

+ Maria

Your Excellency Bishop Hubbard, Mother Mark Louis Anne and members of the General Council, honored Little Sisters of the Poor present with us today, members of the McCrory family, and all of my dear Carmelite Sisters, Brothers and friends – As I begin my reflections for today’s celebration, I think that in the back of the minds of many of us we are concerned about the people of Florida – maybe family members, the Carmelite Sisters and residents of the Lourdes-Noreen McKeen Residence in West Palm Beach, the Carmelite Friars and people of St. Jude’s in Boca Raton, and so many of our fellow men and women. Wholeheartedly, we commend them to the protection of our good God, and entrust their welfare to Him. We can only pray for them now, and trust in the graciousness of Divine Providence. Once the storm has passed, for sure their work will begin.

Here in a dry and beautiful Avila-On-The-Hudson, we are doing something else. We are offering the Sunday Eucharist and recalling and renewing once more in the liturgy the death and resurrection of Christ on this His day. Each Mass gives us the chance to honor our God, and to recall the saving actions of Christ. From this altar and in a beautiful way, we offer our Thanksgiving to God, in particular today on this 25th Anniversary of the beginning of the Diocesan Phase of the Cause for the beatification and canonization of Mother Angeline. This altar, this chapel, and this very place are all here today because of the dedication and zeal of that one person – Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa who, with her Sisters in community, followed the vocation and inspiration of the Holy Spirit to bring about the Congregation of Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm, 88 years and 7 days ago – I don’t know how many hours and minutes. Sorry. Mother Angeline was truly a woman of the Church, and a woman filled with the spirit of the gospel. Mother was also an excellent leader, a builder who left no debts, a fervent religious who never lost the common touch for people. Her charism has not faded in the least since her death thirty-three years ago. Her message is just as relevant and needed in the field of health care and senior care, and the values and methods she and her companions modeled are probably needed more than ever in the face of today’s challenges and aging population. I would also add that what our Venerable taught about the religious life is also priceless and timeless, and we can never veer away from the balance of the active and contemplative Carmelite life that she set down without a loss of equilibrium and strength of vocation.

It seems many times in the last 25 years, Bishop Hubbard, that you and I and many of the Sisters and people here this morning, have gathered in the chapel of St. Teresa’s Motherhouse, right? I talk for 15 minutes, and you sit and smile. Then, after communion, in 15 seconds you summarize everything. What a gift! Recently, a lovely lay woman I know said to me – “Well, now that you have more free time on your hands (so you can see that we are not speaking of reality here) now that you have more free time on your hands, why don’t you write a book?” “A book,” I answered, “about what?”

“Oh, Carmelite spirituality she said.” I don’t have the ability, I told her, to sit still long enough to write a book. As soon as I started, my mind would say, “Did you defrost the pork chops for dinner?” and I’d be away from my desk. Forget it. Finally, I said to her that after I die somebody can gather every word I’ve written about Mother Angeline – 50 articles so far for the Teresian, now Mother Angeline Society Bulletin, sermons, talks and articles for other publications and now even videos. That will be my corpus of writing and, I would add, I didn’t cover the topic adequately.

Twenty five years ago on the Feast of Mary’s Assumption, you were here, Bishop, and we formally began the Diocesan Investigation into the Life, Virtues and Reputation for Holiness of the Servant of God, Mother M. Angeline Teresa McCrory. Still reeling from the death of Father Jude Mead – may God be good to him and Father Eugene – we went forward. I can confess now, since it’s too late to be punished, none of us really knew what we were doing. I concluded the night before, that the Opening of the Cause was premature. I wondered what Father Jude was thinking when he set the date, invited the Bishop, turned the Motherhouse upside down, hired the caterer, picked the meal and sent out the invitations and died. We were not ready. But, like an inexperienced cook just following the recipe, I – and so many generous and helpful Sisters – just went step by step. “Open the book. We opened the book. Do this, we did that.” When I was ready to scream the night before, and was in my formerly beautiful office down the hall – whereas I am now in my beautiful office downstairs – a Sister stopped by at 9 PM and said to me, in effect: “What are you doing? If Mother Angeline were alive, she would say, that’s enough Father. Go and have a cup of tea – or something stronger – and get a good night’s sleep.” Well – here we are today, 25 years later. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, Mothers Gabriel, Bernadette de Lourdes and Regina Carmel, Sister Teresa Stephen and her helpers, the wonderful priests of the Diocese of Albany and the supernatural patience of the Carmelite Sisters and members of the Cause and Charism Commission, we are still moving ahead. Mother Kathleen Rosarie was so trusting and encouraging as we began our work and later Mother Mary Suzanne until we closed in April 2007. I have even forgiven Mother Kathleen and Sister Matthew for going in and re-arranging my office at night without a word of notice. Oh well... Our Servant of God is now Venerable, and every year that passes, we learn more and do more to promote the Cause of her Beatification and Canonization. I think we now know what we are doing. Today, we praise and thank God for the Cause as we mark its silver jubilee and we ask God to show us what we must do next in order to keep the Cause fresh. What we are doing is right and just. God will show us the way and, if we might add a little prayer, we might also ask God to give us just one little tiny verifiable miracle through the intercession of Mother Angeline as well. That’s not too much to ask.

What might Mother Angeline have thought of today’s second reading from St. Paul to the Romans? “Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” What a magnificent statement of the Christian life.

St. Paul goes on to list the commandments: “You shall not kill, steal, or covet” summing it all up in the words of Our Lord Himself: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” “Love is the fulfillment of the law.” And the Carmelite Sisters add: “The difference is love.” Love baptizes everything for the Christian. Every little thing done for love, out of love, because of love, and in order to love is the gospel, and is the Little Way of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, a favorite saint of Mother Angeline, and an inspiration for all of us to live our faith and love in a world that can be dark, unloving and unforgiving. Were St. Paul tutored by Mother Angeline, he most likely would have also added to his list of commandments: “Honor thy father and thy mother” but the plan would have been: “love them, and do everything you can to reverence and care for them in all of their many needs.” All of our programs and plans have to pass the test of love, don’t they? Any strategic plan that is not infused with charity will never reach its true goal, I think. Mother Angeline’s basic instincts and insights are timeless, and that is why we will not exhaust her charism as a charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the Lord, the giver of life.

With trust in the gospel promise of Jesus, which we just heard, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,” we are together this morning, and in almost every house of the Congregation, and gathered in the belief that Jesus is with us. We thank God for the 25 years of the Cause since its formal introduction in this Diocese. Much good fruit has been harvested as the result of the Cause. Amen. In addition, gathered in Jesus’ name, we also ask the Lord of the harvest and abundance, to show us the way and renew the spirit of the Cause in each of us not just so that we see Venerable M. Angeline Teresa beatified and canonized, but that the work she has begun will continue and flourish. That is our prayer. In addition, let the Church say, “Amen”!

Avila-On-The-Hudson

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Very Reverend Mario Esposito, O.Carm.

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