

# CONVERSATIO 2009



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St. Scholastica's Priory  
Manila

Dear Sisters,

First let me wish you A NEW YEAR OF HOPE. The year 2008 did not give us much reason to hope—with all the corruption scandals, the attempt to ram down Cha Cha down our throats, the blatant disregard for the welfare of our farmers. And yet we have also seen the undying hope peoples who hope against hope, people of different perspectives, ideological and political beliefs, who put aside their differences and came out courageously in the February 29 interfaith protest rally, the August 22 Truth Fest and the December 12 Interfaith Prayer rally. This is what gives us hope—that we as a people are learning to work with each other looking beyond our individual interests for the good of the whole community. These are lessons in citizenship and democracy that we are learning amid trying events and continuous assault to our intelligence as citizens. Hopefully the new year will bring about a greater cooperation and participation among the people because our dream is for a fundamentally renewed governance and this will take a long time beyond all personalities and political figures.

In September 2009, we as a Congregation will begin our year long celebration of our 125 years, the theme of which is: AND OF HIS FULLNESS WE HAVE ALL RECEIVED: GRACE UPON GRACE. And in the last Prioresses’ meeting it was agreed upon that the statio conferences will be made by each priory and we have permission to print all these in CONVERSATIO.

For this reason, we are not choosing a theme for the first 8 months of the year. Instead we will choose a topic from the readings of the first Sunday or a significant feast of each month which is Statio day of most of our houses.

Let us thank God for the gift of this New Year!

Lovingly yours,

*S. Mary John Mananzan OSB*  
Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

<i>MONTH</i>	<i>TOPIC</i>	<i>AUTHOR</i>	<i>ARTICLE DUE</i>
January	EPIPHANY	S. Mary John	December 20
February	DUST THOU ART	S. Mary Bernard	January 20
March	MIGRANTS’ SUNDAY	S. Hilda	February 20
April	PALM SUNDAY	S. Josefina	March 20
May	GOOD SHEPHERD	S. Lumen Gloria	April 20
June	BLESSED TRINITY	S. Pia	May 20
July	ST. BENEDICT	S. Mary Thomas	June 20
August	TRANSFIGURATION	S. Soledad	July 20

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

## **THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD**

by Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

We are beginning a New Year- 2009. It is very fitting that our first statio conference this year is about the Epiphany of our Lord. This feast is so rich with meaning that we can draw from it lessons for our whole year.

The observance had its origins in the Eastern Christian Churches, and was originally a general celebration of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. It included the commemoration of: his birth; the visit of the Magi, or "Wise Men" from Persia (Magi being Persian priests), who arrived in Bethlehem; all of Jesus' childhood events, up to and including his baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist; and even the miracle at the Wedding of Cana in Galilee.

### **II. EPIPHANY THEMES**

Epiphany means "manifestation", a sudden revelation, a sudden enlightenment. And when it is God who reveals himself, it is a THEOPHANY. This is what this feast is all about God's revealing of himself to the world. As Rev. William Kolb in his homily said: "The Epiphany that we celebrate this day is the brightness and light of God, of God's love, of God coming into the world with God's great love for us. God coming into the world as a beautiful trusting baby. The Feast of the Epiphany focuses on the bright light that came into the world with Jesus the Christ, a light that can never be dimmed, that is always there for us"

As we go through the Gospel (Matthew 2, 1-12) the themes emerge that we can spend hours to reflect upon:

Magi coming from the East to Jerusalem in search of the newborn Messiah-

The fear of King Herod

The guiding star

The joy of recognizing the divine manifestation

The offering of gifts

Returning to the home country by another way.

Although the feast includes the commemoration of the Baptism of Christ and the Wedding at Cana, we will concentrate our reflection on the Nativity episode.

### **III. REFLECTION ON THE EPIPHANY THEMES**

#### **1. Magi coming from afar seeking God**

The most admirable people are those who have visions. Life is not a bore or a drudgery but a glorious adventure. They will go through tremendous difficulties and will give up comforts, security and even their possessions in search of their dream. They are not discouraged by obstacles, by temporary setbacks, by failures, by peoples' criticisms. Their life is a meaningful journey. As religious Benedictines we often proclaim that our main aim in our life is SEEKING GOD. We set out enthusiastically when we entered the convent and were buoyed up by our youthful enthusiasm and with the help of our formators we could surmount the obstacles that come our way. It is inevitable that as our journey goes on, we could meet disillusionments, discouragements and setbacks. At these points in our lives, the Magi from the East could be our role models in continuing our journey with the same singleness of purpose and unfailing hope.

Not only in our religious life is this theme relevant but in our search for a renewed society in our country. Some of us have made this journey since Martial Law. We have been cherishing the vision of a Philippine society where the great majority of our people have their basic necessities fulfilled, where people can live humanely in peace and kaginhawahan. We have seen EDSA I and EDSA II and have had our hopes buoyed up and then dashed to the ground by events that show there has not been a fundamental change in governance. The events of the last years can rob us of our hope and have actually made many of us just sink into apathy. At no time is the example of the Magi's relentless and determined pursuit of their dream so important to us as during these days.

#### **2. Herod's fear**

Again we listen to Fr. Kolb: "Fear is darkness. It is a dark dimension of being human. We have all kinds of fear, not just a fear of terrorist attacks. If we are in touch with reality we have a fear of death, a fear of violence, a fear of growing old under the wrong conditions. Lots of things to fear. And if we choose to live, to live life, we will risk experiencing some of those things. Fear is the opposite of an epiphany. It is darkness, while the Feast of the Epiphany reminds us that there is light in our world, light that can overcome any kind of darkness. Fear is a component of living a human life. We can be controlled by it or we can turn to a greater power in our lives that overcomes that fear."

Fear can make us do terrible things. The fear of Herod drove him to kill many innocent infants, because one of them was a threat to his power. People who are afraid to lose their power do terrible things. We have seen this in the recent events in our times. They eradicate those whom they consider threats to their power by extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, harassment legal cases. They resort to blatant deceptions and violations of the law they are supposed to protect in order to perpetuate themselves in power. And they instill fear in us.

Freedom from fear does not mean not to be afraid. It means two things: that one can distinguish a substantiated fear from groundless fear. But secondly, that one can act in spite of grounded fears. I remember when I was interviewing a woman political detainee for a paper I had to give in a conference. She told me about her story of being a farmer organizer and how one midnight, the house she was in was raided by the military. She was put in a safe house, gang raped by six men and physically tortured. After my two hours interview I exclaimed: “Why are you not crazy? Some people who would experienced what you had undergone would have become crazy. Why did you get into this work. Didn’t you know that these things could happen to you? And she answered.” Yes. Sister, I knew the risks because some of my friends have been caught before me. But I thought it is so important to organize and conscientize farmers that I told myself, I will cross the bridge when it comes. And I am not crazy because of the love and support my friends and other people have given me.” Her story was for me an example of freedom from fear.

It is normal that we feel fear in the face of threats and intimidations. Let us pray that we will have the courage to stand for what is right in spite of our fears.

### **3. The Guiding Star**

The star of Bethlehem is one of the most popular symbols of the Nativity and is ever present at any graphic depiction of the event. It is also central in a reflection on the Epiphany event. It represents the abiding divine presence in our lives. As long as the Magi remained under the guidance of the star they were able to keep their course in spite of obstacles and detours and distractions in their long journey.

In the same way, our journey, too may be full of detours, meandering pathways, temptations to take attractive side trips , but as long as we remain steadfast in our gaze at our inner star, as long as we are anchored and rooted in the Divine in us, we will not lose our way. It is very vivid in my mind as a Junior, while I was meditating this thought came to me which I never forgot: “You may wander to the ends of the earth but I will pull you back to Myself.” I have indeed traveled to the ends of the world both geographically and symbolically, but God has been true to His promise.

### **4. The Divine Manifestation**

The light of the Star brought the magi to a greater light when they entered the stable in Bethlehem. This was the actual theophany, a self-revelation on God's part and on the part of the magi --a remarkable recognition of God in an infant lying in a manger. These are the two aspects of epiphany—revelation and recognition. In Scriptures, we see the preference of God in revealing himself to little ones, to the simple, to the poor, and to the sinner. I am sure each one of us have experienced some sort of epiphany in our lives—maybe not tremendous ones, but moments of clarity, moments of recognition of what God wants us to do , moments of consolation when God became very real to us. And when did these moments happen? Often when we have reached the end of our rope and we have no one to turn to. Often when people seemed to have given up on us. Sometimes

when in deepest anguish, we simply fully surrender ourselves into God's mercy and love. And for sometime we are buoyed up by these moments of consolation. Then the moment fades away.

Sometimes, there is a self revelation on God's side but there is no realization or recognition on our part. We did not know the time of our visitation. It is only afterwards that like the disciples of Emmaus we recall a moment and then we say as they said: "But was not my heart burning within me?" But let us cling even to the memory of these moments which will help us in times of desolation and darkness.

## **5. The Gifts of the Magi**

The gifts of the Magi are a sure proof that the Magi saw more than a ordinary baby in the crib. They gave him as gifts—GOLD in recognition of his kingship, FRANKINCENSE- in recognition of his priesthood, and MYRRH-- in recognition that he would die to save the world.

How can these gifts be meaningful for us? We could see in gold, the symbol of great value. We can then ask ourselves, what is it that is most valuable to me at this moment and can I make this offering at the crib? Sometimes what is of most value for us may not necessarily be one that has the highest material value. It may be a position, a relationship, a project. And when something is precious to us, we have the tendency to be attached to it and to distract our gaze from its focus on our inner star. This is when we have to offer this precious thing and pray to God for detachment and holy indifference.

Frankincense is to honor Christ's priesthood. As baptized Christians we participate in the priesthood of Christ, and the essence of priesthood is to represent God-- to be God's stand-in. Perhaps offering frankincense means to take seriously this aspect of priesthood, to make people know and feel God's love because they feel our love for them. Remember the crucifix hanging on the wall in our Priory parlor—the one without arms. This is a copy of a crucifix in a church in Muenster which was bombed during World War II. It lost its arms. but instead of replacing them, there is written below the corpus: I HAVE NO ARMS. YOU ARE MY ARMS!

Myrrh is to symbolize Christ's salvific death. A meaningful way of offering our own myrrh to the crib is to offer our own death to ourselves in many ways. If we look into ourselves, there are so many things we have to die to: our temper, our possessiveness, our love of ease, our envious thoughts and jealous feelings, our wish to control, our insensitivity and lack of consideration for others, our pride, our vanity-- and the list can go on and on.

## **6. The Return of the Magi by another way**

After experiencing theophany, the Magi returned to their home country by another way. To the Magi, this was to avoid Herod. To us this returning by another way is a symbol of conversion, metanoia. When we experience in some way God's self revelation, we

cannot go back to business as usual. Somehow something has happened to us. From the Prophet Ezekiel we learn of what God desires to give us: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh".

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. What would you consider a burning passion in your life?
2. What persons would you consider as guiding stars in your life that somehow lighted the way for you?
3. Can you recall the epiphanies in your life? Was there a concrete change in your life after these experiences?
4. What would be the gold, frankincense and myrrh in your life that you can offer to the Infant Child?
4. What fears have caused some setback in your life's journey? How did you overcome these fears?

**GOOD GOVERNANCE**  
By Bishop Broderick Pabillo  
De La Salle-Taft  
December 11, 2008

We are living in a democracy. In this form of government power is vested on the people. They are the ones who choose the leaders who would exercise power in their name for the sake of the common good. The leaders govern **in the name** of the people **for the sake** of the people. It is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. It is in this vein that authority in a democracy has its legitimacy.

In a democracy the right to know is primary. How can the people choose and choose well if the truth is being kept from them. Besides, the public officials are accountable to the people. How can there be accountability without transparency?

In a democracy the good of the majority is to be addressed. It is a government **for the people**. Is there democracy then when the majority of the people wallow in poverty—already since the beginning of the last century when democracy is said to have been introduced in the country? Not only, as time moves on the people not only are not able to get out of their poverty, but more become poor, and the poor become poorer? Where is then the government for the people? This happens because the government is not for the people—the majority of whom are poor—but for the rich and the political families who stay in the reins of the government for decades and perpetuate their hold of power through political dynasties. Do we have a democracy then **in fact**?

In a democracy the good of the governed, who are the people of the land, should be promoted. Is this happening in our economic system now when—in the effort to pursue investment, the good of the people of the land is being sacrificed for the sake of foreign capital? Foreign investors get tax holidays. The salary of workers is being kept low to make foreign companies come and stay. Our lands are being opened to big mining ventures—many of which are foreign owned—with all concessions given to them to the destruction of the environment and to the improvement and to the impoverishment of the poor inhabitants of the land. Now they want to open our country to 100% foreign ownership because this is what foreigners want to invest in our country. They are selling the country to the outsiders and enslaving the Filipinos—all in the name of investment, whose economic gains are not felt by the people at large.

Do we have then a democratic government? Not in reality surely. Perhaps yes **in form**. And to keep this veneer of democracy the institutions that are meant to make democracy function are being bought and co-opted. Laws and policies continue to be made that are not for the common good! The house of representatives is mostly a rubber stamp body. The people there do becoming one too. The Ombudsman and the Department of Justice are too biased, or too incompetent, or both—to bring justice to the country! The judiciary is not untouched by claims and accusations of corruption. The executive branch is accused of lies and corruption—accusations which it does not answer but deny, evade and hide. Where else can the people turn? The military? It has long been a hotbed of corruption, as pointed out even by its younger and more idealistic members.

What then can we do? Follow the biblical teaching on authority? Yes indeed, follow the biblical teaching for the Word of God is our guide. But the Bible has to be properly understood. It is very disgusting that even the Bible is being used for self-serving purposes. Yes it is written in Rom 13:1-4

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.*

We also find in 1 Peter 2:13-16

*For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil.*

In both texts we are asked to honor and respect human authority. Why? Because authority is meant to put order in society so that people can do their work well. Authority is there to punish wrongdoer. Wrongdoers therefore should be afraid in front of this authority. Paul wrote: Rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Is this happening among us? Are wrongdoers being punished? Are those who do good being recognized and rewarded? Why are the organizers of the farmers and the poor being killed. Why are cases being filed against those who tell the truth? Why are the liars being rewarded with positions in government? Why are collaborators in big corrupt practices being protected? Is this the kind of government the Bible is telling is to respect and follow?

Besides the apostles said clearly in front of the Sanhedrin, the highest authority among the Jews:

*But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. (Acts 5, 29)*

We must obey God first of all authority is subject to him. He is the God of truth, of justice and of righteousness. We must serve this God, and HIM alone. Jesus warns us...

*"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear; fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! (Lk 12:4-5)*

Nor can we claim separation of state and church using the Bible since Jesus very clearly said

*He said to them, "Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Lk 20:25)*

The denarius is the money of the emperor. Give it back to him. All, everything and everyone, including the emperor, belong to God. All are to be given back to him. So the government is also accountable to God and to his teachings!

There is the call of the bishops to radical change. This call has been given much coverage, and rightly so, for it is a call to all and a call to action! This is first and foremost a call to radical change in governance. The government has the first obligation to heed this call. They are at the moment in charge. To spell out this radical change in concrete terms means:

- Tell the truth and be accountable to the people.
- Attend to the poor and attend to their development, so extend and reform the Comprehensive Land Reform Law.
- Provide the basic needs of the people first, so put a cap on debt payments and cancel payments on illegitimate debts.
- Let the economy be geared towards self-sustainability. Invest on agriculture and products that Filipinos need. Do away with export oriented economy.
- Open up long standing cases of graft and corruption in high places like the Macapagal Highway scam, the Complete automation scam, the North and South Rail deals, the NBN-ZTE deal, the Fertilizer Scam, etc. and convict the culprits.
- Cleanse the Office of the Ombudsman.
- Stop all extrajudiciary killings and bring to justice all those involved.
- Stop all large scale mining activities for the moment until the Mining Law is repealed or amended so that it may be more favourable to the communities of the place and not to the large investors or government officials.
- Stop all demolitions of informal settlers until there is adequate relocation.

This is a long list of demands for good governance, and the list can be further lengthened. This just shows that there is so much to be changed. Indeed we need radical change. If these changes cannot be done by the present government then it has no capability to govern. If it insists on continuing are we to support and bear with it?

## **INTERFAITH RALLY**

December 12, 2008

Message by Mother Mary John Mananzan, OSB

In the name of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines, I declare our strong opposition to the changing of our Constitutions at this time.

We oppose the term extension of this administration which will just give it an opportunity to deceive, steal from and violate the rights of the Filipino people.

We are opposed to the changing of the patrimony provision which will give the right to foreigners to own the whole Philippines.

We are opposed to the use of the instrumentalities and institutions of the government to fool the people and we call on government officials who allow themselves to be used to come to their senses and refuse to be instrumentalized against the people.

It is said: There are no tyrants if there are no slaves. There are no oppressors if there are no people who allow themselves to be oppressed. And so let us all together refuse to be treated like stupid and ignorant people who can be continuously and repeatedly fooled and deceived, and whose rights are violated with impunity.

We are happy that in spite of our differences, we have all come together here united in one purpose. I hope this is just the beginning of our continued working together in the future.

Let us all together wipe the blemish of shame from the face of our mother country. Let us together build anew the dignity and honor of our people by means of a radical and fundamental change in our governance, not only of people who govern but of the very system that gives the opportunity to those who govern to steal from and to deceive the governed and to violate the rights of the people whom they have pledged to serve.

This journey will be long, difficult, filled with temporary failures, and it may be dangerous. But let us put our whole being at stake in this endeavour. Let us put a meaning to the promise we continually make to our country everytime we sing our national anthem: **OUR HAPPINESS IS, IN THE FACE OF OPPRESSORS, TO DIE FOR YOUR SAKE.**

## **INTERFAITH RALLY**

December 12, 2008

Mensahe ni Mother Mary John Mananzan, OSB

Sa ngalan po ng Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines, ipinahahayag ko ang malakas naming pagtutol sa pagbabago ng ating konstitusyon sa panahong ito.

Tumututol kami sa pagpapahaba ng panahon ng administrasyong ito na makapagbibigay pa ng pagkakataong mangurakot, mandaya, maglinlang, at lumabag sa karapatang pangtao ng sambayanang Pilipino.

Tumututol kami sa pagbabago ng patrimony provision na makapagbibigay ng karapatan sa mga dayuhan na ariin ang buong Pilipinas.

Tumututol kami sa paggamit ng mga sangay at institusyon ng pamahalaan sa panloloko sa taong bayan at nanawagan kami sa mga tao sa gobyernong nagpapagamit sa panlolokong ito na matauhan na at maglakas loob na huwag ng magpagamit.

Sabi nga: There are no tyrants if there are no slaves. Walang mang-aapi kung walang nagpapa-api. Kaya ipinahahayag din namin na matindi naming tinututulan ang pagturing ng administrasyon ito sa atin na parang tayo ay mangmang at stupidong mga taong patuloy at paulilit na niloloko, nilililinlang at nilalapastangan ang karapatan.

Natutuwa kami na sa kabila ng ating pagkakaiba, tayo ay nagkakaisa ngayon sa hapong ito sa isang layunin. Sana ito ay umpisa lamang sa tuloy-tuloy na pagkakaisa sa hinaharap—

Sama-sama nating pawiin ang dungis ng kahihyan sa pisngi ng ating inang bayan. Sama-sama nating itayong muli ang dangal at puri ng sambayanang Pilipino sa pamamagitan ng tunay, fundamental at radical na pagbabago sa ating pamunuan—hindi lamang ng mga namumuno kundi ng sistemang umiiral na nagbibigay ng pagkakataon sa namumuno na magnakaw sa kaban ng bayan at yurakan ang karapatan ng mga taong dapat nilang pagsilbihan.

Ang landas na ito ay mahaba, mahirap, puno ng pansamantalang kabiguan at mapanganib. Ngunit itaya na natin ang ating mga sarili at buong pagkatao sa mahalagang gawaing ito. Bigyan natin ng kahulugan ang paulit-ulit nating ipinapangako sa bayan, sa ating pambansang awit: **ATING LIGAYA, NA PAG MAY MANG-AAPI, ANG MAMATAY NG DAHIL SA IYO.**