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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial

page 2

**STATIO CONFERENCE
H U M I L I T Y**

by Olinda Priory

page 3

**Excerpts from
"HOPE COMES FIRST"
BY Rev. Jack Paleczny**

page 5

**HOW THE MASSACRE CAME TO BE: ANALYSIS
By Toto Causing**

page 8

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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

In spite of the disasters and horrendous events that happened in the year 2009, we dare to greet each other: A HAPPY NEW YEAR OF HOPE. Yes, there are things we hope to happen this new year:

We hope there will really emerge a new political leadership that will have a serious concern for the people.

We hope that this will not only be a change of persons but that this new leadership will initiate mechanisms of change that will result in systemic and fundamental transformation of governance.

We hope there will be effective and serious efforts to curb corruption in all levels of society.

We hope there will be created well paying jobs to give purchasing power to many and to lessen migrant workers.

We hope that there will be genuine land reform to end the centuries old misery of our farmers and to have them engage in adequate food production.

We hope that enough schools be built so that all our children will be able to go to school and develop into good citizens of our country.

We hope that we will be spared from natural disasters and that if these would come that our government is better equipped and better prepared to meet the emergency.

SO WE HOPE FOR THE BEST BUT SHOULD NEVERTHELESS PREPARE FOR THE WORST.

Sincerely yours,



Sister Mary John Manangan, OSB

125TH JUBILEE STATIO CONFERENCE

HUMILITY

By Olinda Priory

“Clothe yourselves with humility, because God is stern with the arrogant but to the humble he shows kindness” (I Pt 5:5, Prv 3:34).

Humility is a specifically Christian virtue, founded already in the First Testament. In Sacred Scripture we encounter men and women who suffered humiliations. This experience caused them to grow in this virtue (*virtus*), that is, in the strength or power which comes from God. They recognized that everything comes from God and placed all their hope in God. Thus they felt strong in God. From this strength grows the readiness to serve God and the brothers and sisters, especially those marginalized. Their example shows us that humility is truth, and that this truth urges us on to love.

In the New Testament we meet even more striking examples of humility. The Son of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, humbled himself by taking on our flesh, that is, our earthly body, our weak human nature. Thus we can more easily realize that we are strong, identified with the Son, in Him and Through Him in the Triune God.

Christ Jesus “though he was in the form of God, did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8). The humility of Jesus is not only a trait of his humanity. Rather, it is a characteristic of his very Being. He tells his disciples: “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29).

Next to Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, we can point to Mary in the New Testament. She did not glory in being the mother of the Messiah, but considered herself the Lord’s servant. In the childhood story we meet Simeon, the servant of the Lord, who can depart in peace after having been allowed to see the light which illumines the gentiles. Then there is the prophetess Hannah, who served God in fasting and prayer. She praised God and talked about the child to all who waited for redemption. The humility which marked these people of the New Testament is revealed in their unshakable faith, in attentive listening, in docility to the inspirations of the Spirit of God and in their readiness to spread the Good News to others.

For the monks of old, humility was the meaning and goal of all asceticism. It was regarded not so much as a separate virtue, but rather as an attitude which permeated all the virtues. In studying the Rule of Saint Benedict, we realize that the various components of monastic life should be marked by humility:

OBEDIENCE is the highest degree of humility (RB 5:1).

PRAYER to the God of the cosmos must be made in all humility and pure devotion (RB 20:2).

SERVICE to the brothers is to be given modestly and with humility (RB 31:7, 13).

WORK which is entrusted to us, must be performed with all humility (RB 57:1).

For Saint Benedict, HUMILITY is one of the three great virtues of a monk, comprising the basis of our spirituality along with OBEDIENCE and LOVE OF SILENCE. Benedict placed Chapters Five and Six, dealing with these topics, just before the longest chapter of his rule, that on humility. This shows us the priority that humility has for him. Chapter Seven is a very detailed chapter, a summary of the ascetical life, a full description of the monastic way.

According to Cassian, the way to perfection begins with the fear of God and progresses towards the love of God, which casts out fear. On this spiritual way described by Cassian, there are ten indicators of humility. Three are related to obedience, two to patience, three to self-denial, and two to love of silence. All these indicators of humility are related to humility in dealing with our neighbor. All the virtues together make up this way. They are part of the ascetical effort, which is inspired by the grace of love. This is first of all God's work, but then also the fruit of our efforts.

Saint Benedict uses the image of the ladder: The first and last steps are concerned with God, with the fear of God, to be more precise. The monastic cultivates a humble attitude in her/his life, looking towards God. Fear of God means a profound reverence towards the Lord, whose word is listened to with respect, and whose command is fulfilled with love. To do the will of the Father means following the example of the Lord, becoming obedient even to death. The love of God urges us to do so (2nd and 3rd step). Sincere admission of faults will foster humility, which hopes for the Lord's mercy and forgiveness (5th step). It is not easy to determine whether a person is truly humble. Humility grows from the core of the person and is revealed by our attitudes (4th and 6th step).

Striving for humility is an adventure. It is the effort of going down to the very bottom of our being, to the truth about ourselves. We must struggle against the power of pride, which wants to pull us upward. When God wants to lift us up in grace, the humiliations start. To keep us from pride, God anchors us, keeps us down through circumstances which humble us, which help us recognize what we truly are: weak, limited beings inclined to evil.

Humility is realism, recognition of our condition as a creature dependent on God. What do I have that has not been given to me? Or, as Benedict put it: "If you notice something good in yourself, give credit to God, not to yourself, but be certain that the evil you commit is always your own and yours to acknowledge" (RB 4:42-43). A correct self-evaluation, therefore, means recognizing our nothingness. In this nothingness we can experience the action of God. We must become empty of self so that God can dwell within us.

As Saint Benedict presents it, humility does not moralize or preach. When we descend into our own depths, into the darkness of our own shadow, our subconscious motives, we rise up to God, to the goal of all spiritual paths. On the 12th step of humility, Benedict points out the example of the publican who places his trust in God, recognizes himself as a sinner, and surrenders to the mercy of God. This is why he returned to his house justified (Lk 18:13-14).

On the way of humility, a person rises to contemplation. Christ descended to us so that we, through him, can rise up to God. This thought made Augustine refer to Christ as “our ladder.” The aim of this ascent is union with God. In the 6th to 12th steps of humility, Benedict no longer points out an ascetical way, but a mystical path, a contemplative way of experiencing God. It is God himself who erects this ladder that unites us to him, which leads our life to perfection in heaven.

The 12 steps of humility lead us to human maturity, to community with our brothers and sisters and to God, with whom we can become one in contemplation.

Guide Questions for Reflection:

1. The text of the conference names some biblical characters—models of humility. There are many more. Which of them are important in your life as a Missionary Benedictine Sister?
2. How is our life as Missionary Benedictine Sisters determined by humility today? (See RB 20:2; RB 31:7, 13; RB 57:1)
3. How do we practice humility nowadays, and how can we be examples of humility for our candidates?

**Excerpts from
“HOPE COMES FIRST”
BY Rev. Jack Paleczny**

The theme that I chose, or the title for today’s sermon, is **HOPE COMES FIRST**.

HOPE is the beginning of our Christian life. Some people may think of it as the crown of our Christian life, that after we have lived in this world and have been faithful to the call of Christ, that our hope will be fulfilled eternally in God’s kingdom. But in fact it is at the beginning because it is the foundation on which everything else in our Christian life is built. We believe that God made a promise to us and we believe that God is faithful to that promise. It is not that we go looking for God, but that God came looking for us. And so here we are again celebrating how God is faithful to His promises. We know that the celebration of Christmas does not mean really that Jesus is going to be born on Christmas. We celebrate our own birthdays and we don’t expect that we are going to go back somehow to the day we were born and that our life starts over. We know that each birthday makes another year forward; another year of progress;

another year of age. Sometimes significant birthdays make us pause and reflect and think about how things have gone – when we finally turn 16 – or when we get old at age 30 – or when we can finally retire at age 65! These are birthdays that are designated as being somehow significant, but really the day of our birthday is no different than any other day that we’ve lived in all that time, is it? We make it significant by remembering it, by attributing that significance to it. That’s really what Christmas is for us – it is not that Jesus is going to be born at Christmastime, it’s that we are remembering that Jesus was born and lived and died and rose and in that life he shared God’s life with us in a new way that touches us again and again and again in our lives.

So, when we are thinking about HOPE, there are some images that I would like to give. One is based on this premise, that HOPE is really a virtue, a Christian virtue, only when the situation is totally hopeless. If you have hope that it is going to snow – as one of the children said – that it is going to snow at Christmastime- well that isn’t really hopeless, is it? We can put some money on that one – that it is going to snow, or that summer is going to come around in another six months, we know that it is going to happen. It doesn’t take a lot of hope to believe that, does it? But really HOPE is a Christian virtue when everything around is absolutely hopeless. I have in mind a kind of a metaphor, or an image of a person in a really deep pit – a sand pit-and they’re sitting at the bottom of this pit, and they don’t know how they can ever get out, and if they look up, they can barely see the edge and they’re sitting there so hopeless that they don’t even want to try. Maybe you’ve had the experience that lack of HOPE in your life, and then as people get some idea that they would like to get out of this pit and they start to climb, they find that in fact the walls are made of sand, and as they put their hand on it and pull it down, it comes down and they can’t get a grip with their foot, and no matter how much energy they spend it is just hopeless. You see, that’s what we are talking about – utter and complete hopelessness where nothing helps – nothing that someone can say—no gift or present that someone would give us can change, can make it hopeful again. Then, when we start to have HOPE in the promises of God, it’s because we absolutely, **absolutely need** what God has promised us.

I said something a few weeks ago about the experience for people who have cancer, who have cancer in their own bodies, or in their own families and certainly that includes just about all of us, who know some family member or friend who had faced the challenge of cancer. Since it seemed to make a connection for so many of you then, I’d like to continue in that vein. Cancer can feel so hopeless. We can feel so powerless in the face of cancer, we can feel like a victim that has been overwhelmed by the enemy with no hope of victory. And yet our hope can teach us a perspective. I would like to share with you this little poem, this little insight (and I have to be truthful, it comes from Ann Landers..) It is called “What Cancer Cannot Do”

Cancer is so limited ...
it cannot cripple Love ...
it cannot shatter Hope...
it cannot corrode Faith ...
it cannot destroy Peace...
it cannot kill Friendship ...
it cannot suppress Memories ...
it cannot silence Courage ...
it cannot invade the Soul ...
it cannot steal Eternal Life!

That little reflection gives us a sense of what HOPE feels like in that situation. And just as we were driving here this morning, driving through the sunlight, I said to Dianna Lynn, “I just got a metaphor that makes all this make sense. HOPE is like being able to see the Big Picture”. You know when you get caught up in something, when something is troubling you, a health concern or a family concern, that little thing niggles at you, right? It bothers you, it upsets you and sometimes it is helpful to step back and try to find the Big Picture.

We have often asked ourselves in the midst of difficult times – what difference will it make 10 years from now? The things that seem so very important, we probably will have forgotten that we were ever concerned about them, right? It gives a bigger perspective. HOPE gives us that bigger picture, it gives the sense that even what we are facing now has some limits to it, even though it feels so overwhelming, even though it feels like it controls us, like it is the victor and we are the victim. Our HOPE is for the bigger picture, and for the bigger picture of our faith. It is truly spiritual hoping. I should say this too, it is not just a feeling, not just an emotion, but HOPE is more spiritual in the sense that it involves our whole person, certainly our thoughts, our intellect and our whole being, but we can choose, in a very difficult situation to be hopeful. Even when it feels not hopeful, we can choose to be hopeful. In fact, there is a whole counseling theory called Rational Emotive Therapy – that says that basically we can help people to think a new way of feeling. If you start thinking that way, you will eventually start feeling that way. At first it is an act of will where you actually choose to think in a hopeful way and then it is like you are re-patterning your brain, even touching a bit of your emotions and getting them in line with what you really believe is the meaning of life; the purpose of life; the value of life; the ultimate goal of life. When you get that straight in your head and let that filter down into your emotions and your thoughts and your being and your actions and your relationships, then what you are doing is living by HOPE!

As I said at the beginning, that is the foundation of Christian life – then the other things follow. We make those choices for **Peace**, we can open our hearts to **Joy**, we can live in **Love** because we have established the firm foundation of **Hope**; that whatever happens to us here, God is with us and present with us. Whatever we experience here, God experiences with us, in us, through us and for us – so let’s continue now with our Celebration of HOPE!

HOW THE MASSACRE CAME TO BE: ANALYSIS

By Toto Causing

You must know that Norberto Gonzales as Defense Secretary is a “terror” operator and if he is to work with political operator Ronaldo Puno, they become a dreaded pair. Remember that Gonzales came from National Intelligence Security Agency, from where came the Vidal Doble who taped Garcillano’s talks with Gloria. Also remember that Puno (the bad one) was instrumental in making Miriam Santiago lose to FVR and in Garci operations in Mindanao.

You must also know that before the Ampatuan massacre, there were hell-bent planning sessions on how Gloria could possibly hold over, de facto or de jure. They were looking at how they can foment war in Muslim areas to have a justification for sinister plots. Instead of launching war against MILF and MNLF which is expensive, what Gonzales did was to make “chismis” circulating between two possible warring clans. The timing was perfect because Datu Andal Sr. was so worried how he can stay in power because of the three-term limit. Andal Sr. even went to the Comelec in the province of Maguindanao to ask what should he do to enable him to run again for the 2010 elections. A “bobo” Comelec official advised him to take a leave. Another Comelec official advised him to resign. Confused, Andal Sr. went to Malacanang and asked an Arroyo confidante what to do. And Andal was told that the only way for him to hold on to power is to prevent elections there from happening. And he was advised to do what is necessary. I do not know what was the advise, but I surmised that he was egged on not to give in to the Mangudadatus who were hell bent on grabbing power from hi, In short “binatirya” or “tsinismis patalikod ang mga Mangudadatu kay Andal na aagawin ang poder sa kanila” And once the power was taken over, the Mangudadatus would take revenge for the earlier raids done on them resulting in seizure of firearms;

Obsessed with desire to keep power revved up by “chismis”, the Ampatuans harbored deep hatred and extreme fear of losing power. And to ensure that no election shall occur, the killings should be done with extreme brutality to justify “martial law, a condition when no election can be held in the province. They were only looking at killing and burying to nowhere the Mangudadatus and families so that they would only be recorded as missing and would be charged against the rebels or Abu Sayyaf, not thinking they would be including 30 journalists in their plan for they did not think that Mangudadatu would ask for the help of media men. And if there would be martial law, the Ampatuans stay in power under the hold-over principle. But their game plot failed during the execution. Thank God: before they knew it, Toto Mangudadatu was able to know the abduction because his wife was able to call him up, prompting Toto Mangudadatu to call for army assistance; the soldiers responded quick enough that forced the killers to escape even though the other victims were not yet buried, leading to the discovery of the plan, thus the execution failed. The original plot was just to make it appear that the victims disappeared mysteriously so that it can be blamed to heightened rebellion that would justify attacks on MILF which, in turn, would justify martial law.

Until here, I believe I have answered now the question why it should be as brutal as this. It was the Ampatuans who did the act and planned the act. The Gloria government only happened to have benefited from it to justify martial rule.

What would be the net effect when martial law gains momentum in Maguindanao? It will embolden the Gloria machines to do the same in other Muslim provinces: (a) Wahab Akbar's family vs Gerry Salappudin's in Basilan; (b) Sakur Tan clan vs Tupay Loong clan in Sulu; (c) Jaafar clan vs opponents in Tawi-Tawi; (d) Dimaporo clan in Lanao Norte against a challenging clan; and (e) many clans in Lanao Sur.

If Norberto Gonzales would have his way, he wanted all of them to fight each other to justify martial law in the rest of Muslim provinces. Remember that the total number of votes in these provinces is substantially big enough to cause suspension of proclamation of winners in Presidential, Vice-Presidential and Senatorial races.

So that when proclamation cannot be had and it will be aggravated and prolonged by creative petitions and protest to be filed before the Comelec, the Speaker of the House (Gloria) would act as Acting President. Why? Since there would be no president, vice-president and senators who would be proclaimed, the Speaker takes over under the Constitution. Gloria would argue that the 12 present senators cannot choose a Senate President because it needs at least 13 votes to elect the Senate President. Another plus or bonus for them: The House of Representatives will approve to extend martial law by means of them voting together with the Senators where the senator's vote is only one. A dummy petition shall be filed to question the act of "voting jointly" by means of outnumbering the Senators; and hoping the Gloria-appointed-dominated Supreme Court would rule that "voting jointly" means lumping together the senators and congressmen and each of them has only ONE VOTE. And when the Supreme court would go Gloria's way, they would now implement House Resolution 1109 calling for the senators and congressmen to "vote jointly" for a CON-ASS to pave the way for a parliamentary government. This PLUS or BONUS may happen before or after the 2010 elections. If it happens after elections, the picture that you would see is that the leading candidates for president, vice-president and senators cannot be proclaimed because their margin of leads can still be overturned by the total votes in areas where voting would be deferred till eternity by Martial Law.

So that this is a GRIM POSSIBILITY.

Patriotically yours,
Toto Causing

(An earlier e-mail to Mr. Brinkley-Rogers by Mr. Causing, which appeared at a Pinoy discussion group online:)

Please feel free to circulate my analysis as you wish. I do not have any reason for me to be afraid of getting known as the author of this piece. To make this known the farthest it can and to the largest number of people possible, the better it is for the Philippines and the Filipinos.

This analysis becomes all the more necessary to be known because of the falsity and illogical premises relied on in placing Maguindanao province under the state of martial law. The manifestations displayed yesterday by Gloria and her minions show burning intention to pursue martial law are getting bolder. It now appears to be bordering on clear and present danger to democracy and the Filipino people. Obama and Hilary must know this to warn Gloria not to proceed with the sinister plot. Why will the Gloria cliché claim there is rebellion while stating at the same time in the premises of martial law proclamation that the territories being held by the rebel Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) shall be respected? To make this clear, let me quote the proclamation: “Sec.1: There is hereby declared a state of martial law in the province of Maguindanao except for the identified areas of Moro Islamic Liberation Front as referred to in the implementing operational guidelines of the GRP-MILF agreement on the General Cessation of Hostilities.” Moreover, MILF has been there existing and campaigning actively for more than a decade now yet in not one period in the past has martial law been proclaimed. In other words, it is very clear in the proclamation that the Gloria Arroyo Government is not referring to the MILF as the reason of rebellion that necessitates martial law.

Is it not clear that the purpose of the massacre was only to scare out or eliminate possible opponents in the upcoming elections for governor of the province in May 2010? Is it not clear that the Ampatuans had a clear intention to run for the elective posts up for grabs in that elections and as such there is no intention to deprive the national government to exercise authority in Maguindanao? Is it not clear that rebellion is an offense against the government only? Is it not clear that the massacre as committed, assuming to the persons of the victims, that the state’s interest in giving justice to massacre victims is only to keep its moral obligation to keep the peace and assuage the revolting conscience?

In sum, it is very clear that there is no rebellion. And the fact that the Gloria minions are insisting that there is rebellion and in fact arrested the Ampatuans on rebellion charges means my analysis is jibing with the clear intention to place Maguindanao under martial law to achieve the purpose of foiling the holding of elections in this place.

The situation of danger against Democracy and the People is **CLEAR AND PRESENT**.

So please, Sir Paul, disseminate to the largest possible audience my analysis ...