

+ Maria

The Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

My dear Sisters in Christ and Our Lady of Mount Carmel – As Mary’s daughters and sons, it is a joy to celebrate her Birthday today. There are beautiful new flowers on the altars and, who knows, there may be a birthday cake in the refectory! No matter what, this feast has a powerful draw and attraction to it and its theme is, for sure, one of joy and thanksgiving. The first reading from the Prophet Micah, invites us to enter into the sense of deep longing and hoping for something better that is so prominent in the Old Testament. It was never easy for Israel and for its faith in the One God to be established in peace. The history of the Old Testament is one of trials from without, and unfaithfulness from within. The pages of the Old Testament recall the constant calls from God for His people to return to Him with all of their hearts and to be faithful. Those same pages detail for us the prayers and pleas and hopes of the faithful remnant that the promised Messiah would come and bring peace. The words of the Prophet Micah are well-known to us, as we hear them often during the season of Advent: “The Lord says: You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from old, from ancient times.” And what shall he bring? Micah answers – the return of his children to Israel, a firm shepherd of the flock, greatness to the ends of the earth, and peace. All this will come through (quote) “She who is to give birth.”

Longing and desire. The ability to long and desire is part of the human spirit. God also longs and desires, to use human language to describe our mysterious God. God longs for our love, for our faith, for our obedience. He longs for it not so much because He needs it as we would need something, but He longs for it out of His love for us, He who is love. God knows that in our act of loving Him, believing in Him and obeying Him, that we are better, that we will find peace and that we will have the Garden of Eden-like blessings that He originally intended for us. The men and women of the Old Testament longed for and desired that sign from God that now we are restored and made whole, now we have the Shepherd, and now we will have peace. And, my Sisters, we have received all of this in Christ – He who fulfills all of our longing and all of our desires. Christ is the completion and end of all of our desires, and in Him we will find every treasure and all that we need.

Mary, whose Nativity we celebrate today, shared in the longing and desire of her people. Like her spouse St. Joseph, she too was formed in the Old Testament spirit of waiting for the Messiah. She possessed and brought into her own prayer: love for God, faith in God and obedience to God. And, at exactly the right moment, God called her to take her part with Joseph in His plan of salvation. “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She

will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” St. Matthew is careful to tell us that this fulfills what the Lord said through the prophet. God keeps His word and men and women of faith know this.

The pages of the New Testament witness to the unfolding of this great news that God has come to us and remains with us in Christ and His Church, and demonstrates for us and teaches us the power and meaning of the arrival of the Good Shepherd and Prince of Peace. Yet, our world and even we, still struggle, still long, and still have many desires. On the feast of Mary’s birth, as her daughters and sons in Carmel, we should say thank you and praise you to God for the example that Mary provides for us of cooperation with God’s plan, she “who found her joy in God her savior”. And we need to learn from Mary as well. To the Lord through Mary, we must bring our longings and our desires. Let them be baptized by grace, so that we do not long for or desire anything that is not the best for us, as God sees and knows the best. Our longings and hopes for the General Chapter need to go through the car wash of grace as well, so that at the end we want, like Mary, only to do the will of God. God longs for and desires our love, our faith and our obedience because it is for His greater glory and our greatest good. Keeping our eyes on Mary, we cannot fail or lose our way. The angel said to Joseph, “Do not be afraid”. God has a plan, and it will be accomplished. “May it be done unto me, said Mary, according to His will.” May it be done unto us too, Sisters, according to God’s will, and with our own “Yes”. Amen.

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