

“Behold I Make All Things New”

Opening Mass for IHM Chapter

June 25th, 2023

The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat. So, they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place. Mark 6: 30-32

Jesus invites the disciples to

“Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.”

Each part of that invitation is important

in light of what you hope to achieve this week.

You need to “come away,” that is, step away

from your busyness and preoccupations of the moment

and allow yourselves to take the time to listen

and reflect on the Word of God,

to share your experiences, to pray rather than analyze,

and to open yourselves more fully to the Spirit.

You must see yourselves as more than yourselves.

You must see this mysterious power that is working within all of you.

This is what Christ is inviting you to do!

You don’t need to worry about our weaknesses,

our incapacities or inabilities.

You just need to affirm the power of the Holy Spirit working within you.

More than anything else, you need to believe

with an almost unbelievable capacity in the power of Christ,

in what he can do in the least of you

and for the benefit of all the IHM Sisters of Philadelphia.

I’d like to suggest that as you begin this week

to **take time today to remember** – to **look back**.

There is no such thing as living in the present moment

unrelated to the past and future
that is too shallow and narrow an existence.

What gives depth to the present moment is the whole reality of the past.

So, today especially, I'd like you to take some time and remember,
quietly looking back and reflecting,
and writing down, if you choose,
what the Holy Spirit helps you to recall.

This will enable you to recognize what you may have forgotten,
and to begin to discern future directions.

They say that hope feeds on memory.

Hope for the future and a memory of the past are not opposed.

So, remembering how God has been so lovingly faithful in past,
promises that God will be even more lovingly inventive
and innovative in the future.

Such assurance awakens hope for your future.

One of our favorite movies is entitled: **“The Trip to Bountiful.”**

It's about remembering a place called home and finding one's life again.

The story begins in Houston, Texas

where Mrs. Carrie Watts, an elderly woman,
has been living with her son, Ludie
and daughter-in-law, Jessie May, for almost 15 years.

It has not been an easy life.

She doesn't belong there; it's not home.

She feels bound up, caged, and lifeless.

Her only real source of consolation is singing bible hymns
as she moves about the house doing her daily chores.

But all she dreams and talks about is where she came from:

a small rural town a hundred miles away called Bountiful.

Unfortunately, she's prevented from traveling there

because her snobby daughter-in-law and her overprotective son,
who will not let her travel alone.

But one day she manages to sneak out of her son's house
and jump on a bus bound in the direction of Bountiful.

Surprisingly, there is nothing left of the little town of Bountiful.
It is a ghost town. It looks like a neglected graveyard.
But in its abandonment, it is stunningly beautiful,
overtaken by nature's beauty of wildflowers and fallow fields
and the music of insects and starlings
and the freedom of the wind blowing through the trees.

As Mrs. Watts enters the home she once lived in,
now dilapidated and empty,
there awakens a host of memories that she carefully contemplates
as she pauses to touch the mantle above the fireplace,
and to stare with wonder into what used to be the kitchen.

She knows this place she calls home.

Something of her has been absorbed there.

It still lives there and welcomes her.

She has come home to Bountiful and found her memories and her life.
Renewed in hope, she is ready to move on.

I think we can all empathize with Mrs. Watts.

We know what it is to be bound up and caged and almost lifeless.

These past three years have been
one of the most challenging and difficult times
we have experienced in our lives.

While we are only just beginning to emerge
from an as-yet-long unfinished global pandemic,
we have also witnessed a domestic attack on our U.S. capitol
led by an outvoted President,
watched or read about daily indiscriminate bombings in Ukraine
while dead bodies pile up on their roadsides,
and have been frightened and horrified
by countless episodes of mass shootings in our country,

that only increase each year.
Such a deprivation has touched
the very source of our identity, strength, and peace.
We have all longed to come home to ourselves and be free again.

You could say the Chapter this week is our “Bountiful.”
But to yield a harvest of any measure and move ahead,
it’s important for you to do some decisive looking back.
What has happened in and to you throughout the past few years?
What have been your moments of grace, of contemplation, of difficulty?

It’s also important to call to mind your deeper roots,
those courageous women of your Congregation’s history,
whose courage and faith helped nourish
the great tree that grows before you today.
There is a beautiful passage from Sirach in which the author
calls to memory godly people from Israel's past.

*I will now praise the godly, our ancestors, in their own time...
renowned for their might,
counselors in their prudence,
seers of all things in prophecy,
sages skilled in composition,
authors of sharp proverbs,
composers of melodious psalms,
writers of lyric poems...
All these were glorious in their time,
illustrious in their day.
Their virtues have not been forgotten.
At gatherings, their wisdom is retold,
and the assembly proclaims their praises*

At our Chapter last January, we spent time looking back

and reflecting on what we had lost and achieved in four years.
In ritual and song, we also honored and gave testimony
to all those confreres who died over the last four years.
The time spent remembering did three things.

It filled us with deep gratitude

for the life we have and for those who have gone before us,

It made us value even more what God yearns

to do for us right now,

And it gave us a new hope because when we realized the events,
the “exoduses” that God has brought us through up till now,
it made us hopeful that God will lead us once more
through the desert again on a new and better exodus.

This brings me to my second point.

Not only should you take time to remember
what God has done for you in the past,
but just as important, you need to be attentive
to what God is yearning to do for you right now
and will do for you in the future,
because the most precious moments are surely ahead of you.

Years ago, I was visiting a friend
who lived in a twenty-story high-rise in Washington D.C.

As we emerged from the underground garage,
my friend gestured toward a door
on which a large notice was hanging.

It read: **‘This laundry room will close at 6 p.m.,
because that’s the way, it has always been.’**

“*It’s the janitor,*” my friend explained.

“*He locks everything up at 6 p.m.,
even though most of the tenets get home after 5:00 pm.*”

While I could easily imagine the frustrated tenants

I couldn't help but think about the unfortunate janitor.
He had locked himself into such a rigid way of doing things,
'because that is the way it had always been'.

Now fear may cause us to agree with Bob's janitor,
because it isn't always easy to hope **for new life**.
The *'reasonable'* thing is to join the three holy women
who remember the enormous stone
shutting Jesus' body away in darkness
and anxiously ask themselves: *'Who will roll away the stone
for us from the door of the tomb?'* (Mark 16.3).
Who will solve our great difficulties
and roll away our persistent problems?
Who will unlock the door of the laundry room for me?

Of course, the answer is the Risen Christ!
God has done the impossible
and brought the dead Jesus to a new transformed life.
In this morning's second reading from the book of Revelation,
we hear these words: *"Behold, I make all things new."*
It is God speaking, revealing himself in Christ,
and promising to dwell with us,
and make all things new.
Because it is the business of God to make us new.
And I have no doubt this is going to happen.
So, try to imagine this, try to anticipate it,
and with that vision, welcome hope into your heart.

To quote Pope Francis:
*"Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out,
that we can always redirect our steps,
that we can always do something to solve our problems."*
It is said that this quote from the Book of Revelation
was Emily Dickinson's favorite Scripture passage.

With the poet's eye, she could catch the vision
God invites us all to grasp.
With her poet's mind, she could understand
and later write: *'I dwell in Possibility.'*
Sisters, I know you to be women of great faith
who truly "dwell in possibility"
And the possibilities for improvement
within you and around you in Christ are virtually infinite.

Let me conclude with another quote from the Book of Revelation
It's a beautiful phrase for God

as the ***"One who is, who was and who is to come."***

The God of our experience, *the One who is,*
proves to be constantly and intimately present to us.

The God of our memory, *the One who was,*
led us through our past right up to this point in time.

But it is the future that should predominate,
that future which is in the hands of the God of Hope,
the One who is to come.

May the God who is, who was and who is to come,
surprise you all these days
and bring out the divine treasure for you,
not only what is old,
but also, and much more what is wonderfully new.