Reflections for Gathering Mass in Burlingame | October 15, 2023



As we bring this sacred day to closure, may the peace and blessings of God be with us.

I'd like to begin with a memory from my days as a young teacher. I introduced my students to working with salt ceramic. It was an experience that has stayed in my imagination because you had to stir the mixture for what seemed like forever before it was done. Suddenly the entire mixture would come together and, as a whole, grasp your spoon. I had been transformed into a new reality made up of all the component

parts that were brought to the process. That image speaks to me of our time together over this weekend.

In weaving together our aspirations, understandings of what God is asking of us now, we hear a challenge and a choice. What mercy will be is emerging from the choices we make day by day. It is that reality highlighted by our readings today which speak of the choices we make in response to God's invitations.

Our first reading tells us that God has prepared for us a banquet, before us we have the rich foods and choice wine of friendship, of compassion, inclusion, justice, mercy, and union—but like those who received God's invitations in today's readings, we must choose to come to the table. We are offered God's food to sustain us, empower us, comfort us, and animate us. However, like the guests of the wedding banquet, we must decide if we will leave aside our plans, our vision of how things should be, our wants and desires to engage in the banquet of God. To sing with our lives the lyrics: "To be in your presence is all I desire. To be in your presence and feel your fire of love burning in my heart, love that ignites, spreading hope on a hurting world."

Since the earliest days of our Institute, we have wrestled with what it means to be community, what are we called to be and do at this moment in time, what is the gift we bring to the world right now. We have talked about the myriad ways in which unity might be nurtured and achieved—a unity beyond an ideal, a unity felt in our soul's marrow. We have walked so many paths on the way. We have been focusing on what holds us together, focusing on the issues of our time that cry out for justice and mercy, sharing resources and talents—all bringing a richness to our efforts. Now we experience together a new moment.

Intimacy, compassion, union, forgiveness, *encuentro*—these words have echoed throughout our days together. All these words converge here at this eucharistic table. Here, our desire for union becomes reality. We savor the Spirit of the God moving us, urging us to walk into the unknown land which lies before us. As we have prayed, shared, and listened to one another, we move to greater union.

So many threads have brought us to this moment of reclaiming, revitalizing our commitment to life in Mercy. Together we have seen our world erupt in the disease of horrific violence, of resurgent racism, of hatred and division in families, in our country and even within our church. The years of the pandemic taught us the pain of isolation and loneliness. The reality of not always being able to do what we were used to doing.

That pain and sorrow challenged us to reflect again about what it means to be mercy, to be a community united as one.

We have suffered the limitation of numerical diminishment, while recognizing that our charism is burning within us, a charism struggling to find expression each day. Our charism is a gift nurtured by our Chapter. Our sharing has been the recognition that we are called to embrace an integrated life, one which shines out as one fire fed by our prayer, our ministry, and our community life.

Our reflections have brought us to the realization that Mercy and *encuentro* are wedded together. To live one is to embrace the other. We recognize now more than ever, that we do not walk the path of mercy alone. We either walk together or we will be worn out by the journey we try to make alone. Our experiences of diminishment, promise, letting go and beginning anew challenge us to see that God wishes us to widen our tent of belonging. We are called to welcome the stranger as well as the friend, to be open to ideas that might shatter our certainties and also birth new vision in our hearts. We have come to know simple human presence is a precious gift that is ours to live, to share—a transforming quality more powerful we could ever imagine. Our Chapter, our sharing and our readings today all challenge us to see this moment of choice. I may not be able to control the events of my future or even tomorrow, but I can choose how I will enter into that experience and be present to it.

Just like the father of the groom invited wedding guests to the banquet, God invites us to come. But can I leave my place of comfort, security, or certitude to say, “Yes”? Can I find within myself the courage to leap into God’s tomorrow, unknown and uncertain yet filled with the promise that regardless of events, God is with us on this journey?

Can we live the joyous detachment Paul describes in our second reading? Can we be filled with joy and hope whether experiencing abundance or scarcity, health or frailty, power or powerlessness? Like Paul can we find courage to walk the path of God’s desire knowing, “I can do all things in the One who strengthens me… God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” To this, let us say, “Amen”!