

# CONVERSATIO 2009



MONTH : September  
NUMBER : 9  
VOLUME : XXXIX

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial

*page 2*

STATIO CONFERENCE

On the Foundation of the Congregation

by Sr. M. Irene Dabalus OSB

*page 3*

Cory, the Heart of a Saint

by Brother Armin A. Luistro FSC

*page 13*

HOMILY OF FATHER CATALINO AREVALO, S.J.

at the requiem mass of President Corazon Aquino

*page 16*

\* \* \* \* \*

St. Scholastica's Priory

Manila

Dear Sisters,

During this month of September, we will launch our one year celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of our Congregation which, as you know, will happen in the Norfolk Priory after the International Formators' Meeting in September. Mother Irene will also write the statio conference about this so I will not elaborate on it.

My simple reflection is this: **THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE IN THE HISTORY OF OUR CONGREGATION.** Why do I say this? Because you all know of the brokenness of our founder, Fr. Andreas Amrhein. For a long time, his name was not mentioned among us. His birthday or feastday was not commemorated. It was only in the General Chapter of 1976 that he was fully acknowledged as our Founder. It was long overdue. It was realized that whatever happened is a fact that we owe him our existence. And now the letters he wrote during the last years of his life, full of humility, repentance and love for our congregation inspire us. In the last Prioresses' meeting in Peramiho, these letters were read before the first session in the morning and sometimes we found ourselves in tears listening to them.

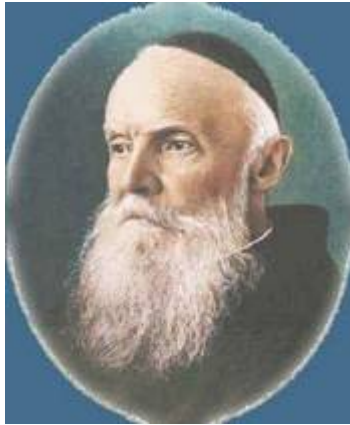
The fact that our congregation continues not only to exist but to flourish is the sign of God's generous grace to us and confirms again and again what St. Paul said about how this grace triumphs over human weaknesses. So as we prepare to celebrate our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we thank God for our Founder and our Pioneer Mothers who nurtured the frail beginnings of the congregation amidst trials, persecutions and martyrdom.

Sincerely yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

S T A T I O   C O N F E R E N C E  
ON THE FOUNDATION OF THE CONGREGATION  
By Sr. M. Irene Dabalus OSB



On September 24, 2009, the Congregation celebrates its **125<sup>th</sup> Jubilee of foundation**. Once again it is a chance to remember the roots of our congregation, trace its unfolding and look at the full blossoming tree with gratitude and delight. Through all the vicissitudes of the decades, we have weathered mighty and small storms with God’s loving hand at our side. In the words of M. Angela : “All our prayers, reflection, activities and celebrations will aim at our renewed taking over of the **founding grace** given to Father Andreas and our foremothers. Therefore we chose the theme from the Gospel of John, 1,16 :

**“From His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace!”**

### **HISTORICAL NOTES**

It is but fitting to focus our gaze again on the man who started it all. Fr. Andreas Amrhein, the founder of the congregation – St. Ottilien and Tutzing – clung to a dream and never doubted that this dream was what God wanted. He visualized a foundation in which monastic calling and missionary endeavor would “compenetrate” each other and bring new light in “lands which do not yet know Christ.” This was our “founding grace.”

We know his story, the brave journey of one man crossing the lines of demarcation between a revered Benedictine tradition of the German Abbey of Beuron and an uncertain and obscure monastic-missionary beginning in the forsaken cloister of Reichenbach. As all beginnings in the history of the Church, his were laced with pain and suffering, both from internal strife and external opposition, until his institute was recognized by Pope Leo XIII on June 29, 1884. We know how his own story was marked by a personal failure for which he paid with separation and exclusion from his institute and the monks he had loved so much.

Thus, the words of Fernao Pessoa, a Portuguese poet, rightly fit the story of his life and his foundation:

### **GOD WANTS IT - MAN DREAMS - THE WORK IS BORN!**

Today we can look at his legacy as the blessing of a loving Providence against all odds. The congregation has spread far and wide throughout the five continents, with ours as a “twin” to the congregation of St. Ottilien. Having inherited the very essence of his dream and vision, we Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing prize our double calling as monastics and missionaries with all the challenges and profound tensions which such a life brings. We lay claim to those ideals emblazoned in all of our documents:

- To be a monastic and a missionary.
  - To live in accordance with the Rule of St. Benedict under a superior and in mission
  - To combine the common life of a “monk” with missioning to active apostolic ministry.
- (adapted from the history of the congregation by Sr. Bernita Walter OSB, *Sustained by God’s Faithfulness*).

### **Mother Birgitta Korff – “foundress” of Tutzing?**

Alongside Fr. Andreas Amrhein another name appears who is intimately bound with our unfolding history as Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing. She is Mother Birgitta Korff, a native of Northern Germany, who as our first superior-general left the stamp of her own spirituality on the young congregation for twenty-five years. Sr. Caridad Barrion used to say with passion that it was Mother Birgitta who “founded” Tutzing in its most difficult years. However, all accolade was given to our founder Fr. Andreas Amrhein as the originator of our charism when Sr. Katharina Scheyns left us. I would like to “recognize” Mother Birgitta here, because she has not been – to my estimation – consciously featured and acknowledged in our feasts as the one who steered the ship of the congregation in the difficult years of transition from the mission site in Emming to Tutzing.

### **Who was Mother Birgitta?**

Mother Birgitta was born on January 25, 1868, at Mülheim on the Möhne River, in the diocese of Paderborn, according to the necrology written by M. Angela Boedecker. In baptism she received the name of Gertrud. Having lost her father in early childhood, she learned unshakeable trust in God from her widowed mother. This mother trained her and her other brothers and sisters in exact and prompt obedience. Mother Birgitta could thus say in later years: “I didn’t have to learn obedience in the monastery; I had learned it at home.”

Gertrud Korff had a keen sense of God’s call for her and entered St. Ottilien on August 2, 1889. This was just half a year after our first missionaries sacrificed their lives at the mission in Pugu /East Africa in January 1889.

What was she like as a person? The necrology recalls: “To her companions in the novitiate she became a shining model from the very first day. She was noted especially for her great conscientiousness, joyful obedience and unassuming manner. On May 26, 1890, the feast of Christ’s Ascension, she received the holy habit and the name of Maria Birgitta. On the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, June 29, 1892, she was allowed to consecrate herself forever to her divine Bridegroom.”

Her early years saw her:

- entrusted with the weighty charge of the kitchen in the first years of the foundation which demanded of her “prudence and a spirit of sacrifice.”
- developing her musical talents at the harmonium and the singing of the chant with her gentle and full voice.
- leading the second group of missionaries for Africa in 1894.
- becoming prioress in Dar es Salaam and later in the new foundation in Lukuledi with all the privations and trials of pioneer work, especially in the face of lack of water..
- getting elected unanimously to head the entire congregation on September 17, 1895.
- accepting during her 25-year term the profession of 320 sisters, 266 of whom served in the missions.

### **What characterized her office and accomplishments?**

Here I copy profusely from the necrologist who attempts this character sketch.

*“Mother Birgitta was a “strong woman” indeed, probably one of the strongest pillars on which God built our congregation as it exists today. The secret of this exceptional strength and firmness was the total God-orientation of her striving. Whenever the Benedictine ideals were at stake—the fitting praise of God, the family and congregational spirit, or the maintaining of monastic discipline and extension of God’s Kingdom on earth—she knew no wavering, no hesitation, and no human respect. She was equally clear in her testing of religious vocations.*

*In governing her ever-growing monastic family, our spiritual mother of so many children benefited greatly from her native practical sense. Verse after verse of the “Golden Alphabet” could be applied to her untiring, well-planned and joyous work.*

*The third ideal of the “strong woman,” charity, which Pius X so fittingly called “motherliness in the wider sense,” can be seen as expressed in Mother Birgitta’s life by her great missionary zeal during her service in East Africa, during her years at the head of the congregation, and also in the evening of her life, her last ten years. Our foreign mission was her dear vineyard, to which all her thoughts and cares, her prayer and*

suffering was devoted. As long as she was still able, she typed laboriously, with one finger of her gout-swollen hand, her letters to the mission. And when her voice was barely audible, she still spoke, dictating her messages to individual communities and sisters.

During World War I, she sent 86 of her daughters to nurse the wounded and sick heroes, inspiring them to fulfill this Samaritan's service in the noblest possible manner. "Serve each soldier with great respect, as though he were your own brother!" This motto, and the Mother's blessing, prayer and sacrifice together with God's grace gave all of them strength and support amid manifold difficulties and dangers; not one of them, not even a postulant, failed to remain faithful to her vocation in this critical time and situation.

We will always remember the spiritual works of mercy to which our good Mother Birgitta devoted herself zealously all her life. She instructed the ignorant, counseled the wavering, and guided the confused into the right path. "She opened her mouth to speak wisdom" and was ever eager to lead us, by her instruction and the faithfully offered conferences on Sundays and feast days, to the fountains of eternal life and true interiority, zealous fulfillment of duties, and sacrificial enthusiasm for our vocation. She loved to draw on the rich treasury of the liturgy for doing so. Shortly before her death, Mother Prioress in the name of all of us asked her for some words of farewell. She whispered with great effort: "Observe the silence; it is the basis of the interior life—practice sisterly charity; it is not yet fully done—humility—love of sacrifice, love of sacrifice, love of sacrifice."

Now we still need to look at the fear of God, the fifth ideal of the "strong woman," in the life of our dear deceased Mother, working to perfect her own soul. Just as Mother Birgitta always called those entrusted to her to sanctification of self, to truly seeking God in the spirit of St. Benedict, as their first task, so she also gave us the best example in this respect.

Though she had been trained from her youth in prompt obedience and her strong Westphalian nature easily accepted this "courage turned inward," her religious life still was rich in situations where the practice of this virtue cost heavy sacrifices for her. She always referred to accepting the election in 1895 as the greatest and most difficult sacrifice of her life. At her voluntary resignation in December 1920, she said during a chapter meeting: "It was not because of being tired of my office that I took this step, but for the welfare of our dear congregation. I was not moved by anyone. What I did was done in obedience to the dear God, who inspired me to do so. I trust that in laying down my office I am just as much fulfilling God's will as I did when accepting the election, when I only and solely considered the will of God. I accepted the office in obedience to God, though it was exceedingly hard for me, and now I lay it down, again in obedience to God, even though it hurts me very much to loosen the sacred bonds which unite us."

*Mother Birgitta zealously treasured the “precious good of obedience” with the double weapon that Christ himself placed into our hands when said, “Watch and pray!” Mother Birgitta daily devoted a considerable amount of time to spiritual reading and regular Eucharistic visits.*

*Mother Birgitta had a special regard for nocturnal prayer. In 1899 she obtained permission for the Motherhouse for solemn observance of First Fridays by exposition of the Blessed Sacrament by day and by night, and in 1917 she initiated that we atone and pray in this manner for the needs of Church and our country each Friday.*

*Mother Birgitta was no exception to the human right of having faults. “To be human means to struggle,” and each one of us witnessed how persistently she struggled. It happened that her choleric temperament caused her to excess zeal. But true to her motto, “Failings against love must be repaired by humility and love,” she would, with a very natural simplicity and without finding excuses, acknowledge her failings and ask forgiveness.*

*“Grateful love had been the true sun in her long years of suffering. Visiting her sick companions, she kept encouraging them to be grateful and never tired of listing our great advantages as fortunate dwellers in a convent compared to God’s other sick children out in the world.”*

She now lies buried in the crypt of the Maria-Hilf-Convent in Tutzing (Maria Hilf means Mary, help!) where many of her daughters had preceded her. She was laid to rest at around 9 a.m on May 24, the patronal feast of the Maria-Hilf-Convent, with Fr. Archabbot Norbert Weber officiating. “The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever!” sounded out the psalm at her funeral.

Like many a forgotten foundress she has not been properly chronicled with all that she had done for the congregation in the 25 years of her office. However, one thing stands out among such chosen spiritual leaders: their steadfast spirit of prayer and their life of sacrifice for the others.

## **OUR JUBILEE CHALLENGE**

### **The meaning and promise of this 125<sup>th</sup> year of our foundation**

Today, in the year 2009, we are again crossing the threshold to another 25 years, marked by a jubilee celebration which will last a whole year. What impact will Benedictine life in our Priory make in the coming 25 years? Or more humbly put: Shall we Missionary Benedictines today have a choice as to what legacy to leave behind us? What is the Missionary Benedictine approach to renewal in our secular contemporary Philippines? What is the identity of our monastic life in the marketplace of liberal post-modern values? Where is missionary-monastic truth a piercing light into our society? In education? In political action? In social advocacy? In the coenobium?

It seems to me that our missionary-monastic life has yet to emerge with sharper contours in the world we live in. Are we in the world but not like the world? Or are we in the world and like the world? We are again in quest of a manifest Benedictine core of virtue and power, which can be seen and felt in the “clamor” of the sisters for a radical renewal, one that goes to the roots. The ancient monastics – our fathers and mothers in God-seeking - went to the frontiers of the desert unshakably focused on their object of life and activity – the Absolute. Their impact was magnet-like. Drawn by the same Spirit we also want to set our minds and hearts on God alone – the Meaning-Giver of our entire Benedictine existence. This is the substance of monasticism to which Benedict subscribes – “*monos*”: to go for God alone. The ancient monastics in the silence and immensity of the desert had nothing externally which could deviate their focus from God. Their struggles were internal.

On the contrary, we post-moderns swim in the flood of material goods with which media and commerce swamp the consciousness twenty-four hours a day. Is this why we seem to have such a tenuous hold on this focusing power? Are we, in fact, in danger of getting a disturbed vision? Is this why we seem to be misdirected and disturbed in our contemplative priority with the work-driven and fun-loving generation of our new century? In this situation of post-modernity, however, we are convinced that the Holy Spirit is at work to bring order and wise experience out of our insecurities and ambiguities. For where the contradictions are sharpest, there she is most active.

Herein lies the meaning and promise of this Benedictine moment – the **kairos** of our 125<sup>th</sup> year of foundation – , the rare chance to push to birth a new Benedictine existence at the frontiers of renewal. It is barely three years after our centennial as a priory and yet, there is this clamor of radical renewal. In what does this renewal consist?

In India where we have a little mission at the southernmost tip of Kerala, the peoples of other religions have a stereotyped image of the religious and of the Church. They are, to be sure, agog over the vast achievements of the Church and of the religious in the fields of health, education, social work. Those of other faiths cannot compare with them in efficiency and quality. However, when it comes to initiation and guidance into the inner life people would rather go to a Hindu or a Buddhist master – to a “man / woman of God” – because of his/her purity, his/her detachment and his/her holiness of life, rather than to a priest or a sister. Might this be an indication of going back to the roots?

## **PRESENT ACTUALIZATION**

### **Our Congregation Jubilee is for us like a “Reflection on the Mirror”**

The reflection is ourselves. The mirror is the series of activities and events since our last election chapter at the beginning of the third millennium. These events and activities projected to us an image of who we are. Looking at the mirror is an attempt to capture a deeper understanding of where we are now and to grasp some implications of the challenges we are facing at the moment that will be haunting us for sometime.

## **Where We Are Now**

We are now into the first year after our election chapter and of our 11<sup>th</sup> Manila priory chapter held in January 2009 and April 2009 respectively. Since that time we have been holding renewal days in every community to start a process of “radical renewal.” “I have a strong hunch that now we are beginning to feel an incipient fire in our belly.” What has aroused us? We are beginning to be aroused by a number of events. Let me make a summary review of the events we went through.

- The Preparatory Commission for the 11th Priory Chapter of the Manila Priory sent out study guides and questionnaires for the communities to reflect on for the election chapter.
- The communities went into cluster retreats from September-October 2008 with a discernment process guided by Sr. Mary Macdonald.
- The formators-superiors’ retreat also went through the same process.
- In the election chapter of January 2009, M. Mary John was re-elected as prioress,
- Subsequent superior-formators’ meetings defined the implementation of the mandate for radical renewal of the priory to be the task of the Priory Government in the immediate future.

The Priolympics and the election chapter were joy-filled events. They came and went. What was significant was that we felt the “sting of the Spirit”. We felt the power of the Priory as an instrument of the Spirit to still be capable of rousing us to faith and fidelity. The priory chapter stirred strong emotions among us. It mandated a radical renewal of the priory in its 11-point message, summarized by M. Mary John’s closing remarks in three paramount concerns for renewal and deepening:

- Our distinctive Benedictine monastic culture,
- Practice of simplicity of life style,
- and our option for the poor. (Social orientation of the apostolate)

## **At the present moment**

This is our mirror and in this is our reflection. Might there be a lack of passion in the way our mandate is being implemented? Are we invigorated while participating in meetings but tend to ignore or forget what was seemingly resolved with enthusiasm while together? With all the gatherings and sessions carried out by the Priory Government and the superiors, has there been a change in the day-to-day life of the sisters and the communities? The actual decisions and recommendations are good, but are we slow or even “dragging” in living them out seriously?

I end this reflection of ourselves and the mirroring of our activities by reverting to the sonnet which probably Sr. Irmengard Bachen wrote at the passing away of Mother Birgitta. It contains

the reflection of her witness as light and fervor. The mirror of her activities was given above. This great woman continues to challenge us in our search for our own identity in the new age that has begun.

### ***In Memory of Mother Birgitta***

*You were destined to give us light and fervor,  
Like the Easter candle in the house of God.  
And though your radiance is extinguished here on earth,  
It burns all the more brightly above.  
The radiance of God's glory must not cease:  
Eternal light is surrounded by a chorus  
Of endless jubilation: glory, honor, praise!  
Light, love and praise is the goal of all being.  
You, who now have gone into eternal light,  
Do not forget your children in the land of shadows  
And fan our desire for God into flame,  
Let us prove ourselves in all you gave to us  
And every hour gird ourselves with the robe of light  
Already here on earth, preparing like you, for transfiguration!*

### **Para-liturgy**

#### **The Symbols**

**A large mission cross**

**The Holy Scriptures**

**The Holy Rule**

**Two candles are lighted.**

These are symbols for the spirituality of our founder and “foundress”. Let us allow them to speak to us. Let us listen to them.

**Protracted silence.**

Choose any of the texts for your personal reflection and sharing.

#### **The Word of the Lord**

**Let the Word of God speak to our hearts.**

Yahweh God wishes us to be Godlike. The human becomes divine.

Gen. 1/26-27; 2/27

God is ever in search of us.

Gen. 3/8-9

God sees, hears the suffering of his chosen people and acts in solidarity with them.

Exodus 3/7-8

God knows every fiber of our being intimately

Psalms 139/1-24

God walks with his people as a friend

Exodus 33/12-17

Jesus the suffering servant

Isaias 52/13-53/12

Yahweh God becomes human and dwells with us

Luke 1/26-38; 2/1-7

Jesus searches for the lost sheep

Mt. 18/10-14; Lk. 15/3-7

Jesus made sure Peter had his priority right before he entrusted him the care of his flock.

Jn. 21/1-19

**The Rule of Benedict gives us a Christocentric way of life. The Risen Lord is the core and center of our consecrated and spiritual life. If not, then we have nothing to bring to the people as Good News except our empty selves.**

- Does my commitment and dedication to the person of the Lord Jesus sustain and give vigor to my apostolic mission?
- Am I practicing and developing a contemplative outlook on life?
- Am I discovering the richness of the interior life?
- Do I believe and am I convinced that I am redeemed?

Jesus the Lord tells me:  
If you love me you will keep my commandments.  
And I will ask the Father  
and he will give you another advocate  
to be with you forever....  
You know him because he abides with you  
and he will be in you....  
On that day you will know  
that I am in my Father  
and you in me and I in you.  
(John 14/15-16, 17, 18, 20)

- How do I feel listening to these words of Jesus?

**Fr. Amrhein established his foundation for Benedictines in common life and for mission. The spiritual needs of those who have not yet heard of Christ were closest to his heart. Inspired by our founding charism we are lead to a serious reflection on the society in which we live. All of us must try to understand the theological and apostolic reason for our desire to serve the poor at this time in our history. We must have the courage to make a new start from questions like the following:**

- In what way is our spirituality a sign of contradiction for the society in which we live?

- Does our being in the world make us resigned in an uncritical way to the logic of the world?  
(cf. Jn. 17/11,14)
- Are we conforming ourselves to society or are we a sign for it?
- Is our proclamation of the gospel and our living out of the Missionary Benedictine charism prophetic?
- Is our charism sufficiently clear and credible so as to attract young people?
- Does our apostolate among the poor bring us in closer relationship with the person of Jesus Christ the Redeemer?
- Our apostolate among the poor is challenging. Has this challenge had any concrete repercussion on our life style making us more satisfied with what is simple and essential?
- Are we sufficiently on our guard against the risk of consumerism?
- How can our ears remain sympathetic to the poor when the noise of the world deafens us to their voice and our way of life is different from theirs?
- Has our association with the poor led us to serious reflection on the society in which we live?

### **Faith Sharing**

### **Concluding prayer**

Over the great city,  
Where the wind rustles through the parks and gardens,  
In the air, the high clouds brooding,  
In the lines of street perspective, the lamps, the traffic,  
The pavements and the innumerable feet upon them,  
I Am: make no mistake.  
Do not be deluded.

Think not because I do not appear at the first glance,  
because the centuries have gone by  
and there is no assured tidings of me  
that therefore I am not there.  
Think not because all goes its own way  
that therefore I do not go my own way through all.  
The fixed bent of hurrying faces in the street,  
each turned towards its own light, seeing no other,  
yet I am the Light towards which they all look.  
The toil of so many hands to such multifarious ends,  
yet my hand knows the touch and twining of them all.

All come to me at last.  
There is no love like mine;

For all other love takes one and not another;  
And other love is pain, but this is joy eternal.  
**Edward Carpenter (1844-1929)**

## **Cory, the Heart of a Saint**

### **Brother Armin A. Luistro FSC**

*Homily delivered on 02 August 2009, 8:00 PM  
at the La Salle Greenhills Gymnasium*

Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God. . . As the world continues to bestow accolades on Corazon Cojuangco Aquino and as the Nation gathers in solemn rites before her mortal remains we cannot help but recall that God is truly with us here and now. Her mortal remains remind us of a time in the not-so-distant-past when we saw with our own eyes the hand of God in our nation's history. The biblical stories of old were nothing but myths to me until I saw with my own eyes how tanks can be stopped by unarmed civilians, guns can be silenced with flowers, and dictators can flee from the power of prayer.

The prophetic vision of Jaime Cardinal Sin and the courage of Corazon Cojuangco Aquino transformed this nation paralyzed by fear into a nation of everyday heroes. At EDSA, we prayed with all our hearts and blessed it with our tears and hallowed the streets with our faith. The world stood in silence and awe at this Biblical story recreated in our own eyes and written in its entirety by ordinary Filipinos who allowed the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to work His mighty wonders in our own land and in our own time. If we honor Cory tonight, it is because she has kept that memory alive in our hearts so we can share our journeys of faith to our children and our children's children. God is not dead and Cory's mortal remains are living proof of that. The Nation should be eternally grateful to Balsy, Pinky, Noynoy, Viel and Kris for generously sharing the gift of their mother to us, for those who are nearest and dearest to her must have shared the pain and the cost of her life's sacrifices. We have not thanked them enough. And for this distinct privilege and honor to receive her in this campus, now her home, we owe the family a debt of gratitude for, indeed, this place has been transformed into sacred ground and when we bid her goodbye tomorrow, this place will never be the same again. I sincerely pray that those of us, who pay our respects now, can also say we will never be the same again.

*PASASALAMAT. Ang gabing ito ay isang gabi ng pasasalamat para sa ating pinakamamahal na Ina. Ang ating mga dilaw na laso ang magsisilbing alay ng bayan at ng ordinaryong Pilipino para sa maningning na liwanag ng katotohanan, kalayaan at katarungan na kanyang pinangalagaan at ngayon nama'y ipinagkakatiwala na sa atin. Malaki ang ating utang-naloob sa kanya at hinding-hindi natin siya malilimutan.*

As her mortal remains entered the halls of this campus, the heavens poured as though to share our grief. The heavy downpour, however, has not dampened the spirits of those who have patiently waited in line, some traveling from distant provinces and some for as long as three hours, to pay their last respects to President Cory and to give thanks for the magnanimity of heart that allowed her to endure many trials and sacrifices for the sake of the nation. It is for our sake that she bore them all. She bears the wounds of her sufferings; her heart has scars to show for them. She is battered but not defeated. And in her powerlessness ordinary Filipinos will surely

find the strength to rise as a noble nation, proud of its heritage and secure in its future. Our immense debt of gratitude stems not only from the acts of sacrifice and courage that she did for the country; it is also about what she has been for us—a pillar of strength and a moral compass for the Nation; a guiding light that constantly rekindles our passion to uphold the democratic values and morals that Filipinos hold dear.

Tonight, I stand in awe and profound gratitude at the person we have come to know through the years simply as Tita Cory. In an interview before she hid from the public eye, she said, “*Ako’y nagpapasalamat sa Panginoong Diyos na ginawa niya akong isang Pilipino.*” Can we say the same with the passion and conviction of Tita Cory? We can only truly show how truly grateful we are to her if we understand and live that conviction.

*PANGUNGULILA. Ang gabing ito ay isang gabi ng pangungulila. Ang mga anak ng bayan ay nagluluksa sa pagpanaw ng isang ginigiliw na Ina. Sa kanyang paglisan, hinaharap rin natin ang kaba na baka tuluyan nang maglaho ang ating mga pangarap at inaasam-asam at matagal nang ipinaglalaman. Maaari pa ba tayong tumayo, kung wala na siya?*

After her death, TIME Magazine posted this article in their website entitled People Power’s Philippine Saint: Corazon Aquino 1933-2009. This is what it says: “Whenever the country appeared to be in a crisis, Cory Aquino rose above the bureaucratic procrastination that had always bogged it down, reminding her people that they once astonished the world with their bravery—and that they could do it again. But Filipinos must now take stock. Whom will they march with now that their saint has gone to meet her God?” How could I forget her when, after the De La Salle Brothers issued a statement expressing our grave concern on the conduct of the last national elections, we felt all alone and perhaps much maligned in that conviction. Did anyone really care? Would it have been better if we remained silent? But she stood by us, supported us. She marched with us and even in the dark nights of our frustrations when we felt defeated, she reminded us that victory will surely come not in our time, but in God’s time. But we must now take stock. Whom will we march with now that our saint has gone to meet her God? I certainly wish I had an answer to my grief.

*PANANAMPALATAYA. Nguni’t ang gabing ito ay isang gabi rin ng pananampalataya. Sa kanyang katauhan ay nakilala ko ang tunay na diwa ng kabanalan: isang taimtim na pagnanam ng dakilang kabutihan ng Diyos na nagbubunga sa walang pakundangang pagtataya ng sarili. Ipinakita niya ito sa puso at sa diwa, sa salita at sa gawa.*

Cory exemplified how to live sanctity in the modern world. She showed us the virtue of remaining steadfast in our faith in the midst of our daily struggles. In her life, in her sufferings and now in death, she has taught me that my faith must necessarily bear fruit in action. She has taught me that from the cathedral we must return to the streets. But she has also taught me that all of our struggles can only find meaning if I can learn to kneel down in prayer and patiently wait for God’s time. She has left me with a lasting conviction that whatever we do and whatever we fight for is not our work alone. Lord, the work is yours!

She has taught us that those of us who dream impossible dreams can find their sanctity in the sure hope that God is on our side and that, no matter how hopeless, we should fight for the right, yes, without question or pause. Like her, we should be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause. What woman will dare do that unless she lives in the conviction that it is God

who leads? I have thought before and now am more convinced in my heart of hearts that before us is a saint for the modern times. Not in the canonical sense, and surely not a saint on a pedestal or confined to the pious devotions of a cathedral, but one who lived her faith in the marketplace and found her life's meaning in God's promise: *Cory, hindi ka nag-iisa*. She shows all of us that the heart of patriotism resides in a passionate love for God. She shows all of us that our love for God must find its expression in our love for our fellow men and women. Were we wrong? Why should saints remain in the cathedrals? Why should activists just struggle in the streets? Why should saints be perfect—devoid of human weakness? Why should activists think that there is no God? *Ipinakita niya sa atin na ang tunay na Pilipino ay tapat na Kristiyano*.

Now she has come home, back in the loving embrace of the God she loves and the God she has dedicated her life to. She has run the race; she has loved God and Country passionately. Love covers a multitude of sins. She has kept the faith. From hereon it is up to us to continue the good fight. That is what we are called to do now. As our Saint watches over us, let us continue her fight to promote and defend the values for which she lived for.

*Paalam, pinakamamahal naming Ina.*

May the God of Benigno Aquino, Jr., Jaime Cardinal Sin, Corazon Cojuangco Aquino, continue to walk with us on our journey of faith.

## *Homily of Fr. Catalino Arévalo, S.J.*

*at the requiem mass of President Corazon Aquino*

*August 5, 2009*

If I may first ask pardon for what might be an unseemly introduction. In the last days of President Cory's illness, when it seemed inevitable that the end would come, the assignment to give this homily was given to me by Ms Kris Aquino. In fact, She reminded me that many times and publicly, her mother had said she was asking me to preach at her funeral Mass. Always I told her I was years older, and would go ahead of her, but she would just smile at this. Those who knew Tita Cory knew that when she had made up her mind, she had made up her mind.

What then is my task this morning? I know for certain that if liturgical rules were not what they are, she would have asked Congressman Ted Locsin to be here in my place. No one has it in him to speak as fittingly of Cory Aquino in the manner and measure of tribute she uniquely deserves, no one else as he. Asked in an interview she said that the address before the two Houses of Congress at Washington she considered perhaps the supreme shining moment of her life. We know who helped her with those words with which she conquered America. These last few days, too, every gifted writer in the press and other media has written on her person and political history, analyzed almost every side of her life and achievement as our own "icon of democracy". More powerfully even, images of her and of EDSA UNO have filled hour after hour of TV time. Really, what else is left to be said?

So, Tita Cory, you'll forgive me if I don't even try to give a shadow of the great oration that should be given here this morning. Let me instead try to say some things the people who persevered for hours on end in the serried lines at Ortigas or here in Intramuros can (I hope) more easily follow. This is a lowly tribute at one with "the old sneakers and clothes made tighter by age, soaked by water and much worse for wear" of the men, women and children who braved the rain and the sun because they wanted to tell you, even for a brief and hurried moment, how much they love you. You truly "now belong among the immortals". But these words are for those mortals who with bruised hearts have lost "the mother of a people". Maybe less elegantly than the seminarian said to me Monday, they would like to say also: "She was the only true queen our people have ever had, and she was queen because we knew she truly held our hearts in the greatness and the gentleness of her own."

One of my teachers used to tell us that if we really wanted to know and understand a position held, we would have to learn it from someone fully committed to it. Just as only one who genuinely loves a person, really knows him or her also. So to begin with, I turned to three real "experts on Cory"; to ask them where for them the true greatness of Cory Aquino lay. My first source thought it was in her **selflessness**, seen above all in her love of country - surely above self; yes, even above family. Her self-giving, then, for us; what she had received, all became gift for us. The second, thought it was in her faith her greatness lay, in her **total trust in God** which was also her greatest strength. And the third said it was in her **courage and the unshakable loyalty** that went with it. It was a strength others could lean on; it never wavered; it never broke. . . . . Cory's selflessness and self-giving; her faith (the Holy Father just called it "unwavering"); her courage, her strength. -- May I use this short list to frame what I will say? O, let me name my

experts now, if I may. They were three, all of them women close to her: Maria Elena Aquino Cruz, whom we know as Ballsy, Maria Aurora Aquino Abellada, Pinky to her friends; and Victoria Elisa Aquino Dee, Viel to the family. Kris and Noynoy are the public figures; they can speak for themselves. I hope they will forgive me that I did not ask.

First, then, her generous selflessness. For us this morning what is surely most to the point is her love of country. When her final illness was upon her already, she said, -- most recently at the Greenmeadows chapel (her last public words, I think) --that she was offering her suffering, first to God, then for our people. I heard that grandson Jiggy asked her why first for country and people, and she said that always the priority line-up was God, our country and our people, and then family. On radio, the other night, the commentator asked an old woman in line why she stood hours in the rain to get into La Salle. “Ito lang ang maibibigay ko po sa kanya, bilang pasasalamat.” “Bakit, ano ba ang ibinigay ni Cory sa inyo?” “Di po ba ang buhay nya? Ang buong sarila nya? At di po ba ang pagasa? Kaya mahal na mahal po namin siya.” Early on, on TV, they ran many times the clip from a last interview. She says, “I thank God, and then all of you, for making me a Filipino, for making me one of you. I cherish this as one of the truly great gifts I have received.” A few weeks from her death, she could say that; without put-on or the least insincerity. “I thank you, for making me one of you..”

Her selflessness, her self-gift. Pope Benedict likes to say that the God whom Jesus Christ revealed to us, is Father. A Father who is wholly self-gift; the God “whose nature is to give Himself” – to give Himself to us, in His Son. And, the Pope says, that is what is the meaning of Jesus and the life of Jesus, and, by discipleship, what the Christian’s life is meant to be. We Christians too, we must give ourselves away in the self-giving of love. “Ang buhay po nya at sarili. Kaya po mahal na mahal namin sya.” In the last days, when finally and reluctantly still she admitted she had much pain, I kept thinking that only a couple of weeks before, for the first time publicly, she said that she was offering it up first of all for us.”

Secondly, her faith. Pinky says, it was her mother’s greatest strength; it was what was deepest in her. Her faith was her bedrock, and it was, bedrock . Frederick Buechner the ordained minister and novelist likes to say that through his lifetime, he’s had many doubts, even deep doubt, daily doubts. “But I have never really looked down into the deep abyss and seen only nothing. Somehow I have known, that underneath all the shadows and the darkness, there are the everlasting arms.” I think Cory’s faith was like that, not in the multiplicity of doubts (even if, in a life so filled with trial, there surely were doubts too), but in the certainty of the everlasting arms. More than once she told me, “Every time life painted me into a corner, with seemingly no escape, I always turned to Him in trust. I knew He would never abandon us if we trusted in Him. And you know, somehow, He found a way out for us.” And so Pinky says, “Mom was always calm even in the most trying times. She trusted God would always be there for us, She was our source of strength. She made this world seem so much safer and less cruel for us. And now that our source of strength is gone, we have to make our faith something more like hers. But we know in our hearts that in every storm she will watch over us from heaven.”

Within this faith was her devotion to Mary, the place Our Lady of Fatima and the rosary held in her life. All we can say on this, this morning is that Our Lady truly had a special, living presence in her life: Mary was, for Cory, true mother and incomparable friend; as we say in the hymn, - vita, dulcedo et spes, - life, sweetness and hope. No, Mary was not the center of her faith, but its air, its atmosphere; and the rosary, her lifeline through every trial and crisis. In the

long harsh months of her illness, Sister Lucia's beads almost never left her hands. She was holding them, as last Saturday was dawning and her years of exile were at last done, when we know her Lady "showed unto her, the blessed fruit of her womb."

Lastly. Her courage, her strength. Her children tell us that their father was only able to do what he wanted to do, because her loyalty and her support for his purposes was total, so she practically raised them up as a single parent. Ninoy himself wrote, again and again, that he endured imprisonment and persecution, leaning so much on her courage and love. And after his death, when she could have withdrawn in a way "safely", to her own life with her children at last, she stayed on her feet and fought on in the years that followed, through the snap elections and what went before and after them, through her presidency and the seven coup attempts which tried to bring her down. Even after she had given up her rule, could she not have said "enough", and we would all have understood? But with not the least desire for position or power again, whenever she thought the spaces of freedom and the true good of our land were threatened, she went back to the streets of struggle again. Once again she led us out of the apathy we so readily fall into; once again she called us out of our comfort zones to the roads of sacrifice.

Here, even hesitantly, may I add one trait, one virtue, -- to those her daughters have named? One day Cardinal Stephen Kim of South Korea asked if he might visit her. Through Ballsy, she said Yes. It was a day Malacanang was 'closed'; they were making up the roster of members of the forthcoming Constitutional Convention. Someone from the palace staff ordered us turned away when we came; it was Ballsy who rescued us. Stephen Kim, hero and saint to his own people,--perhaps, along with Cardinal Sin, one the two greatest Asian Catholic prelates of our time,- = spent some 45 minutes talking with her. When we were on our way back, he said, "I know why the Lord has entrusted her with power, at this most difficult time. ... It is because she is pure of heart. She has no desire for power; even now it is with reluctance she takes it on. And she has done this only because she wants to do whatever she can for your people." He said, "she truly moves me by the purity of her spirit. God has given a great gift to your people."

With this purity of heart, in the scheme of the Christian Gospel, there is joined another reality which really, only the saints understand. It is suffering. How often (it is really often; over and over through the years) she spoke of suffering as part of her life. Much contemporary spirituality speaks of suffering almost as the epitome of all evil. But in fact for all the saints, it is a mystery they themselves do not really understand nor really explain, Yet they accept it quietly, simply as part of their lives in Christ. There is only one painting she ever gave me. Kris said then, when her mom gave it to me, that it was her mom's favorite. The painting carries 1998 as its date; Cory named it "Crosses and roses" There are seven crosses for the seven months and seven weeks of her beloved Ninoy's imprisonment, and for the seven attempted coups during her presidency, and many roses, multi-colored roses all around them. At the back of the painting, in her own hand, she wrote a haiku of her own: "Crosses and roses/ make my life more meaningful./ I cannot complain." Often she spoke of her "quota of suffering." When she spoke of her last illness, she said: "I thought I had filled up my quota of suffering, but it seems there is no quota. I look at Jesus, who was wholly sinless: how much suffering he had to bear for our sakes." And in her last public talk (it was at Greenmeadows chapel), the first time she spoke of her own pain: "I have not asked for it, but if it is meant to be part of my life still, so be it. I will not complain." "I try to join it with Jesus' pain and offering. For what it's worth, I am offering it up for our people." Friends here present, I tell you honestly I hesitated before going into this, this

morning. But without it, part of the real Cory Aquino would be kept from view. Quite simply, this was integral to the love she bore for her people.

At this point, may I, following the lead Mr Rapa Lopa has given, just speak a word of thanks to President Cory's children, who shared so much of her service and her sacrifice. They have almost never had their father and mother for themselves. For so many years, they have been asked to share Ninoy and Cory with all of us. And because of the blood and the spirit their parents have passed on to them, they too gave with generosity and grace the sacrifices we demanded of them. – Ballsy and Pinky, Viel and Kris, your husbands and your children, and Senator Noynoy, may we thank you this morning from all our hearts, and may we offer also the gratitude of the hearts of a people now forever in your debt.

I have used up all my time, some of you will say, and I have not even approached the essential: her political life, that she was our nation's unique icon of democracy, that Cory Aquino who, throughout the world, was TIME magazine's 1986's woman of the year, she who led the ending of the dictatorship that had ruined our nation, the bearer of liberation, of freedom, and of hope for a prostrate people. So, by your leave, may I add one item, along this line at last. In October 1995, Milano's Catholic University, conferred on her the doctorate honoris causa in the political sciences (incidentally, only her twenty-third honorary degree). This was only the fifth time this particular one had been given since the university's inception: the first time to an Asian, the first ever to a woman. She wanted, at the end of her lectio magistralis, to spell out, perhaps for the first time with some explicitness and completeness, her personal political creed. She listed seven basic beliefs which, regarding political life, she said she tried to live by. Then she spoke of one more, "one more I may not omit." Perhaps the paragraph which followed is worth citing here, even without comment, because it has something to say to our present hour.

(We cite her words now.) I believe that the vocation of politics must be accepted by those who take up the service of leadership as a vocation in its noblest meaning: it demands all of life. For the life of one who would lead his or her people, -- in our time as never before, -- such a life must strive for coherence with the vision aspired to, or else that vision itself and its realization are already betrayed. That vision must itself be present, in some authentic way, in those who seek to realize it: present, in the witness of their example; present, in a purity of heart vis-à-vis the exercise and usages of power; present, in an ultimate fidelity to principle, in a dedication that is ready to count the cost in terms of "nothing less than everything." It is Cardinal Newman, I believe, who said that in this world, we do good only in the measure that we pay for it in the currency of our own lives. For us Christians, there is always the image of Jesus, and the price his service demanded of him. And for me there has been, as a constant reminder, the sacrifice my husband offered, and the word that it has spoken, to me and my people." (Cory Aquino, end of citation)

## **Conclusion**

With all this said, I am done. Ma'am, tapos na po ang assignment ko. It has been so hard to do what you asked. But I comfort myself that these so many words really do not matter. What counts in the end is really – what all this week has been; these past few days' outpouring of our people's gratitude and love; what will come after all this today; what we will do, in the times ahead, in fidelity to your gift. I received a text last night from a man of some age and with some history behind him. "She made me proud again, to be Filipino." Maybe that says it all., Cardinal Sin used to put it somewhat differently. "What a gift God has given our people, in giving Cory Aquino to us." The nobility and courage of your spirit, the generosity of your heart, the grace and graciousness that accompanied you always. They called it "Cory magic" – but it was the truth, and the purity and beauty, clear and radiant within you, that we saw. And the hope that arose from that. And when the crosses came to you and you did not refuse to bear them, more to be one with your Christ and one with your people and their pain. "Blessed are the pure of heart; for they Shall see God."

Thank you Father in heaven, for your gift to us of Cory Aquino. Thank you that she passed once this way through our lives with the grace you gave her to share with us. If we give her back to you, we do it with hearts of thanksgiving, but now, oh, with breaking hearts also, because of the greatness and beauty of the gift which she was for us, the likes of which, perhaps, we shall not know again. *Salamat po, Tita Cory, mahal na mahal po namin kayo.*

-----

*"that in all things god may be glorified"*