

+ Maria

Your Excellency Bishop Colacicco, Reverend Fathers, Mother Mary Rose and members of the General Council, members of the McCrory family, friends and associates of the Carmelite Sisters, our other Sister guests, and all of my dear Brothers and Sisters in Carmel – I am very happy to welcome all of you here, once again, as we celebrate the 131st birthday of Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa and the 40th Anniversary of her return to the Father's house. Wherever did 40 years go, I don't know, but truly, we all experience Mother as both deceased and alive. Her spirit and legacy live on in our dear Carmelite Sisters and their beautiful ministry, and her charism and holiness continue to be studied and applied to this very day. Her spirituality and values still inspire and motivate people and institutions to provide compassionate and loving care to many people each day as well as call women to join the Sisters and live her spirit. How we long to see her genuine reputation for holiness grow even more among God's people and favors and miracles become more apparent. And how pleased she would be to see her beloved old people cared for so well in the various Carmelite Homes, even with all of the stresses and strains of contemporary health care. The value and dignity of human life in all its stages remains one of the top moral questions of our age that Christian believers need to give witness to and advocate on behalf of in all spheres of life.

In my opinion, I think Mother Angeline was a richly complex person who, at the same time, had some very basic convictions that showed themselves in the unity of her life and activities. She was very good with people – respectful, open, interested in them, and had a natural touch and sense of what folks needed. She was wholly dedicated to the care of the elderly – about their emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing and spared nothing to see that they were lovingly and competently cared for. Mother Angeline loved the Church, the Pope, bishops, priests and had numerous friends in other religious communities. Everything Catholic interested her – Saints, devotions, prayer- all came under her gaze, but always with moderation and common sense. Mother loved her family and was always true to them and loved her Carmelite Family. Finally, and this brings us to the theme we are pondering this year, Venerable Mother Angeline loved the presence of Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar – Mass, adoration, silent prayer, Holy Communion, silent reflection. The Mass and the liturgy in general occupied the center of her spirituality, shaped her day, and as we all

know, she delighted that when a new home was opened, a new tabernacle for the Lord was placed in the center of the house.

“Strengthened by the Eucharist” is the theme for Mother’s 40th anniversary of death, 2024. There is no need for me, as the homilist, to introduce this theme that is so obvious, especially during these years of the Eucharistic Revival in the Catholic Church of the United States and anticipating a national Eucharistic Congress in July of this year. Believe it or not, I am a kind of a simple man and especially as I get older, I sense things in simpler ways – not unusual, I am told. Our Church has a beautiful and well-developed Eucharistic theology, there for the study and taking. But I would venture, for most people, in the words of the Liturgy professor at our theologate many years ago, for most people on a Sunday morning, they are in Church to receive Holy Communion and go home. This same professor who used to go from parish to parish on Sundays sharing in and observing the Mass, he used to tell the class of future priests: the people are there to receive Communion – don’t get in their way. Be faithful to the texts of the Mass, prepare and preach something that is understandable, and let the people receive Communion and go home. According to me, the two principal ways of thinking about the Eucharist and receiving Holy Communion can be summed up in two short phrases: the Eucharist draws us into union with Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Eucharist gives us grace and strength to live our Christian life and be of service. They are not contradictory, and both are found in the life and spirituality of Mother Angeline.

Mother prized her Carmelite vocation, and often, like St. Teresa of Jesus, held up the Prophet Elijah as a model for Carmelites making his motto alive for the Carmelite Sisters, “I am filled with a jealous, or zealous, zeal for God”. In today’s first reading our poor father Elijah is fed up and finished, “Take my life for I am no better than my fathers.” He has been pursued, threatened, ostracized, and has had it. But, while he is done emotionally and physically, God is certainly not done with him. In a beautiful, actual, and mystical way the angel of the Lord comes and feeds Elijah, not once but twice, and this gives him the food and energy to continue to Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God where God reveals Himself to Elijah in the tiny, whispering breeze – enabling and sending Elijah off to continue to serve Him and fight for the cult of the true God of Israel. This little story prefigures for us the Eucharist as strength for mission, strength for service, strength to continue the work of God, the good that he has called us

alone to do. By ourselves, we can feel “I have had enough” but with the grace and strength of Jesus within us in the Sacrament of the Altar, we are not alone and therefore we are enabled to climb our little mountains and face our own situations. And, these are not just exterior mountains, but also interior mountains that each one of us must face to live and be productive in a peaceful way. I would never reduce the Eucharist as food for work, but we must never underestimate the power, the loving and reconciling power that Holy Communion affords us. Thus, Mother Angeline repeatedly in writing to the Sisters emphasized the importance of being in Chapel and taking what was received there out into the ministry.

As Catholics, we believe in nothing less than this: in the Eucharist we receive into ourselves absolutely the Lord Jesus, body and blood, soul and divinity. Saint Paul reminds us that this was the will and wish of Jesus Himself, to unite Himself with us from the moment of the Last Supper to today, through our taking up of the bread of life and cup of salvation. The Eucharist is geared to unity, and it is truly a Holy Communion, a making one. Mother Angeline emphasized over and over again, in a true contemplative spirit, that the first response to this presence of Christ on the altar during Mass or in the tabernacle, should be silence, reflection, a pondering and welcoming of the Lord Himself into our souls, giving Him permission to dwell and reign within us, in a loving way which changes us, and makes us more like Himself. Both in art and in words, we have all seen Mother Angeline sitting before the Monstrance, gazing face to face and heart to heart with Jesus, adoring and be united with Him. How fortunate are we who live and work where there is a chapel, that any time of day, we can enter into the Eucharistic presence and be drawn into a deeper bond with our Savior, like the Venerable who prized such moments.

Finally, the gospel today is the most commonly read of any passage of the four evangelists. We read the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes in Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Passiontide, Easter, Pentecost and Ordinary Time. Here is Christ at His best – nurturing and feeding his followers by His word and by food. We see his compassion for the crowds. We see his using exactly what is available to him to work a great miracle, not something more than ordinary food. We see his power to provide for a vast number of people not just a meal that is enough, but to feed the crowd of five thousand people to a superabundance with leftovers. Jesus is always one with his followers, with

us, and uses food as a symbol of his ability to provide, like the angel who fed our poor Elijah, strength and nourishment to go on. While being fed in the belly, they have also been fed in their minds, souls, and hearts with his life-giving word, implanting in them the seeds of faith that will blossom in their due time. And what a beautiful image of the Mass where we are fed by Jesus in His word, through prayer and listening, and by the bread of angels made food for us. Jesus unites Himself to us, and then allows us to go home, not empty-handed but utterly refreshed by having met him, nothing less than God Himself.

My friends – we are happy to remember Mother Angeline today in this Mass and to pray for her on the 40th Anniversary of her return to the house of the Father. She continues, though, to teach us and by her example, helps us to know how much, like her, we need to be strengthened by the Eucharist. Loved, adored, praised and blessed be Our Lord Jesus in heaven and in the most holy sacrament of the altar. Amen.

Father Mario Esposito, O.Carm.

Avila On Hudson

January 20, 2024