



Dear Friends,

IT is hard to believe that another year is passing into Eternity and another Advent is beginning! However, this Advent of 2009 will not be like any other, past or future. Why? Because we know that God is always transforming our lives, therefore there will be new challenges for us to meet this Advent.

We know from Scripture that Mary too, had her challenges - her "yes" to the angel at the Annunciation - her visit to her cousin, Elizabeth. Let us draw near to her, the God-bearer, as we prepare for the great feast of Christmas, and ask her help in meeting our challenges with faith and courage as she did.

The wonder of Advent is that it is not just a single event in time, and after that we can put it aside until next year. St. Francis has taught us that each person we meet along life's way comes bearing the Word of God. Do we truly believe this message, so that we can share with others "what we have seen and heard?" (St. John)

In today's world, we seem to be surrounded by turmoil, change, tension - we live a time when people despair at the thought of a nuclear war, a polluted planet, a loss of values, half-empty churches and the clash and collapse of cultures.

However, St. Leo tells us that this is no season of sadness for "this is the birthday of life - the life that annihilates the fear of death and engenders joy - no-one is an outsider to this happiness." One of my favorite poets, the Jesuit Gerard Manly Hopkins writes that the "earth is charged with the glory of God" - our God Who is with us through all the ages, and He is here with us this Advent, as we journey towards our eternal home.

The Advent Antiphons proclaim this joy and this glory as we invite Christ into our hearts, into our world. We ask God as WISDOM to make us prudent, as ADONAI the Lord to redeem and save us, as THE ROOT OF JESSE to increase our love for each other, as the KEY OF DAVID to bring freedom and peace, and as EMMANUEL to offer hope. These antiphons end majestically in the splendour of the Christmas night liturgy.

May His loving, compassionate Presence accompany each one of us this Advent, and touch our lives with His love, joy, peace and hope.

- Sr. Liz

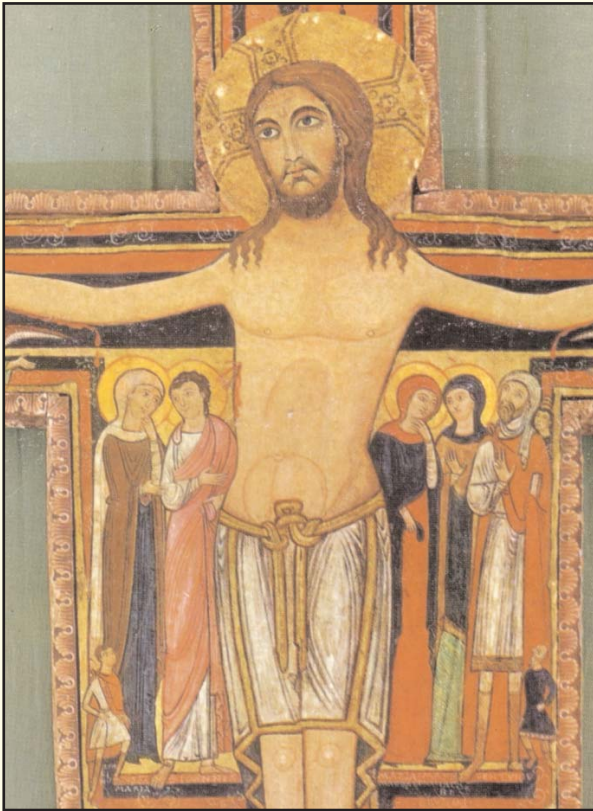


The Crucifix that spoke to St Francis . . .

IN St. John's Gospel, Christ does not die alone, but He has some of His faithful companions nearby. In the Cross of San Damiano, these companions are painted on the panels under Christ's outstretched arms.

At the right side of Jesus are Mary, His mother, and the Beloved Disciple, John. This could be the moment when Jesus says, "Woman, behold your son." (Jn. 19:26). Blood flows over the Beloved Disciple from the wound in Christ's side. He is a symbol of the

Church, redeemed by the blood of Christ. Following a Syrian tradition that dates from the sixth century, the blood is flowing from the *right* side of Christ.



Occupying a special place on the left side of Jesus is Mary of Magdala, and beside her is Mary, the wife of Clopas. (Jn. 19:25) Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary of Magdala has her left hand raised to her chin. Byzantine artists used this position to depict confusion and the struggle of human reason before the mystery of faith.

Through this gesture, the artist is alluding to the grief and turmoil these women must have felt as they witnessed the death of Jesus. However, these attendant figures have also witnessed the Resurrection, so their faces reflect joy and their faith in Christ. In this painting, gestures of joy far outweigh expressions of grief. Mary's gaze is not on the body of Jesus, but on the Beloved Disciple, fulfilling her role as Mother of the Church.

Next to the women on Jesus' left is the figure of a centurion wearing a knee-length Roman tunic. It has been suggested that this figure is the Centurion mentioned in Mark's Gospel, who having witnessed Christ's death, declares, "Truly, this man was the Son of God." (Mk. 15:19)

The small head behind the Centurion is probably the face of the artist - an accepted way for the artist to autograph his work. Significantly, three fingers of the Centurion's hand are in the traditional iconographic sign for "I am testifying that Jesus is Lord." Like the Beloved Disciple and the three women, he too is a witness to the Resurrection of Christ ...

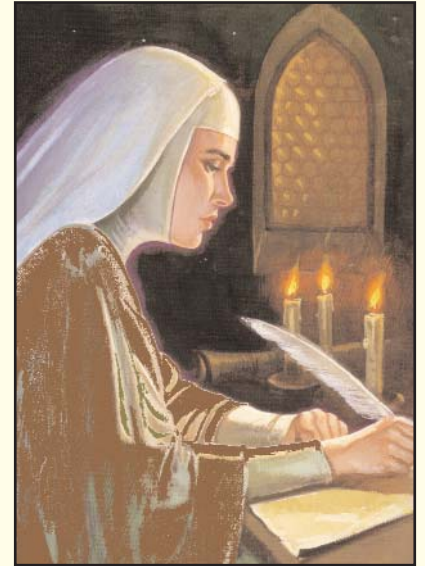
To be continued

Saint Agnes of Prague

THIS saint is also known as St. Agnes of Bohemia. She was born in Prague in the year 1200, and probably died around 1281. She was the daughter of King Ottocar and Queen Constance of Hungary, and was a relative of Saint Elizabeth. As a child, she was educated in the Cistercian convent of Treinitz.

She was betrothed to Frederick II, Emperor of Germany, but when the time came for the solemnization of the marriage, it was impossible to persuade her to abandon the resolution she had made of consecrating herself to the service of God. Frederick was incensed, but on learning that Agnes had left him to become the spouse of Christ, he came to understand her decision. He is said to have exclaimed, "I cannot take offense because in preference to me, she has chosen the King of Heaven."

Agnes became a Poor Clare in the monastery of St. Saviour in Prague. She was elected Abbess, and became a model of Christian virtue and religious observance. As we know, she kept up an extensive correspondence with the great St. Clare of Assisi. They never met, but we are fortunate that some of those letters have survived until today.



Though Agnes lived in a period far removed from ours, she still remains a shining example of the Christian faith and heroic charity, on which we are invited to reflect and imitate. She was canonized by Pope John Paul II on November 12, 1989. Her Feastday is kept on March 2.

NEWS FROM SUDAN - A Childhood Dream

ARRIVING in Juba on September 22 was the realization of a dream of being a Missionary in Africa. Since I was very young, my dream was to be a Missionary in Africa and for that reason I joined the Missionary Franciscan Sisters.

After many twists and turns on my journey of life, my dream became a reality. The fire which sparked my initial call to be a missionary was fanned into a flame by the invitation to join "Solidarity with Southern Sudan."

So here I am, one week later, feeling very much at home in my new community with Luchita and Joseph. This sense of "belonging" is due to their warm, friendly welcome and their gentle accompanying presence during this transition period. The spirit of prayer, openness and inclusiveness is a great source of comfort to me as together we form a new community.

On my first morning in Juba, the dawn was ushered in by a Call to Prayer from the local mosque, which sounded as if it were in my very room. The roosters, too, crowed with great energy and enthusiasm as they greeted a new day. I did not feel as committed as my Muslim brothers and sisters or as enthusiastic as my brother roosters to rise and praise God. (If you come to Juba, there is no need to bring an alarm clock!)

In our first meeting, I spent time sharing ideas with my new community, and we discussed how together we can dis-



Sr Nuala Mulleady

cover new ways of being in an International, Intercongregational community. Discovering ways of shared charism, spirituality, mission and community is very exciting and challenging for me. The words of Revelation come to mind: "Behold, I am creating something new!" (Rev. 21:5)

This first week has provided me with many opportunities to meet and share with different people, eg. in the marketplace, discussion groups, retreats and Sunday liturgies. On our Retreat Day, priests,

brothers and sisters from the area prayed, reflected and shared on a very thought provoking talk given by Fr. Daniel Machetti, MCCJ. My first Sunday liturgy was a memorable one - three and a half hour's celebration followed by lunch and a four hour programme. Since Archbishop Paolino welcomed me during the Mass, I felt this celebration was just for me!! What a wonderful introduction to the life and culture of the people of Juba.

Walking through the neighbourhood gave me another perspective of the suffering and poverty of the people here. In one sense, the suffering and misery can be overwhelming, yet in another sense there are opportunities to offer hope through the ministry of education.

The words of Oscar Romero are very meaningful for us - "this is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities."

- Sr. Nuala Mulleady, mfc

P.S. Since sending this letter, Sr. Nuala fell and broke some bones in her foot. She is now recovering in hospital in Rome. Please keep her in your prayers that she will soon be well enough to return to Sudan.

New book on Elizabeth Hayes

THE launch of a new book on Elizabeth (Mother M. Ignatius) Hayes is a major step forward in publicising the life of this remarkable woman. For many years the sisters have accessed privately printed resources on Elizabeth.

Now after the recent launch in York, England, we have our first professionally published book on her, with Gracewing helping us to spread this fresh understanding.

The Australian author, Pauline (Sr M. Francine) Shaw MFIC, PhD, entitled her book, Elizabeth Hayes: Pioneer

Franciscan Journalist. It situates Elizabeth in the significant events of the nineteenth century, shows her sensitivity to the happenings of her age and highlights her ability to take advantage of the Apostolate of the Press when newsprint was the life blood of the time.

Church historian, Fr Tom Boland, notes in his review that Elizabeth was always inspired by St Francis of Assisi and that she adapted his spirit to the needs of the age as she pursued her mission through journalism. He claims that apart from her passionate religious life, her story is an exciting picture of vibrant nineteenth century Western life.

Elizabeth wrote, and engaged serious authors to write, convincing accounts of faith and devotion besides missionary stories and interesting serials.

Through her Annals, she popularized Franciscan Spirituality for she wrote for the general reader as well as for Franciscans. Emeritus Professor, Fr Edmund Campion, in his review points out that today historians of popular religion respect magazines like Elizabeth's Annals of Our Lady of the Angels as archival proof of the laity's religious sensibilities.

The York launch was conducted during the conference of the History of Women Religious, and besides other participants, our Sr Jeanette Gaudet came from Rome to speak on behalf of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters. (For Jeanette's article see www.mficaust.org.au/notes_news/book-launch.html)

When Sr Francine returned home from UK, the Kedron sisters celebrated another launch as did the teachers and students of Mt. Alvernia College. (Mt A. link is www.mta.qld.edu.au/newsletter.html) The Australian Catholic University, via its Golding Centre for women's history, theology and spirituality, is planning through Dr Sophie McGrath RSM another launch in Sydney in April during their annual Colloquim.

Copies of Elizabeth Hayes: Pioneer Franciscan Journalist available by E-mail order pshaw@mficaust.com.au or Book Sales c/- PO. Box 1100, Stafford. Q. 4053. Cost \$35 (GST included & without postage)

On-line sales - www.gracewing.co.uk 2 Southern Avenue, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 OQF, Fax: 01568.613289. E-mail: gracewingx@aol.com



Sr Francine Shaw

JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS - 175 years of Professed Religious Life

CONGRATULATIONS to Sr. Margaret Rubenach on her 60th Anniversary of Profession, to Sr. Mary Camillus on her Golden Jubilee, and to Sr. Elizabeth Prendergast on her 65th Anniversary of Profession.



Sr M. Camillus



Sr Elizabeth

Well done, dear Sisters - may the Good Lord reward you for all your years of faithful service.



Sr Margaret

Christmas traditions from around the world

CHINA

CHRISTIANS in China light their homes with beautiful paper lanterns during Advent. Santa is called Dun Che Lao Ren. The children are encouraged to hang stockings like their counterparts in Australia and the United States. Many of the traditions for celebrating Advent and Christmas among the Christian communities in China were brought by the early missionaries to China.

INDIA

ONLY a small percentage of Indian households is Christian, yet decorating for the Christmas season seems to permeate even non-christian homes in every village. Houses are typically decorated in greenery, mango leaves and strings of lights, while the "Star of Bethlehem" is hung inside many of the houses. Small, personalized gifts are the norm and are exchanged even among non-christian families.

CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES



MEXICANS and South American countries celebrate Christmas, Navidad, for a full nine days, leading up to Christmas Eve. Costumes are the norm, and groups go from

house to house, knocking on the door, asking if there is room for them, and then being turned away by the family of the house, as the "inn is full." Families then move to the public square, where music is played and delicious traditional food is served. The children are given sticks to strike paper mache' creations, which are mostly in the shape of a Nativity animal and filled with all kinds of sweets and biscuits. They then enact a play to welcome Mary, Joseph, and the Christ Child, as well as the angels and shepherds, into a stable built by the young men of the town. At the finish, everyone then goes to Church to celebrate the birth of the Son of God at Midnight Mass.

Christmas cards

IN 1843, when English writer and civil servant, Sir Henry Cole, had insufficient time to write his Christmas letters, he commissioned an artist to design a card to convey his wishes. The cards pictured Christmas scenes, and contained a Christmas greeting. Pictures of the poor and needy were also included to remind recipients to share some of their Christmas fare with their less fortunate sisters and brothers.

Mankind is a great and immense family ... this is proved by what we feel in our hearts at Christmas.

- Pope John XXIII

It is no use walking anywhere, unless walking is our preaching.

- Francis of Assisi



I WISH each and every one of you a blessed Christmas - may you experience true joy, knowing that God's most precious gift - His Son - walks with you. In conclusion, let us reflect on these words from a poem by St. John of the Cross:

*The Virgin weighed with the Word of God
Comes down the road:
If only you will welcome her!*

Love,

Sr. Liz, mfc

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