

Flood of Joy

Joy is not an emotion usually associated with death. Birthdays and weddings are joyous occasions – but death?

Perhaps we are looking at things from the wrong perspective: from our own perspective, our own loss, and not that of the dying person who celebrates both a birthday and wedding? The Church celebrates the feast days of its saints on the day they died, calling it their "birthday in heaven". Christ is the bridegroom of every soul, so the moment of death is the moment we meet our Bridegroom face to face for the first time. How could this not be a moment of joy?

We are beginning at the end, though. Perhaps we should take a step back and look at life, the joys of life, for the joy at death is only the pinnacle of the joy of living. For us – and by "us" I mean all members of our Claverian Family: Sisters, Extern Members, Promoters, Collaborators and Benefactors – a large part of our joy is the joy of evangelization, for we all have the great privilege of sharing in the missionary charism of our Mother Foundress, Blessed Mary Theresa Ledochowska. Few of us will have the opportunity of 'going to the missions' ourselves; we are not 'front-line' missionaries, but missionaries 'behind the scenes' to use Mary Theresa's descriptions; but that does not mean we are not 'real' missionaries.

Our Congregation's Constitutions state that we are "*characterised by the desire to help the kingdom of God to take root and grow everywhere, especially in Africa. Our primary means are prayer, the giving of ourselves, and various activities to promote and support the missions. Our priority is to transmit to others the fire of Christ that burns in our hearts, to spread ever further the love for the Mission so it may take root in all hearts.*" (Constitutions and Directory, Art 4, par 2.)

The joy of evangelisation has been a consistent theme of Pope Francis, not only in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium – the Joy of the Gospel*, but also in his daily meditations when he celebrates Mass in the chapel at *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, and of course, in his *World Mission Day Messages*. In his 2014 Message he wrote

- of Mary's joy when she went to visit Elizabeth and proclaimed her *Magnificat* – "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit exults in God my Saviour".
- of the joy of the 72 disciples returning from their first mission of preaching the coming of the Kingdom,
- and of Jesus own joy as he "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit".

Then he asked "Why shouldn't we too enter this *flood* of joy?"

"*Flood of joy*" – I loved that phrase, not only because of all the images it conjured up in my mind, but also because I could not help but think how aptly it described our missionary role, our "*various activities to promote and support the missions*". Through these activities we strive to support missionaries, yes, but it is "*our priority... to spread ever further the love for the Mission so it may take root in all hearts*" – to give as many people as possible the joy of sharing a little more fully in the lives, the works and harvests of 'front-line' missionaries: for when it is through our prayers and support that they are enabled to continue their work amongst the poor, then *we are there with them* every time they bandage a wound and take care of the sick and elderly. *We are there with them* when they provide clothes and food to the needy, when they comfort those who are suffering, and when they provide education to youth, allowing them to break free of the cycle of poverty that enslaves generations. *We are there with them* when they celebrate Sacraments with the faithful; and *we are there with them* when little children bow their heads in heart-felt prayer for the first time, because they have learned they have a heavenly

Father who loves and cares for them....

Truly “a flood of joy”! and a harvest of fruits that will last for all eternity, for missionary work is much more than 'just another charity'. It could be called THE charity because it incorporates all the Temporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy and brings both the recipients and the givers eternal rewards.

"Flood of joy". This wonderful image also made me think that perhaps this is one of the reasons our Foundress laughed as she was dying – literally laughed! Having spent her life working for the missions, perhaps she could just no longer contain this flood of joy!

Mary Theresa died on 6th July 1922 surrounded by her Sisters. Sister Valeria Bielak described the moment: "I was kneeling at the foot of her bed and could see her face clearly. Suddenly it lit up and our mother began to laugh. I could not help crying out: *She's laughing!* This drew the attention of the others, who at first had not noticed it. Our mother was laughing with unspeakable joy, with an outpouring of unspeakable gratitude."

Most photos and paintings of Blessed Mary Theresa show her in a serious mood, but as Roland Quesnel C.S.Sp writes in his biography of her "the joy with which Mother Ledóchowska went to meet God was typical of her life. Those who knew her said that she was always brimming over with interior joy, even in the midst of the worst tribulations. She lived in a permanent state of thanksgiving... Everything in her came from love of God and union with God". ('At the Service of a Great Cause', p. 21.)

The celebration of the 100th anniversary of the death of our Foundress on 6th July 2022, is an opportunity to remind ourselves of the joy of her death and the joy of her life – and to dive once again into her charism, into this flood of joy which is evangelisation:

“Joy cannot be held at heel: it must be let go. Joy is a pilgrim virtue. It is a gift that walks, walks on the path of life, that walks with Jesus: preaching, proclaiming Jesus, proclaiming joy, lengthens and widens that path...The Christian sings with joy, and walks, and carries this joy." (Pope Francis, Mediation in the chapel at *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, Friday May 10, 2013).

“The joy of the Church is to announce the name of Jesus, and to proclaim: My spouse is the Lord, he is God who saves us and accompanies us”. (Pope Francis, Mediation in the chapel at *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, Tuesday, 3 December 2013).

“The Church – I repeat once again – is not a relief organization, an enterprise or an NGO, but a community of people, animated by the Holy Spirit, who have lived and are living the wonder of the encounter with Jesus Christ and want to share this experience of deep joy, the message of salvation that the Lord gave us” (Pope Francis, Message for World Mission Day 2013).

I would like to paraphrase the last quotation by substituting "Our Claverian Family" for "The Church":

“Our Claverian Family...is a community of people, animated by the Holy Spirit, who have lived and are living the wonder of the encounter with Jesus Christ and want to share this experience of deep joy, the message of salvation that the Lord gave us”.

"Living the wonder of the encounter with Jesus Christ". This is the key, the source and reason for our joy, the joy of evangelisation. St Paul wrote: *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will*

say, rejoice” (Phil. 4: 4-5). To this we add "Amen" and ask the intercession of our Foundress on behalf of her Claverian Family. May it also be said that everything in us comes "*from the love of God and union with God*". We thank our Saviour for the privilege of sharing her charism and being a part of this flood of joy!

Written by Sr Eileen March