

STATIO CONFERENCE

SISTER REINOLDA MAY, OSB

By: Sr. Mary Bernard Lansang, OSB

The October 16, 2013 issue of the Philippine Daily Inquirer flashed this headline:

'LIKE 32 HIROSHIMA BOMBS'

"An earthquake with energy equivalent to " 32 Hiroshima bombs" jolted the Visayas and parts of Mindanao and southern Luzon early Tuesday morning causing centuries old churches and modern buildings to crumble . . . killing at least 93 people.

(The following day, the news report flashed another figure: the number of deaths rose to 173 people. And, 3 million people are affected.)

On TV News watch, we saw how people lived under tents . . . no food to eat; no water to drink . And, what was very pathetic was the destruction of centuries-old churches . . !

I thought to myself, "How can I write a conference on Sister Reinolda May when the whole nation suffers from this great calamity . . . ? How can I direct my heart to quiet contemplation of the life of a holy sister ? How can I quieten my heart when the hearts of our people are throbbing with pain and horror?

But then, something caught my attention : on the table of our community room was the latest issue of *TIDINGS* : there was the photo of Mother Adelaida Ygrubay and Sister Celine Saplala standing by packs and packs of relief goods for Candaba, Pampanga. Other photos showed boxes for *ANAKPAWIS* and sisters, college and NSS students packing relief goods. Above these photos was the headline: SPA REACHES OUT TO HABAGAT AND TYPHOON VICTIMS.

From a phone conversation with Sister Celine, I found out that our sisters from other communities of our Priory are alerted when a calamity visits some parts of our country: the victims of *Typhoon 'Santi'* in Bulacan, the people suffering from the war situation in Mindanao and others.

Enlightened and inspired by that conversation over the phone, I went back to my room and re-opened my papers on the biography of Sister Reinolda May. On it was written :

THE ZEALOUS MISSIONARY

Woman of Charity

Below these words was the picture of Sister Reinolda May.
And I read these paragraphs:

It was not only her reputation as midwife that made her so popular in the district but more particularly, her keen and sincere interest in the people. Sister Reinolda had her heart in her missionary vocation. She longed to bring the love

of Christ to his people in Zululand. She was convinced ***that charity is the soul of the missionary apostolate.***

Day after day, she came to the aid of people she met in and outside of the hospital. She visited the sick in the wards of the hospital and comforted them. Poor and hungry people came to her door. She gave them food and clothed them. She went out in order to get a chance of visiting sick people in their homes. The poor, the unwanted, as well as families with many children received her special care. Through all the years, generous benefactors overseas supported her charitable mission.

At the same time, Jesus whom she loved much was on her lips. She brought the good news to people together with medicine, food and clothing. Praying together with people in their homes was the central part of her missionary endeavor. People could not forget the way she prayed in their midst. She did not stop doing good even if her kindness was occasionally misused. (underlining is mine)

BIOGRAPHY OF SISTER REINOLDA MAY, OSB

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Sister Reinolda was born into a religious family at Pfalheim in the Diocese of Rottenburg, southwest Germany on October 21, 1901. She was the youngest of nine (9) children. The following day, she was baptized and was given the name *Francisca*.

Francisca completed her primary education in her home village and later, attended the domestic school of the Franciscan sisters at Hochaltingen in Bavaria.

The village at Pfahljeim had a very zealous parish priest, Fr. Eugene Adis. He encouraged his parishioners to get involved in one or the other sodalities. Young and old, men and women, the married and unmarried were thus constantly encouraged to practice their faith. A whole range of colorful customs enhanced the great liturgical celebration of the church year. He promoted church music. He implanted in the parishioners a love for Jesus in the Eucharist. Inspired by the spiritual programme of Pontificate of Pope Pius X, ***“To renew all things in Christ”*** Fr. Adis fostered a Eucharistic spirituality through daily Mass and Eucharistic devotions. Sister Reinolda was influenced by this spirituality. She remarked later: “When I was preparing for First Communion, our parish priest implanted in me **a love for the Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.** Every evening, the Blessed Sacrament was exposed and the Rosary was said in the parish.

In her youth, Sister Reinolda learned to love Mary, the Mother of God. Francisca joined the parish Sodality of Our Lady. The sisters of St. Paul cared for the children and the sick in the parish. The community appreciated this work.

As a result of this devotion: at the turn of the 20th century, more than 30 girls joined different religious congregations. One of them was Francisca May.

Mother Birgitta Korph, the first Prioress General of our Congregation, led the Congregation from 1895 to 1920. After her re-election in 1903, she wrote a letter to her sisters in East Africa:

“The salvation of souls is not the work of weak human beings. No, it is God’s work. But the Lord wants us to share in His work. How much sacrifice, self-denial and struggle is demanded by constant faithfulness in little things! If we feel too sluggish, weak, and lacking energy for diligent striving, let us go to the Divine Heart of Jesus in the tabernacle to obtain the fervor which imparts strength.”

Brothers and sisters, following the Benedictine Rule, struggled to live their missionary vocation and experienced God’s faithfulness.

Francisca tried to enter our convent in Tutzing but was denied admission. She was told that she was “not strong enough to go to the missions.” So, Francisca had to go back to her family. His father was not at all sad about this turn of events. He loved his youngest daughter who was charming and full of life. The people in the village noticed that Francisca was often seen during the day praying in the parish church.

On March 1, 1922, Francisca travelled back to Tutzing and was admitted to the Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing. She made her First Profession of Vows on the feast of St. Scholastica, February 10, 1925 and received the religious name, Sister Reinolda. Soon after, she was assigned to dedicate her life to missionary work in Zululand, South Africa.

Bishop Spreiter wanted the Missionary Benedictine Sisters to work once more with him. He had a very high regard for them. For him, they were exemplary religious, unwavering in their commitment to missionary apostolate, highly disciplined and always willing to bear the hardships of a new beginning. He wrote in his diary : “ I really regard them as sisters, as precious co-workers.

On June 21, 1925, Sister Reinolda received the mission cross. Together with three sisters, she left the Mother house in Tutzing and travelled to Zululand. She felt the bonds were loosened: Home! Motherhouse ! Fatherland! She wrote: In all the sacrifices, I felt unspeakable peace and happiness, Never before could I pray sincerely, ‘ Jesus, all for you alone!’

THE DEDICATED MIDWIFE

A New Vocation

Bishop Spreiter, at that time, was convinced of the great importance of indirect mission work in school and hospital for the spreading of faith in a difficult mission territory like South Africa. With great vision and courage, he worked to obtain permission from Rome that Benedictine Sisters could be trained in midwifery.

After years of persistent effort, this permission was obtained from Rome and from Tutzing in 1936. The sisters in Zululand were allowed to assist women in childbirth. Sister Reinolda was the first sister to take a course in midwifery.

When the Benedictine Mission Hospital at Nongoma opened in June 1938, the newly qualified sister Reinolda was placed in charge of the maternity section.

“At first, things were very difficult. She experienced personal hardships and great poverty. She had to put up with the distrust of the local population, not to mention quarrels with the local district surgeon who did all he could to harm the competitor. (this was how he perceived it.) **In these years, Sister Reinolda’s great union with God and her deep faith became evident. She spent many an hour of the night in prayer in order to be able to handle this difficult situation.**

Training of Midwives

Eventually, Sister Reinolda started training midwives. Hundreds of Zulu girls, sisters from various congregations, as well as her own sisters were her students. They learned a lot from her vigilant and highly capable supervision : discipline, punctuality at work. In all those years, her students had 100% pass rate.

THE ZEALOUS MISSIONARY

Woman of charity

Sister Reinolda had her heart in her missionary vocation. She longed to bring the love of Christ to His people in Zululand. Day after day, she came to the aid of people whom she met in and outside the hospital. She visited the sick in the different wards of the hospital.

As a midwife, Sister Reinolda had the heart of a mother. She was one constant factor in the maternity department. Her office and bedroom were in the maternity section; she was on duty for 24 hours. When a woman had difficulty in delivering a baby or when a baby was crying throughout the night, Sister Reinolda would be a babysitter throughout the night.

A TRUE BENEDICTINE SISTER

We are coming to a very important section in my reflection on the life and mission of Sister Reinolda. Deeply in love with God and faithful to her Benedictine Vocation, **Sister Reinolda faithfully lived out the essence of our life according to the Rule of St. Benedict.**

- ✚ She loved her religious community and joined them in all their community exercises: community meals and recreation. She would share enthusiastically her experiences at work and missionary activities especially in helping women at childbirth. Records in the maternity wards show that **Sister helped in the birth**

of 28,000 babies. Her community started celebrating those significant moments of her mission. Whenever another thousand births was recorded, the community would celebrate this event with an apple cake!

- ✚ The Rule of St. Benedict says “ brothers should serve one another. “ Amidst all her work, with the poor and the sick in the hospital, Sister Reinolda kept her heart turned towards her sisters in community. She did not forget her own sisters and made efforts to care for the old and the sick sisters.

- ✚ Lastly, Sister Reinolda kept the PRIMACY OF PRAYER in her life. She joined her community in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist and of the Divine Office. She firmly believed that **she was called by God to be a “woman of prayer” in the community.** It was her conviction that the Opus Dei should always retain its primary position in the Benedictine community. “Nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God .” (Rule of St. Benedict)

As I pondered on the life and mission of Sister Reinolda : her commitment to the poor and the sick, the children and the elderly, her readiness to reach out to those who needed her by traveling to distant places either on foot or on horseback, my mind and my heart turned back to our people who suffered from the earthquake in Western Visayas and Cebu and most especially in Bohol.

THE CHALLENGE TODAY

After that terrifying earthquake that brought destruction to the Western Visayas and Cebu and most especially in Bohol, there were many calls for action and plea for help that came to us through the internet.

One of the News Briefs published in the Internet, Zenit org., October 17, 2013, was A CHALLENGE from Manila’s Cardinal Luis Tagle ; a CALL ON CHRISTIANS TO REBUILD THE CHURCH.

The challenge to rebuild the Church is to be taken literally and figuratively. He spoke about the “egotism and the self-interest in the church” I am quoting a portion of the Zenit org. regarding this challenge:

The Cardinal said he could hear the message of God to St. Francis:
“Build my church; rebuild my church.”

But how can we reconstruct the Church apart from Jesus the cornerstone?

How can we construct the Church without His life-giving Word?

How can we strengthen the Church without the Holy Spirit who will transform hearts of stones into living flesh and all of us into a living temple?

How can we reconstruct the Church without love that enables us to break from egoism and self-interest in order to embrace, God, neighbor, society, and

creation?

This call from Cardinal Tagle has to be based on FAITH.

On MISSION SUNDAY, our Holy Father, POPE FRANCIS talked about FAITH.

Faith is God's precious gift. It opens our minds to know and love him.

Faith is to be accepted; it needs our personal response, the courage to entrust ourselves to God, to live His love and be grateful for His infinite mercy.

Faith is a gift offered with generosity. Everyone should be able to experience the Joy of being loved by God, the Joy of Salvation.

It is a gift that one cannot keep to oneself, it is to be shared. If we want to keep it only to ourselves, we will become isolated, sterile and sick Christians. Quoting the Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, he said; A healthy and mature Church is one that engages in missionary outreach. **And he stressed one of his signature themes : that of reaching out to those on the margins of society.**

Pope Francis brought up another point : Unprecedented Mobility Brings Unique Challenges.

He spoke on how both the mobility of people and the ease of communication "have mingled people, knowledge, and experience."

He noted : **"For work reasons, entire families move from one continent to another. Professional and cultural exchanges, tourism and other phenomena have led to great movements of people. . . "**

On Mission Sunday, October 20, 2013, the priest who came to celebrate the Holy Mass with us was a Passionist Priest from Bohol. He talked about the continuing terror of the great earthquake : as of October 20, Bohol people have been experiencing aftershocks of the earthquake. The record shows 193 aftershocks of varying intensity ranging from 4 to even 6. He told us that until this time, his family lives under the tents, knowing the possible danger of staying in their house.

Then, he talked about the tourism and luxury living in their place, Bohol, and the effect on the lives of people. He described to us how in his younger years as a little boy, he would run home at the ringing of the bells from the Church announcing time for Angelus. Then, at 8:00 after their family supper, they would come together for the family rosary.

Then, he continued, nowadays, children come home at 6:00 in the evening, not to pray the Angelus but to open the face book or watch other things on TV or computer or lap top.

In Zenit, org. talks about Migration in a globalized world and its effect on people. Archbishop Martin of Dublin Ireland, spoke recently at the Contending Modernities Conference at the Notre Dame London Center. He spoke about **“the God-given unity of the human family based on fraternity and solidarity and this enables dialogue with Islam and other religions.**

The concept of a transcendent and sovereign God, a God who cares, loves and communicates that caring and love in the works of creation, in the genius of humanity in the unity of the human family and in the integrity of all of creation, is the basis of common language among us.

Archbishop Martin invoked the principle of Catholic social teaching on the universal destination of the goods of creation. This teaching stresses that God destined the earth and all it contains for all and for all peoples so that created things could be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice and tempered by charity.

I am happy to note that the above-mentioned social teaching has been the guiding principle in our social centers, in our schools and in our communities. But, maybe the question that we can ask ourselves is “How has this been a principle in my own personal life, in my use of material goods, clothing, and other activities and forms of leisure?”

And, how have I communicated this Christian principle to our students, our faculty **and** employees, and the parents of our students.?

A CHALLENGE TO THE YOUTH : to Seminarians, novices, and to all

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis addressed the youth in St. Peter’s Basilica on July 7, 2013.

“Rejoice . . . be glad . . .rejoice with her in joy!” says the prophet Isaiah. Why? The Lord will pour out upon us a torrent of consolation of maternal joy : a joy of being carried by the Lord like a child on its mother’s lap!

“Every Christian, especially you and I, is called to be a bearer of this message of hope that gives serenity and joy: God’s consolation, his tenderness towards all. If we first experience the joy of being consoled by him, of being loved by him, then we can bring that joy to others. This is important if our mission is to be fruitful : **to feel God’s consolation and to pass it on too others. People today certainly need words, but most of all they need us to bear witness to the mercy and tenderness of the Lord which warms the heart, rekindles hope and attract people towards the good. What a joy to bring God’s consolation to others.**

Then the Holy Father brought conclusion to his talk by this challenge:

“Many of you have been stripped by this savage world that does not give work, that does not help, that does not care if children die of hunger . . . that does not care if families do not have anything to eat or money to bring bread home.”

The Pope, then, asked the Lord to bestow upon all Christians the courage to strip themselves of the spirit of the world!

MISSIONARY OF MARY

Encounters with the Blessed Virgin Mary.

I would like to bring my Statio conference to a conclusion by taking up Sister Reinolda May's Encounters with Mary and allow this section to penetrate our personal lives and our life in community.

Sister Reinolda had encounters with Mary at the Benedictine Hospital in Nongoma from 1955 to 1970. I will just write about one encounter that Sister Reinolda had in the hospital chapel on August 22, 1955. Shortly after receiving communion, our Blessed Mother MARY stood before Sister Reinolda.. Mary showed herself as a wonderful light. Upon her breast rested a big host surrounded by a brilliant corona, radiating life. Mary was a living monstrance. Mary said, ***“Call me TABERNACLE OF THE MOST HIGH. You, too, are such a tabernacle. I wish to be called by this totaled for the glory of my Son. I wish that the altars be surrounded by praying people!”***

SISTER REINOLDA MAY : AN INTERCESSOR IN HEAVEN.

On April 1, 1980, Sister Reinolda May passed over into eternity. The obituary written by the then Prioress of Inkamana and the sisters ends in this way:

“Sister Reinolda will remain in our memories as an exceptionally efficient midwife, a great missionary and a religious woman who drew her strength from her deep love our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary, the Mother of God. May she be an intercessor for the people whom she had loved much.

May she rest in peace.

‘FAITH IN THE MIDST OF RUINS’

The front page of the October 17, 2013 issue of the Philippine Daily Inquirer has the photo of a **Madonna Statue amid Rubble**. A statue of the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus is set at a makeshift altar before a pile of stones was the 180-year-old statue of Our Blessed Mother and the Child Jesus in the Our Lady of Light Church in Loon, Bohol. Amidst the ruins and rubble of destroyed churches, we believe that Mary the Mother of God, will continue protecting us. May we listen to what God wants to tell us

through this calamity. May Mary remain to be our intercessor and Guide through all our journey in life.

PRAYER TO MARY

I would like to end my conference with a prayer that Pope Francis wrote at the end of his first encyclical , ***Lumen Fidei***:

Mother, help our faith.

Open our ears to hear God's word and to recognize his voice and call.

Awaken in us a desire to follow in his footsteps, to go forth from our own land and to receive his promise.

Help us to be touched by his love that we may touch Him in faith.

Help us to entrust ourselves fully to him and to believe in his love, especially in times of trial, beneath the shadow of his cross, when our faith is called to mature. Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One. Remind us that those who believe are never alone.

Teach us to see all things with the eyes of Jesus, that he may be light for our path. And may this light of faith always increase in us until the dawn of that undying day which is Christ himself, your Son, our Lord. (Prayer by Pope Francis)

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GUIDE FOR SHARING:

It would be helpful to share together in community your various experiences on the present-day culture that you observe in our students and our people whom we meet at the social centers:

- ✚ The present-day leisure, entertainment, TV programs and various information that can be accessed in the computer, etc.
- ✚ What have you observed among your students or clients in the centers that show the declining values in our times?
- ✚ What have you observed among our own sisters ? values, attitudes of modern-day living that are not compatible with the spirit of St. Benedict?
- ✚ Share among yourselves creative and effective ways of instilling Christian values among our students and the other people we serve.
- ✚ PTA Meetings and other activities with parents are rich venues for instilling Christian values. Share among yourselves your experiences or encounters with parents.

References:

Biography of Sister Reinolda May : downloaded from the Internet .

Nota bene: there is a long list of sources and references used but I decided not to print them here.)

Matilda Handl, OSB: Faith- filled Foremothers : Missionary Benedictine Pioneer Sisters

Various news briefs and articles from Zenith org. (October 15, 2013)

Various conferences and talks of Pope Francis downloaded from the Internet.