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St. Scholastica's Priory  
Manila

Dear Sisters,

We will celebrate this month -- INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY and this year is special because it is the 100<sup>th</sup> year of its proclamation. In the Philippines we are celebrating the whole month of March as Women's Month since its promulgation as such by Pres. Cory Aquino. We have so much to be thankful for. The Women's agenda has found a secure place in society worldwide. In the Philippines, the Women's Movement remains strong and has also made great strides especially in the passage of laws favorable to women. However sad to say, we still have a long way to go. We have not as yet achieved real gender equality; there are still discrimination of women and trafficking of women and many forms of violence against women. In spite of this, we have women who inspire the world with their courage. And I would like to focus here on HEIDI MENDOZA, who has mesmerized TV audiences with her clear, courageous and well documented testimony regarding anomalies in the AFP.

I first listened to Heidi about three years ago when she talked at the CEAP convention at Miriam College and already revealed her findings. But nothing got into the press. She was summoned as witness against General Garcia and in the 12 hearings, no one was interested. She called me up once and I went to a hearing with two other SFIC Sisters, Sr. Cres and Sr. Tess. And we were really the only ones in the courtroom with Garcia and his aide on the other side of the room. Nevertheless Heidi was grateful because she said the judges who were busy texting during the trial became very attentive when they saw nuns around.

And now her KAIROS has come. And she has inspired thousands of people with her courageous testimony. Her thorough analysis of the results of auditing the AFP corroborated also the revelations of Col. Rabusa. I think Heidi is an exemplar for all women and men in her INTEGRITY, RESPONSIBILITY and SENSE OF ACCOUNTABILITY—three virtues that are sadly lacking especially in government service today. May her example bring about the much needed changes in the system of governance in the country.

Sincerely yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

# STATIO CONFERENCE

## PEACE IS MY GIFT TO YOU. . .

By Sister M. Lydia Villegas, OSB

Dear Sisters,

I have not written in a long while. Mother Mary John's invitation that I write the Statio conference for March on peace left me a bit troubled as I asked why I should be the one to write on peace. For deep within, I know that the writer has a message to give when the topic is one she knows about and knows in the Biblical sense of experience.

When will I find the time to write a paper that not only comes from the heart, but which is likewise worthy of the readers—a paper based on Scriptures, a paper that invites reflection and dialog (conversatio), a paper that inspires the Sisters to genuine renewal, encourages them while challenging them to further walk the way of peace, a paper in short that is biblical, theological, phenomenological, a sharing that speaks to the readers heart to heart?

I shall follow the framework laid out by Mark Mayberry in his article "But the Fruit of the Spirit is Peace" and then weave in my own reflection, experience, and struggle to be a woman of peace. The following section was lifted fully from Mayberry's article.

### Introduction (1)

In the New Testament, the word "peace" is found at the beginning or end of every epistle except for James and 1st John. The breadth of its meaning is apparent when it is linked with "grace" (Romans 1:7), "life" (Romans 8:6), and "righteousness" (Romans 14:17). What are the different shades of meaning of this wonderful word?

*Romans 1:7, "...to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

*Romans 8:6, "...For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."*

*Romans 14:17, "...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*

The Biblical word "peace" signifies far more than merely the absence of war. It carries the idea of completeness and wholeness. It conveys a sense of inner-satisfaction and fulfillment. It communicates the idea of contentment and serenity. In its fullest sense, it expresses our hope of reconciliation and redemption.

In the Old Testament, the concept of peace is usually expressed by the Hebrew word *shalom* and its

derivatives. This was a typical greeting among the Hebrews. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says that "*shalom*, one of the most significant theological terms in Scripture, has a wide semantic range stressing various nuances of its basic meaning: totality or completeness. These nuances include fulfillment, completion, maturity, soundness, wholeness (both individual and communal), community, harmony, tranquility, security, well-being, welfare, friendship, agreement, success and prosperity."<sup>(1)</sup>

In the New Testament, the Greek word *eirene* [i-ray-nay] and its derivatives express the idea of peace. *Thayer* defines this word as "1. a state of national tranquility; exemption from the rage and havoc of war... 2. peace between individuals, i.e., harmony, concord... 3. after the Hebrew SHALOM, security, safety, prosperity... 4. specifically. The Messiah's peace... 5. according to a conception distinctly peculiar to Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is... 6. The blessed state of devout and upright men after death."<sup>(2)</sup>

*Bauer* says *eirene* refers to "1. peace, a. literally; b. figuratively, peace, harmony; c. order; 2. corresponding to Hebrew Shalom, welfare, health... in a farewell greeting ... A new and characteristic development is the combination of the Greek epistolary greeting *charein* with a Hebrew expression in the Pauline and post-Pauline letters: 'grace and peace'; 3. Since, according to the prophets, peace will be an essential characteristic of the messianic kingdom, Christian thought also frequently regards peace as nearly synonymous with messianic salvation."<sup>(3)</sup>

*The Revell Bible Dictionary* defines peace as "(1) Wholeness, unity, harmony; (2) prosperity, health, and fulfillment; (3) theologically, inner harmony and harmonious interpersonal relationships with others made possible by a personal relationship with God." In conclusion, "the Biblical concept of 'peace' is total and profound. It touches on our relationship with God, with our inner self, with other believers, and with the world at large. Biblically, peace is no mere absence of strife but the active experience of a harmony that promotes total well-being. Peace is always the product of God's active involvement in our lives, and God's intervention is essential, for sin has so marred individuals and society that strife is our constant companion. Only God's saving work can bring us an experience of his peace."<sup>(4)</sup>

## Reflections

In my nearly 44 years of religious living, there are some insights on peace and truths I hold dear that make for peace.

**1. PEACE IS A GIFT FROM GOD.** It is a fruit of the Spirit meaning that in Baptism each of us received the Spirit. According to Thomas Keating, the fruits are mere indications of God's presence at work in us in varying degrees and forms. Through the Fruits, the Spirit is becoming a reality in our lives (2, p. 13). Keating continues:

By manifesting the fruits in daily life we bear witness to the resurrection of Christ in a most profound manner. It is not so much preaching or teaching, but our rootedness in the Spirit that communicates Christ's life to the people around us—to our family, friends, and those with whom we work. If we are rooted in the Spirit, these fruits inevitably begin to appear. (2, ibid)

"The third Fruit of the Spirit is Peace. Peace is the pervasive sense of contentment that comes from being rooted in God while being fully aware of one's own nothingness." (2, *ibid*, 19)

- 2. PEACE IS A PROCESS.** Like anything that has been given to us by God in our being, peace becomes a concrete reality in our dealings with God, with self, with others, and with the created world in the degree that we allow God to take possession of us. For is it not our own self that is the primary hindrance to the things of God? The struggle is between allowing our God-self to take the upper hand in our thinking and doing and the dominance of our self-will.

The invitation to us is to be converted so that we may live. In the words of St. Benedict it is to return to God by obedience (3, p. 1) so that nothing is preferred to Christ. When God is at the center of our life, we show respect to the other, supporting with the greatest patience one another's weakness of body or behavior, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another. No one pursues what she judges better for herself, but instead what she judges better for someone else. Among themselves they show the pure love of sisters; to God, reverent love; to their superior, unfeigned and humble love. Nothing whatever is preferred to Christ and Christ will bring them all together to everlasting life. (3, p. 87)

- 3. DRAW CLOSE TO OUR DEEPEST CENTER WHERE THE GODHEAD IS.** Our God is a God of peace and harmony. We have been made into God's image. It is our inheritance. But sin entered human history and our personal history. And so from within us breaks out the debris of past hurts, resentments, insecurities, and whatever makes us unclean. To the degree that we have been cleansed, purified, and set free from the unruly passions that enslave us, the greater the opportunity there is of the God-in-us to manifest the qualities of God, the gifts and the fruits of the Spirit.
- 4. CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER CLEANSSES AND HEALS US.** When we allow ourselves to be naked before our God, surrendering to His love and mercy, we are liberated from our selfish and self-centered ways and God becomes our active Center.
- 5. PRAY FOR THE GRACE TO JUST BE.** Deep in my heart I pray for the grace to just BE before the Lord, making no excuses for my limitations but accepting them and begging God for mercy.
- 6. PEACE COMES FROM SURRENDERING TO GOD'S WILL.** The peace that God gives us, that is the peace the world cannot give comes from my surrender to God's will. When I will only what He wills, then can I be at peace.

When my heart is at peace, my body members are aligned to peace. Gentleness predominates or when I fail, easy recognition comes and I once more align my being to God's ways.

**7. RESOLVE TO DRAW NEAR TO ONE’S CENTER WHERE GOD DWELLS.**

The more the world seems to pull me in all directions and even tears my being apart, the stronger my resolve is to draw near to my center where God dwells.

**8. THE PEACE THAT COMES FROM GOD IS DIFFERENT FROM THE PEACE OF THE WORLD.**

We are speaking of the peace that God gives. What the world gives is peace that comes from created things. The pursuit of power, wealth, and fame to gain peace only leaves us with a restlessness that knows no satisfaction.

Some practical considerations—

1. To be a peace-person, I must want peace.
2. I must set my priorities and order my wants and desires according to what are essential and necessary. The less clutter I have in my mind and heart the more centered I become and closer to peace.
3. Can I strip myself of what is unnecessary, whether it be of things or words or thoughts? Even economy of words matters. I may get lost in the multiplicity of words, remarks, etc.
4. God and neighbor first. What asceticism! To be mindful of the other who comes after me, in the care of common things, in transforming our convents into a home for each other. I can educate myself to look to the others’ needs before mine. Little things matter. When in the past we ate at table and there were servers, we looked to our sisters’ needs. Today do I carry that disposition when serving myself buffet style? How much consideration do I give for the others who will also come to table?
5. In listening to one another, do I truly listen to what the other is saying and not saying?

### **Conclusion**

When I am at peace with myself, peace will characterize my relationships with others. When I have nothing to prove or defend, I can be and give of myself freely.

The peace I have within resonates with the tranquillity I find outside of myself. When I am at peace I find creation echoing that peace or crying out for peace. My being becomes very sensitive to the lack of peace in the rape of nature. And my spirit weeps with the unfreedoms and oppression the others experience. My being at peace is a harp attuned to harmony outside of me, and which can pick up discordant notes for harmonizing or . . .

The way to peace is in every step that I take. I remind myself to tread gently upon the earth, to be gentle to myself and to others. I cannot be a peace-person when

envy, anger, resentments fill my heart. I can cry out for peace when I feel and see its absence. Let me not cry out for justice and peace when it is my ego that is hurting from a perceived injustice or when I am displacing my own anger over things I have no control of. Rather let me cry out from a pure heart, a heart that weeps because another person has been wronged or violated.

When I have lost my foothold in giving of myself, when the life of my body has been poured out in service of others, then like the Risen Lord, the peace I share becomes life-giving. When I die daily to myself that the God-life may resurrect in my being, whatever little I do is a step towards the peace that the Risen Lord came to bring.

Dear Sisters, this has been a lengthy sharing that I hope has helped you. As Missionary Benedictines committed to the pursuit of peace, it would be nice if in one way or another this piece evokes an exchange of insights on our personal and communal pursuit of peace. Perhaps our Conversatio could be a vehicle for the exchange.

### **Guide for Sharing**

1. The way to peace is to journey to one's center. How has your journey been? What were the helps you experienced in community?
2. How are conflicts that disturb one's peace and that of the community's addressed?
3. Share the peace-making efforts you and your Sisters have initiated in the community and in the apostolate.

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**(Editor's Note: Instead of a theoretical article on hope, let me share with you these touching stories of hope)**

## Hope

By R.C. Sproul Jr.

Strange as it might seem, I was actually looking forward to seeing her, and wondering how she would react to seeing me. Two years ago my dear wife Denise was stricken with cancer. She received excellent treatment, and faced her challenge like a hero. It was my habit to accompany her to the chemotherapy room, where we met several young ladies that worked there. One seemed particularly compassionate, talkative, and fun. What will she think, I wondered, two years later, when Denise waltzes in here to accompany me for my chemotherapy treatments? Who would have thought a husband and wife, still comparatively young, would both fall victim to cancer within the space of two years?

The sweet nurse was surprised to see us, which didn't surprise me. After we reintroduced ourselves she set about her work. She had some difficulty finding a vein with her I.V. needle, which didn't surprise me either. After five or six jabs she succeeded. She then leaned close to me and whispered, "Do you ever get angry?" I smiled at her, knowing how frustrating and embarrassing it can be to try to get a needle in the right place. "Mercy no," I told her, "I know you are doing your best. I'm sorry my veins are so lame." She then explained that I had misunderstood her question. What she wondered was whether I ever got angry with God. "Why," I asked her, "would I ever get angry with God?"

"Well," she continued, "don't you ever think that since you're a pastor, since you've devoted your life to God, that He shouldn't have allowed you to get cancer, let alone both you and Denise? Don't you ever think that this is a pretty lousy way to repay you?" I gave thanks to God for the opportunity to help this sweet young woman. "I don't get angry with God. He doesn't owe me anything but His wrath. But that's not why He gave me cancer. He gave it to me because He loves me, just like He gave it to Denise, because He loves her. This is neither punishment nor permission. This is a gift from Him."

Paul tells us that it is right and appropriate, in times of hardship that we should mourn. I didn't tell the nurse that every day with cancer is like a day full of sunshine. (As I write this morning, it has been more than sixty hours since I've been able to eat anything.) Hardship, though it be for our good and His glory, is still hardship. And so we mourn. But, Paul tells us, we do not mourn like the world. They mourn without hope, while we mourn with hope.

There is an immediate and sound deduction we can reach here. Why would our mourning differ from the world around us? We know where we are going. We know what end is in store for us. Any sadness or hardship that we experience is, on any appropriate scale, brief and mild. Our suffering, after all, cannot be compared with the eternal weight of glory. The suffering of

those outside the kingdom is but a prelude, a small taste of an eternity of agony. Our suffering, on the other hand, is but a speed bump on the way to Glory Road.

What we must not miss, however, is the reason for our different ends. Our grief is infused with hope not merely because we have a bright future. Instead our grief is infused with hope because of our past. We look forward, in the midst of our grief, in hope, because we look backward, in the midst of our grief, with joyful gratitude. My future is bright because the wrath that I am owed has already been spent. The difference is in the cross of Christ. Whatever sorrow God calls me to go through; He calls me to go through for the express purpose of remolding me into the image of His Son. Every cancerous cell growing in my body, every deadly chemical that the nurses pour into my body to fight the cancer, all of it exists to make me more like Jesus.

Stephen, we are told, while he was being martyred, saw heaven open up. He beheld the glory of Christ, as He stood, a witness for this witness. The joy was not merely that Stephen would be found innocent. The joy was not simply that Stephen would be with Jesus. The greatest joy was that Stephen knew that what he saw, that he would become. John, remembering that we ought not to mourn as those who are without hope, gives us this greatest hope, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). He knows the plans He has for us, plans to give us hope and a future, a future so grand that eye hath not seen or ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind of man.

May we be blessed with the courage to believe His promises, even in the midst of hardship. May the world witness us, the witnesses of Christ, as we attest to His goodness, through mourning with hope. May they behold His glory, as we move from mourning to dancing.

## **No Hopeless Situations**

By Steve Goodier

Dinah Shore said, "There are no hopeless situations -- only people who are hopeless about them." Case in point: Morgan Rowe. Some 30 years ago, when he was only 11 years old, he lost his left arm and much of the use of his right arm. It happened when he fell off a tractor at his father's fence company in Valdosta, Georgia, and was dragged beneath the machine. Morgan's left arm was destroyed and his right, mangled.

Young Morgan was released from the hospital after three-and-a-half months. The first thing he set out to do was to help pay the bills -- \$30,000 worth. That was a lot of money back then as it is now. For a boy of 11 to accomplish such a task, the situation seemed hopeless.

For five years Morgan scoured roadsides picking up cans and bottles. He collected thousands of cans and collected and sold newspapers. He never gave up hope. First, he paid off the \$455 ambulance bill. Then he put \$2,500 down on the hospital bill. He was still a long way off though his parents raised another \$9,000 toward the debt.

People began to hear about the injured boy and eventually some 2,000 donations poured in, totalling \$25,000. The bill was paid in full! Morgan set aside the additional money for future education.

What then? Though the bill was paid up, Morgan kept his projects going to collect money for the hospital so he could help others.

Someone forgot to tell the boy he was too injured for that kind of work. Someone neglected to inform him that the situation was hopeless. Somehow young Morgan didn't realize that an 11-year-old boy could never pay off a hospital bill so large. Martin Luther once said, "Everything that is done in the world is done by the hopeful." No matter your age. No matter your circumstances. No matter your financial wealth. Without hope, nothing is possible. But with hope...well...watch out!

## **Powerful Hope**

By Steve Goodier

Jean Kerr said, "Hope is the feeling you have, that the feeling you have, isn't permanent." It is what we have when we know that we WILL eventually survive the night and bask in sunshine once again. It does not deny the present darkness, but it reminds us that dawn is coming.

Brigadier General Robinson Risner ("Robbie") spent seven years as a POW at the "Hanoi Hilton," as prisoners of war called their North Viet Nam compound. There he discovered the power of hope. He spent four and a half years of that time in isolation. He endured ten months of total darkness. Those ten months were the longest of his life. When they boarded up his little seven-by-seven foot cell, shutting out the light, he wondered if he was going to make it. He had already been under intense physical and mental duress after years of confinement. And now, not a glimmer of light shone into his cell -- or into his soul.

Robbie spent hours a day exercising and praying. But at times he felt he could nothing but scream. Not wanting to give his captors the satisfaction of knowing they'd broken him, he stuffed clothing into his mouth to muffle the noise as he screamed at the top of his lungs.

One day Robbie got down on the floor and crawled under his bunk. He located a vent that let in outside air. As he pressed against the vent, he saw a faint glimmer of light reflected on the inside wall of the opening. Robbie put his eye next to the cement wall and discovered a minute crack in the construction. It allowed him to glimpse outside, but was so small that all he could see was one blade of grass. A single blade of grass and a faint ray of light. But when he stared at the sight, he felt a surge of joy, excitement and gratitude like he hadn't known in years. "It represented life, growth, and freedom," he later said, "and I knew God had not forgotten me." It was a tiny glimmer of hope that sustained Robbie through an unbearable ordeal. The human spirit is strong. It seems to run forever on nothing but a morsel of hope. Without it, you have nothing. With it, nothing else matters.