

Commemoration of the 25th anniversary
of the arrival to the Philippines
Of the Dominican Sisters of the Anunciata

Dear Sisters of the Anunciata in the Philippines and across the world, it is with pride and fresh inspiration that we have gathered this morning, after twenty five years of lights and shadows, hopes and dreams, sorrow and pain, growth and reaping spirits, to revive the story of the arrival to the first sisters of the Institute to this land. May the resolve and inexhaustible courage of those early sisters (Monserrat, Angeles Ortega and Sagrario), who sparked the successes and harvest of these twenty-five years of your presence, be a continual reminder of your own courage, determination and mission. History is yours now! Take the torch of Dominic and go forward and preach, preach and preach with your word and your lives the Word which you have contemplated and pondered in your study. Set alight the torch of Dominic and of Francis Coll, inspired by the prophetic example that your elders left to you.

Cause life – respond with wholehearted consecration to the Gospel- burn with the fire of love – have a burning heart in flames for the kingdom – take in your hands the mission lying ahead – trust your gifts, in those of the community and in the silent companion whose silence will fill you with his guiding light. Be prophets for our time and yeast for the masses, lest your charisma remain fruitless. Be reminded of the message given to us by the document *Vita Consecrata*, inviting us to rediscover the charism of our founders. Therefore, we need to rediscover and reinvent in a prophetic way how you are to plan and organize your future apostolic work and commitment in the Philippines. If you do not do this, you fail in your vocation as Sisters of the Anunciata.

In our religious profession we have been consecrated and sent to be witnesses, religious are deeply seal with a sense of exclusivity and belonging. Being and acting are intertwined and cannot be separated from fidelity to the providential call which in turn implies belonging and embrace of the charisma as visible proof of the inner identity or consecration. It follows that the quality of life reveals the identity of those who by a solemn pledge committed themselves to a life in

community as expression of that unique sense of freedom which though characterized by surrender is nonetheless an authentic respect for all the gifts with which the Lord has enriched the community.

Unity in diversity and plurality must help in articulating the real dynamism of the community; likewise it should allow us to express the human maturity which encourages growth of persons as well as that personal transformation proper to the follower of Jesus. The community is not above the person and the person knows that the power of the apostolate is linked to the common good of the members of the Institute in faithfulness to the Church, which is the second founder of a given Institute. Were it not so, how could we understand the words of the Gospel? “I have made you known to those you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me. They have obeyed your word... I pray for them. I do not pray for them... keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one just as you and I are one. .. I sent them into the world, just as you sent me into the world. And for their sake I dedicate myself to you, in order that they, too, may be truly dedicated to you”. Jn 16,6-19.

If you wish to seek the **enkindling** light for your mission, the fire that was burning within the original sisters as they began laying down the groundwork for the future of the Institute, recall their sense of discernment when it came to setting up the first house or accepting candidates to the Institute.

I vividly recall those beautiful and inspiring moments, which then seemed like dreams and today became a reality; however you are confronted with a similar and even greater challenge today. You need to assume with greater courage your life and commitments; on this depends your future success. Look, then, to those moral values and courage that brought you through these years to the confidence that you have for the Institute in this land. However, this requires clarity of principles and profound conviction as well as resolute courage. This, I am afraid, must spring from a deeper immersion into the river of grace and holiness.

You will find a never-ceasing inspiration in the unfaltering earnestness and imperishable deeds of the early sisters. One, Sister Angeles Ortega, is a witness from above. Sister Montserrat is anxiously hoping to hear, if she can understand, news about your life, hopes and dreams. I am sure that she will be joining you in prayer and thanksgiving. Finally Sister Sagrario, Mariela and Naty are eye witnesses of what has happened to this little flock from the early days till today.

But there are other brothers and sisters here who have been at your side through these twenty-five years of history and service whose name I do not need to mention so as not to forget any of them.

I would like to believe that you have chosen the logo “Twenty Five Years of Enkindling Light” to express the history of these twenty five years of presence of the Sisters of the Anunciata in the Philippines. Shining and burning lights have been enkindled, setting alight hearts and dreams, hopes and realizations, feelings and emotions, as your presence in this church attest. Vocations have come, though not as many as I had hoped. Houses were built and they stand as platforms of action, witnessing and mission. Plans have been drawn up and critical evaluations have been and continue to be made so that you might be able to forge a brighter future of light and service. Do not forget that our cause is His cause and our will is His will. We work and pray but He governs and harvests the fruits.

The combination of their responses and yours has moved into action and the expansion of the Institute has achieved some relevance. But those responses, no matter how devoted and committed the founders were and the new members embraced, have, at times, posed questions and brought in sadness and discouragement, to rekindle, once again, as the joy of the arrival of Sisters Monserrat and Maria Angeles was renewed with the hope that Mariela’s entrance caused to them and those who were concerned with the future of the first original steps. Prudence, inaction, postponements, rejoicing in and with the Lord who had begun to show his way from those early moments were at times overshadowed by the clouds of darkness, uncertainty and doubts. On one hand there was an urgency to take in vocations and on the other it seemed wise to postpone such action.

The devotion to all those memories we hold so dear and the memories and concerns we all had were expressions of the only goal that was set before us “go on, go deeper, trust in Him, do not look back, but always forward with the inner insight of faith”.

Hopes of unselfish service arise in the midst of uncertainties. Responsibilities were accepted and embraced at a mature age when obedience sent them to begin a foundation in a world and environment so alien to them. But, thanks to their resolution and the work of all those who have joined and followed them, this is what you have become during these 25 years. But you are not called to sit down

and relax! Rather, you must aspire to greater things with the spirit and help of the one who has planted in you the seed of the vocation of Sisters of the Anunciata.

Montserrat and Maria Angeles, the original founders, were tasked with assuming not only the responsibility of buying, building and accepting candidates, but also the tedious and uncomfortable process of forming the new candidates. Only they, God and a few of us may have a superficial knowledge of the great and overflowing hearts of those three women who set their feet in this land trusting in their Master and their brothers and sisters. What can I say that you can not ratify with your experience?

Many worries crossed their minds compelling them to seek advice, counsel, direction when fear and uncertainty hover over the horizons of life, because not everything was burning, bright and shining light as when the rays of the sun dispel the darkness of the night. Contradictions in advice, reluctance and prudence were suggested and even immobility, inaction and so many other things that already belong to the world of forgotten memories caused them to kneel and beg for light and direction in their path.

But that is history; they could not give birth unless they were ready to assume the risk. Sister Sagrario and Sister Naty could tell us stories about the numbers of hours talking, planning, thinking and evaluating steps that had been taken or were to be taken. Encouraged and comforted by God, their Superiors, their Brothers and Sisters like Lourdes Moraleda and many others, they decided to go forward with the promise of a reward that only time, effort and dedication could achieve under the guidance and providential Father whom they always trusted.

This altar, this tabernacle and that of Scotts Choutoco are mute witnesses of the prayers, supplications, reflections uncertainties and joys which they share. Not to mention that little image of St. Francisco Coll at your motherhouse in whose presence so many prayers were elevated to our Father in heaven. Nor Francis Coll (whose image was symbolically turned towards the wall) nor our Father responded with the clear answers you wished to have. Nor should we expect them to respond with such clarity. All of us have experienced the feeling of not having received a quick response to our expectations and dreams. Countless numbers of times we have been forced to redirect plans and strategies because our efforts would not yield the quick and plentiful harvest we longed for and wanted to reap. Oh! How difficult it is to see light at the end of the tunnel and across the channel of life.

Thus far your efforts have not been in vain and the outcome of your labours is humble but promising. God has rewarded your prayers, efforts, commitments and mission. However, it is necessary that you anchor your lives in the mystery of the divine. Motives are important but you are in need of that resolve that draws power from the only source that helps us to cling to the hope that faith can offer. Truth and grace are always productive and transforming, generating life and service, but the Lord who so providentially called us to imitate his life in an unending surrender to his will is continuously inviting us to remain attentive and alert and to give whatever we are and have to the church and to his kingdom.

There is always need for interior renewal. Religious are continuously invited to deepen in their relationship with God since, through our religious profession, we accept as authentic rule of life a profound adherence to Christ. Motives are important but you are in need of that resolve that draws power from the only source that helps us to cling to the hope that faith can offer. Truth and grace are always productive and transforming, generating life and service, but the Lord, who so providentially called us to imitate his life in an unending surrender to his will, is continuously inviting us to remain attentive and alert and to give whatever we are and have to the church and to his kingdom. Thus, through the contribution of your charisma you must become living and credible witnesses of faith and grace in the world today.

Give what you are, live what you preach and teach what the Spirit of God continues to pour upon your minds and hearts, recognize by divine inspiration, what is to be done while uttering together with Mary “We are the handmade of the Lord”.

May the Virgin Mary, disciple, servant and Mother of the Lord obtain from Jesus that you who have received the gift of following him in the consecrated life may be enable to bear witness to that gift by your transfigured lives, as you joyfully make your way with all the members of the Dominican Family (cf. Vita Consecrata n. 112). May St. Dominic and Saint Francis Coll continue to be your inspiration and strength in you ministry of preaching! Amen.

Homilía pronuncada por Fr. Bonifacio García Solís O.P.
en la Eucaristía de celebración de los 25 años de presencia en Filipinas

