

**Reflection on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception**  
**Dec. 9, 2019 Monroe, Mich.**  
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Readings: Gen.3: 9-15, 20: Eph. 1, 3-6, 11-12; Luke: 26-38

Memory is a powerful ability that we have. When we remember, we are made present to what we remember.

And so, today, as we have done all down the years, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary remember. ... We call to mind, yet again, the day on which we called upon God to witness our commitment to the liberating mission of Jesus Christ, according to the Constitutions of the congregation and in the Church. And, today as well, we delight in our associates who have committed themselves through conscious association with us in our life and mission.

That commitment took intense shape in the Chapter Direction statement of 2018, which reads:

“As an IHM community, we believe the Spirit is inviting us to enter more deeply into the liberating mission of Jesus Christ (Luke 4, IHM Constitutions—Chapter One) as we come to understand it—the liberating mission of Jesus Christ anew—through the mystery of the Sacred Universe. Our spirituality and our shared humanity compel us to respond collaboratively with others to the challenges of our beautiful yet fractured world especially through our commitment to social, economic and ecological justice.”

As Christians, it seems fitting that we plumb the Scriptures, especially the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John, for insights into the conversation that Christians have had between our grasp of the created universe and the liberating mission of Jesus Christ. In the Prologue of St. John, we read:

*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The Word was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through the Word, and without that Word not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

*14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us.*

And, as today’s Gospel of the Annunciation to Mary proclaims: through the working of the Holy Spirit, that Word took on, assumed, the flesh of humanity and thus the matter, the stuff of the cosmos, in the person of Jesus in the womb of Mary.

Given the contents of the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John, we hold that all that has and is coming into existence is accomplished through the Word spoken by God through the working of the Holy Spirit.

And so, we can say:

THAT WORD, by which all continues to come into being,

THAT WORD spoken through the law and the prophets and the psalms ...

THAT WORD became flesh ... assumed the matter of the cosmos ... in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God ... by the working of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary.

As we know, that Light confronted the darkness, the injustice, of our world.

And so, that word made flesh by the working of the Spirit, was executed by crucifixion because of the sinfulness of all humanity.

And yet, with his death, Jesus, the Word made flesh, bestowed that same Spirit upon his followers from the Cross, drawing them into his own response to God by the working of that Spirit.

St. Augustine loved to preach, “The Church was born from the side of Christ on the Cross.”

As St. Paul teaches, in baptism, it is Christ who draws us into a set of relationships — that is, we have been inserted into dynamic relationships with the crucified and risen Christ and all others who are baptized, not unto superiority over the rest of humanity, but in order to continue the liberating mission of Jesus Christ in history.

What a magnificent heritage and inheritance!

But, as the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus – walking away from Jerusalem with disappointment – reminds us, the cost of discipleship can lead to discouragement, and the disciples – you and I in times of discouragement—wonder why things do not always turn out as we had hoped ... in our congregation, in the Church, in our country and in our world!

And yet, the risen Jesus ... who is always present with us, asks: “Why are you so sad?” And we respond: “things are rougher than we imagined, they are not always as we had hoped!”

As Luke recounts:

<sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

<sup>28</sup> As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So, he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup> When he

was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened....

As the story of the road to Emmaus indicates, the celebration of the Eucharist is the place in which the crucified and risen Christ interprets the joys and sufferings of our lives to us through the Scriptures so that we might return with a courageous Spirit to Jerusalem and all the ends of the Earth. Whatever our joys and disappointments and discouragements are, we bring them to the celebration of the Eucharist, so that the Word may interpret them for us, tell us what they mean.

The celebration of the Eucharist has often become a time for personal prayer only. However, I have come to know it as the most profound, public, ethical action in which I commit myself, at the cost of my life, to doing the justice of God who is Jesus Christ, to whom I have been knit in baptism with you, for the peace and healing of all creation.

A few years ago, the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (on which I had the privilege to serve) created a possible revised Exultet for the Easter Vigil that is a fitting conclusion to these reflections:

*We praise you, God, for all your works of light!*

*We bless you for that burst of fire and flame*

*through which you first created all that is:*

*a living universe of soaring stars,*

*of space and spinning planets, surging seas*

*that cradle earth and rock against her breast. ...*

*We bless you for the **light invisible**:*

*The fire of our faith, the Spirit's grace and truth,*

*the Light that bonds the atom and stirs the heart,*

*and shines forever on the face of Christ!*