal promises and the strength of our belief in an eternal life. The hope for ourselves and our country lies in the recovery of our sense of hope and the faith which is its basis.

As consecrated persons we are more in touch with and expect to have the deeper, great hope in the Lord who embraced suffering, humiliation and a most painful death to gain the victory over sin. He won for us eternal life, which is the final object of hope and the reason for

hope. The promise of eternal life is what should impel us to continue the struggle for justice, truth, honesty, human dignity because these are the signs that God reigns now, Jesus lives. In the reverses that often mark the struggle, may we not lose sight of the reality that we are on the right side, for Christ has already won the victory. My holding the palm branch this Palm Sunday should be an assertion of my following of Christ, a declaration of hope in Christ the victor.

Questions for Reflection: 1) What are the signs in my aspirations and my prayer that I truly hope for eternal life? 2) Do I recognize God's visitations in my life or am I too preoccupied with my own set spiritual ideas and plans to see what he is offering to me?

For Discussion: "Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love, and that this gives them their meaning and importance, only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and to persevere." What is the relevance of this statement to our present situation in the Philippines, and the situation in the world?

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PALM SUNDAY HOMILY

Cathedral of Our Lady
March 20, 2005

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Each year during Holy Week, we read two of the Gospel accounts of the Passion of Jesus. Today, Palm Sunday, we have just completed the first account which this year was from Saint Matthew's Gospel. On Good Friday, we will read the Passion from the Gospel of Saint John. Last year, many of us saw the movie – the Passion of Christ. I hope and pray that this added emphasis will help us to reflect more deeply on the profound meaning of the Passion. But remember, the Passion is not simply a story nor is it only a movie. The Passion is the most vibrant and effective love account of all times. It is summarized in the biblical verse: *“God so loved the world that He sent His Son Jesus to save us”* and *“Greater love than this one has than that a man lay down His life for His friend.”*

The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus is called the Paschal Mystery. It is the Paschal Mystery that we re-enact in every celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass. Thus today, as we begin Holy Week, I invite you to join with me and with our brothers and sisters throughout the world as we celebrate the liturgies of the Paschal Mystery. These celebrations are not just historical recollections. They are opportunities to explore the meaning of suffering, of justice, of loss, of death and whatever hope there might be on the far side of death.

This morning we began our solemn ceremonies with the blessing of the palm branches. We were reminded of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Then we heard the further story of how some of those who hailed Him as King later shouted for His crucifixion and death. Yet, through it all, Jesus never condemned them. He never resisted their attacks. He offered Himself up on the Cross and prayed for their forgiveness.

To one extent or another, we are all somewhat like that fickle crowd. God has blessed us with life and everything else we have. He has promised us eternal salvation in His kingdom. At first, we rejoiced in that Good News of Jesus but every so often, we turn away from Him by turning to false gods. Whether it be drugs or alcohol or sinful sex; whether it is greed or envy; perhaps it's money or power or prestige; whatever sin we commit is contrary to God's plan and injurious to us. Likewise, the sins of omission (failure to fulfil our responsibilities) or lack of charity or decisions based on injustice offend God and our neighbour. Yet God does not abandon us.

As Jesus, hanging on the Cross, forgave His persecutors and as He extended a firm promise of hope to the thief hanging on the cross next to Him who repented, so it is with us.

God loves us totally and completely, so much so that He sent His Son Jesus to save us. This is the love story of the passion and death of Jesus. The resurrection is the triumph of God's love for us as He overcomes sin and death.

Thus when we gather together in faith – as we are right now – and later throughout this Holy Week, we do not question God's love for us. God's love is total and absolute. He lived, He suffered and He died for us. He rose up to new life which He now offers to share with us.

The questions we need to ask are about ourselves. How are we responding to God's sacrifice and His love? Are we truly repentant of our sins? Are we making every effort to come closer to God? Is our faith in Jesus the greatest priority of our lives?

Meditate on this for a few moments so that we will then be able to make a public proclamation of our faith and celebrate the Paschal Mystery with reverence and devotion. Remember, re-enacted in this Eucharist is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the blessings of the new and beautiful life He offers us. Amen.

Most Reverend Eusebius J. Beltran
Archbishop of Oklahoma City

“Their Story Seemed Like Nonsense” Luke 24

Homily for Easter Sunday Mark Payne, OSB

The women who went to the tomb early this morning returned with an astonishing report. So astonishing that everyone who heard it thought their report was nonsense. It is important for us tonight to share in both of those emotions. Otherwise, we risk taking Jesus' resurrection for granted. Of course, Jesus rose from the dead. He said he would rise (as the men in dazzling garments reminded the women). He said he would rise, and he did. We have heard this from our youth, we have seen the paintings. We have read the Gospels and seen the movies. Like the sunrise and the early growth of springtime, we remember the resurrection and we are comfortable with it.

But No, we need to be astonished; we need to experience the same feelings as those who thought the news was nonsense, outrageous, impossible. One of the un things about my mother was that you could retell her an old joke and she would laugh heartily. She never remembered jokes and so she delighted in hearing them all over again. She never took them for granted, never got used to them, never became bored with them. So it must be with us.

Everytime we hear the news of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth we need to be astonished, amazed, delighted. It's like waking up and suddenly remembering it's our birthday, or that today is the first day of summer vacation – even though we already knew it when we fell asleep. In fact, that is a good way for us believers to hear the news of the resurrection. When we walked into church earlier tonight we were asleep, unconscious, distracted. But now we have heard the Allelujah, the Exultet, the Gloria, and the Good News of the Resurrection. Now we are finally awake; we are finally alive because of the Good News of Jesus' resurrection.

The Good News in never old news. God didn't create us once; God is creating us always. God didn't save us once; God is always saving us. Peter hustled himself out to the tomb that same morning and saw that it was empty. I wonder if Peter did that very same thing everyday from then on. That's what we should do. Every morning when we get up, we should run ourselves out to the tomb and peek inside. Wow. The tomb is empty. Alleluja. Jesus is raised from the dead.

If we did receive the Good News again with every new day, a whole lot of other things would also change for us. That is of course the reason for doing it: everything has indeed changed for us. Everything is new for us. Christ is risen: we are saved. Death no longer has the last word over us. Weakness and failure and sin no longer determine our future and we dare not let them determine our present.

This is the night, the Exultet sings, when the people of Israel escaped from slavery and passed through the flood. This is the night when the pillar of fire guilded our ancestors into the Promised land. This is the night we were born, we were baptized, we were forgiven. This is the night when we will be received into heaven. St. Paul told us tonight that as we shared in Jesus crucifixion at our baptism so are we united in Jesus' resurrection.

No more is it Jesus' resurrection that is nonsense, now it is nonsense to keep this Good News to ourselves. It is nonsense to remain fearful or depressed. Yes, things will still fall apart for us. Friends and family members will die. We will still miss opportunities to do good and sometimes we will choose to do things that are wrong. Evil and sadness in will seem to pile up our life as in a tomb. But the women will still come back from the tomb and report that they find it to be empty. Yes, it is nonsense. God's love for us does not make sense; it is a miracle, a gift, and always a surprise. Let it be a surprise again tomorrow and next week and next month. Jesus is risen from the dead. Alleluja!

Letter of Sr. Terese J. Zemale, OSB

1 February 2009

Dear Mother Mary John,
Dear Sisters,

Tomorrow I will leave to return to Rome after spending one month in the Philippines. It was my first and so maybe my feelings and impressions are coloured by that being my first visit. I am grateful to Mother Mary John and Sr. Lumen for arranging for me to visit some of the other communities of the priory, besides priory house and Tagaytay where the priory chapter was held. I feel very grateful for all I experienced during my one month stay. Coming from a priory that has only 28 years old, it has been an exposure in a big priory with a longer tradition! Out of gratitude I want to share some of my impressions, thoughts, and experiences.

- *Some of the words that come to my mind to describe my experience of the priory are: Very creative and resourceful; at the age of 103, the “mustard seed” planted by five German Sisters has grown into a big tree with many branches!*
- *I think it was a great idea to have priolympics exercises as a beginning point of the priory chapter! I enjoyed the day very much. I am sure that the experience of one another in learning about health and fitness from Ms. Sanrose, the fun and creativity in the various movology exercises, the generosity and variety of gifts, etc. did a lot to help each one experience belonging and well being.*
- *I heard again and again in reports and in informal situations, the words “new” and “renewal” and they struck me: renewal programs, new convents, chapels and new buildings, renovated buildings, new apostolates, even the community of House St Benedict had a new apostolate and are dreaming of another! They reminded me of the Lord’s promise that those who trust in Him will renew their strength (Ps 84:5-7) as they go along, changing valleys into springs of blessing.*
- *I can see that the Priory is doing a lot for the people of this country; that the priory is composed of great women of God, inspired and enabled by him to do what you are doing in his name. I was impressed by the important school apostolate which I saw at Manila, Marikina, Angeles, and San Fernando and it was evident that the students are proud to identify themselves as Scholasticans, wanting to live the Benedictine values they have received along with the high quality education.*
- *I was particularly impressed by the extent, organization and networking of the Social Pastoral Apostolate endeavours and how the priory has managed to integrate this within the overall frame of the priory and its Institutions.*
- *I had a feeling of touching immensity and variety in what you are doing and have achieved. You have accumulated wisdom, a heritage of skills and knowledge, and a generous, joyful and creative spirit that is giving life to what you are doing. I pray that you may have the courage to continue listening to the accumulated wisdom in your priory, to the Lord who speaks and continues to send you to the people in their various needs. I wish priories could learn more from each other, could learn from the example of Manila Priory, especially priories in Africa.*

- *I could not but notice some of the similarities of global problems experienced in Kenya and Uganda which are also spreading their destructive effects here, like the indiscriminate cutting of trees, invading of rural areas by big unscrupulous companies, and the urban poor.*
- *I appreciated the way the priory cares and maintains contact with families of the Manila Priory Sisters who are on mission assignments in other priories, through visits, especially at Christmas and Easter, and in times of sickness and death in the family.*
- *I also noticed the chain contacts through sms messages among the superiors so that the communities get to hear important events happening in the other communities at the very time they are happening. I see this as a help in bonding and participation of communities in the life of other communities in the priory; hence an example of a positive use of modern means of communication!*
- *Among the English speaking priories, I think I am not wrong to say that I have found Manila Priory having the most numerous publications of books both about the Missionary Benedictine Congregation history and Manila Priory, as well as publications on other topics. I think it is good for the sisters of the whole congregation to know of the existence of these works, and for other priories too, to share what they publish. I have made a list of the ones I came across in the library and elsewhere and I intend to send this list to the other priories.*

I want to express my gratitude to you all for your hospitality, especially to the sisters in the communities I visited. Thank you for your time, love, care, all you did and spent for me. Words cannot thank you enough, so I ask the Lord to bless you abundantly as He alone can do.

*Lovingly,
Sr. Terese J. Zemale, OSB*