

Our Dear Retreat²⁰¹³

Day Two: Prophets of Doom or Hope

As we begin ...

Let us begin with a few minutes of quiet listening to nothing at all to the sounds around us to our own heartbeats



Call to Prayer —

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12

Opening Prayer —

Lord and holy protector, like the disciples who were caught in their tiny boat in the midst of a mighty storm, we come together to seek your help. We feel helpless and small before the great powers of evil, darkness and confusion that sometime surround us. We place our trust in you; we feel secure in the power of your love. We thank you for this time, this opportunity to explore, with those around us and with all the world, the puzzle of pain. May we seek only the fullness of life, not rejecting the element of pain inherent in all growth and essential in each search for wholeness, holiness, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Music —

Select some music that will help you enter into today's theme

Setting the stage —

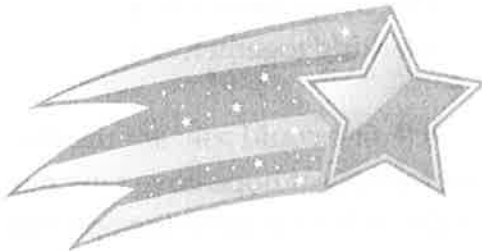
For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10 – 11)

On 11 October, 1962 John XXIII addressed the Bishops gathered for the opening of Vatican Council II, a momentous occasion for many reasons. In this passage we read of the Pope's optimism:

"Present indications are that the human family is on the threshold of a new era. We must recognize here the hand of God, who, as the years roll by, is ever directing men's efforts, whether they realize it or not, towards the fulfillment of the inscrutable designs of His providence, wisely arranging everything, even adverse human fortune, for the Church's good."

However, another memorable passage finds its way into every historical account of the Council:

"In the daily exercise of Our pastoral office, it sometimes happens that We hear certain opinions which disturb Us—opinions expressed by people who, though fired with a commendable zeal for religion, are lacking in sufficient prudence and judgment in their evaluation of events. They can see nothing but calamity and disaster in the present state of the world. They say over and over that this modern age of ours, in comparison with past ages, is definitely deteriorating. One would think from their attitude that history, that great teacher of life, had taught them nothing. They seem to imagine that in the days of the earlier councils everything was as it should be so far as doctrine and morality and the Church's rightful liberty were concerned. We feel that We must disagree with these prophets of doom, who are always forecasting worse disasters, as though the end of the world were at hand."



Reflection One —

We are no strangers to the patterns of light and shadow that illustrate our lives. Our families, friends, personal experiences can be mapped out in a pattern of light and shadow. This is familiar territory: the seasons, childbirth and death, good days and bad, our many experiences of the Spiritual Exercises, good decisions, not so good decisions.

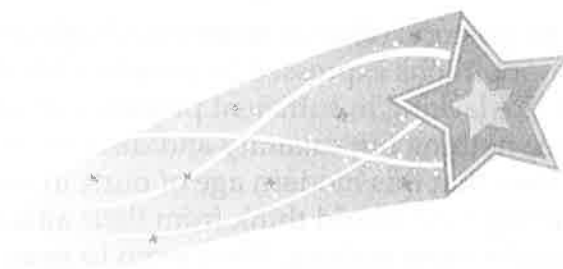
We as church members and as members of the Holy Child family recall the spirit of the early days of Vatican II renewal but it did not take long for the realization of the challenging implications of *aggiornamento* to become clear. Try to think of the light and shadow side of renewal as experienced in ministries, community life, parish life, etc. The many discussions of post Vatican II committees, parish organizations, local communities, etc. can be remembered as reflections of the same powerful dynamic that existed among the Council Fathers. Progressive, liberal, traditionalist, conservative ... We, too, struggled to see God's design in the various calls from Vatican II.

*Let us take God's view. What does God think of this?
How shall I view this in eternity? CC33:18*

Take some time to reflect on the shadow side of the implications and the challenges of this momentous call to renewal that stand out in your memory.

*What were the “understood” issues? Were there issues of a much deeper type?
Who were the people you remember as being stumbling blocks to moving ahead?
Who were the ones who articulated change as a positive element?
Seen from these many years later, what do you see now as valuable in each position?*

*Do you have some unresolved encounters in your memory bank?
How might you address these?*



Reflection Two —

One plants, another waters, but God gives the growth.
The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and
each will receive wages according to the labor of each.
For we are God’s co-workers, working together. 1 Cor 3: 6,8-9

Now fifty years after the Council, one could ask: are the dynamics any different? The “prophets of doom” and the prophets of hope have new names and maybe different issues. An anniversary year, such as the 50th year since the opening of Vatican Council II, calls us to reflect on what happened there. Religious journals and internet sources have taken seriously a need and desire to reflect on the Council. Writers try to “update” perspectives and craft questions about the present.

Spend some time in reflection on the following and, if you wish, have a discussion with others about your findings.

How would you describe the present situation in our Church? What are the lights? Where are the shadows? Who are those who bring hope to difficult situations?

What brings you joy when you think about the Church today? What causes you sadness and concern? When you think about our Church, what do you pray for?

*Our Lord accepts our thoughts as prayers
when we desire earnestly anything good and for his greater glory.
And he accepts our tears too when they are good tears. CC 58:12*

Reflection Three —

*Where has remembering and reflecting on Vatican II taken me today in my life with God?
What do I feel drawn to return to in prayer?*

Closing Prayer —

Archbishop Oscar Romero was martyred in 1980. Romero fought against the social injustices in El Salvador and acts as an inspiration to many throughout our world. The prayer, “Prophets of a Future Not Our Own”, is attributed to him.

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the church’s mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant 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 beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in reali:

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God’s grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,

but that is the difference between the master builder and the work

We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen.



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Day Three: Contemplation

As we begin ...

Begin each time of prayer today with quiet music, asking the gift of solitude and peace.



Call to Prayer —

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God, so that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you. Ephesians 1:17-18

Opening Prayer —

From uplifted hearts, hearts full of gratitude, may this prayer of thanksgiving rise to you, God of all gifts and of great generosity. We are thankful for times of stillness which allow us to listen to that holy river of prayer flowing in the heart; for the presence of your Holy Spirit within, the Spirit who prays continuously. These times of quiet heal us, within and without, replenish our spirit with strength to meet each day with renewed hope and joy. Jesus climbed mountains at night and retreated deep into the desert to find you in stillness. May we, after these days of silent-solitary communion with you, be able, ever more clearly, to make known to others the reality of your love. Blessed are you, Lord our God, who gives us nourishment in times of silence and solitude, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Setting the stage —

Spend some time recalling the months since the Province Gathering in early October. No doubt you will remember Hurricane Sandy and the presidential election. In your personal lives there will be memories, too, of these months.

What words would you use to describe your experience since October? Was there joy? Loss? Generosity? Questioning? Strength?

As we "closed" the 150th anniversary of our presence in the Americas, were the challenges of those Sisters replicated in your own life, in a different time and place?

Reflection One —

Cornelia's desire that we meet the wants of the age is a pattern oft repeated in our own documents. "Meeting the wants of the age" was the founding apostolic spirit of the SHCJ. This same conviction enlivened those who joined the community, energized those who responded to the calls of the Church and prompted Cornelia and her sisters to move beyond boundaries of all kinds: geographic, cultural, ministerial. Our reflections during the Gathering helped us to focus on some of the realities of today: the Church, our understanding of our place in the cosmos, our own reality of aging.



Spend time reflecting on the following phrases from the Enactments of the 2010 SHCJ General Chapter which describe the many dynamics of our time:

"As a Society we experience the same realities as the rest of the world: diminishment and growth; boundaries that no longer fit; the pressures and opportunities of living in a globalized world. We recognize that our resolve to do things differently to meet the wants of this age requires great unity and courage."

"Rooted in tradition, we move with faith and trust into a future that will continue to be marked by the demands of an accelerated rate of change ... The Society's mission in the 21st Century is more diverse, more inclusive and more expansive than at any other time in our history."

We belong to a religious community, a church and a world that is complex and challenging. *What about today's realities gives you pause? What evokes concern and worry?*

What of today's realities could use an "aggiornamento/renewal" (like those inspired by Vatican Council II?) What gives you hope and peace?

It is not presumption to have hope and joy and confidence in God's grace. CC21:7

Reflection Two —

In October, 2012, in the context of the 50th anniversary observance of Vatican II, Bishops met in Rome for a synod on Evangelization. Below you will find selected passages from the presentation by Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury.

These are offered here as the suggested text for reflection (emphases added). Take time to read them and think about and pray them slowly. You may need several readings! Before reading the passages, ask yourself the following:

To what need in our world today do you feel especially attracted?

What personal gifts do you bring to the task of meeting this need?

How would you describe your personal limitations in responding to this need?



“Evangelization, old or new, must be rooted in a profound confidence that we have a distinctive human destiny to show and share with the world.

To be fully human is to be recreated in the image of Christ’s humanity; ... a relationship of loving and adoring self-giving, a pouring out of life towards the Other. Thus the humanity we are growing into in the Spirit, **the humanity that we seek to share with the world as the fruit of Christ’s redeeming work, is a contemplative humanity.**

To be contemplative as Christ is contemplative is to be open to all the fullness that the Father wishes to pour into our hearts. With our minds made still and ready to receive, with our self-generated fantasies about God and ourselves reduced to silence, we are at last at the point where we may begin to grow. **And the face we need to show to our world is the face of a humanity in endless growth towards love ...** St Paul speaks (in II Cor 3.18) of how ‘with our unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord’, we are transfigured with a greater and greater radiance. That is the face we seek to show to our fellow-human beings.

We seek it because in this self-forgetting gazing towards the light of God in Christ we learn how to look at one another and at the whole of God’s creation ... the silent gazing upon God that is the goal of all our discipleship.

... this is not at all to argue that ‘internal’ transformation is more important than action for justice; rather, it is to insist that the clarity and energy we need for doing justice re-

quires us to make space for the truth, for God's reality to come through.

...the great spiritual networks, Sant' Egidio, the Focolare, Comunione e Liberazione, these too show the same phenomenon; **they make space for a profounder human vision because in their various ways all of them offer a discipline of personal and common life that is about letting the reality of Jesus come alive in us.**

...To put it boldly, **contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit. To learn contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly. It is a deeply revolutionary matter."**

After reading the passages, reflect on the following (alone and/or with others):

Is there a reason why this call to contemplation seems to "fit" us so perfectly today? Do you think it does fit? If so, why and if not, why not?

Closing Prayer —

After suffering a devastating stroke in 1981, Pedro Arrupe, General of the Society of Jesus, was partially paralyzed and his speech severely impaired. At General Congregation Thirty-three, his final words to his Jesuit brothers as he resigned his position had to be read by another. Here are extracts:

"More than ever, I now find myself in the hands of God. This is what I have wanted all my life, from my youth. And this is still the one thing I want. But now there is a difference: the initiative is entirely with God. It is indeed a profound spiritual experience to know and feel myself totally in his hands."

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All I have and all I possess are yours, Lord. You gave them to me and I will return them to you. Dispose of them as you will. Give me your love and your grace, and I shall want for nothing more.

Pause to remember and mention those persons who were special instruments of grace for you and for us during the days of early Vatican II renewal or those who introduced you to the Church of the Second Vatican Council.

We who live in the middle of a trinity of time— past, present and future—do bless you, source and sustainer of all seasons. Glory be to you, Lord of all times. Amen.