

FROM THE SERVANT GENERAL

ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF OUR CONSECRATION TO MARY

August 10, 2008

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the love of Jesus!

It has been one year since that blessed event last August 10, 2007, when we as CFC-FFL consecrated ourselves to the Blessed Virgin Mary, more specifically, to Our Lady, Mary Mediatrix of All Grace. Since that time, we have experienced her powerful intercession, helping firm up our restoration and moving us forward in our mission.

Yesterday we had a pilgrimage to the Carmelite shrine at Lipa, Batangas. We filled the Church and had a wonderful time. Like Mary in her Magnificat, what we experienced was **exultant joy**. This is the joy that comes from knowing God's mercy, His salvation, and His bountiful blessings. This is the joy that comes from experiencing God's love (Jn 3:16), trusting in His plan for us (Jer 29:11), and responding to His particular call to us as CFC—founded in 1981, re-founded in 1993, restored in 2007.

Jesus was there from the very start in 1981. And at the very start of our restoration in 2007, there also was Mary.

The apparitions in Lipa, to a Carmelite novice named Sr Teresing, started in August 1948. 60 years ago. Fr Melvin Castro, our Eucharistic celebrant, said that the devil was defeated in 1948, and that now, from this day on, the devil will be defeated through our work in every part of the world, where Our Lady is.

It was a powerful affirmation of the spiritual warfare that we have always been involved in, intensifying in the last few years, with its most intense period last year. With restoration, the devil's intent to destroy CFC has been thwarted. But the enemy does not give up. And today we are still deeply involved in spiritual warfare. The devil will oppose God's work and God's people till the end of time.

But Jesus already won victory on the cross. And our Blessed Mother too is victorious over the devil's works.

How do we now respond to this situation of continuing intense spiritual warfare? Let Mary show us the way.

First, Mary was not afraid. She was greatly troubled at what the angel told her (Lk 1:29) but the angel assured her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (Lk 1:30). In the midst of troubles in life, if we place ourselves securely in God's

embrace by walking His path for us, then, knowing His great love and great plan for us, we need never be afraid. No matter what happens.

Second, Mary embraced the cross. We know that there will be problems, challenges and pain in life. We are called not only to be unafraid of these, but in fact to face them boldly and joyfully. Mary was told by Simeon that she would be pierced by a sword (Lk 2:35). This was the price of walking with Jesus. So too with us. The sage Jesus, son of Eleazar, tells us, "My son, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials." (Sir 2:1). If we want to be disciples of Jesus, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow him (Lk 9:23). All the way to the cross.

And do not forget (never forget) that we are into spiritual warfare. So the enemy will continue to oppress us. "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22). We can be subjected to persecution, even from our own brethren. But even this will be cause for blessings and great joy. Jesus himself pronounced the beatitude: "Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven." (Mt 5:10-12).

Just like Mary, who gave birth to Jesus and stood at the foot of the cross until his death, we too must go all the way to the cross. Pain and suffering are salvific. They purify us. They humble us. They pave the way for us to experience victory. For us, just like Jesus and Mary, the cross is the only way.

Third, Mary experienced victory in and through the Holy Spirit. We have been entrusted with God's work. How is this possible? We are weak and sinful. Mary also asked, "How can this be" (Lk 1:34)? The angel replied, "The holy Spirit will come upon you" (Lk 1:35a). It is possible because it is God's work, we are just instruments, and it is the Holy Spirit who anoints and empowers us. Though we are nothing, nothing is impossible with God (Lk 1:37). In fact, God delights in using nobodies like us. Mary herself was lowly, but all ages would call her blessed, for the Mighty One did great things for her (Lk 1:48-49).

We in CFC-FFL are an evangelistic and missionary community. We, as with all Christians, have been entrusted with that wonderful gift of salvation won on the cross by Jesus. We have been commissioned to bring that good news of salvation to the whole world. This is our privilege. This is our responsibility.

Is it possible for God to use us in the power of His Spirit? Can we become families in the Holy Spirit that will be God's instruments for renewing the face of the earth? Jesus has said so, and we just need to believe and accept.

So fourth, Mary believed and so was blessed. Elizabeth told her: "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." (Lk 1:45). Faith is the key. Faith unlocks God's power. With faith, God can move mountains through us (Mt

17:20). But we need to be faithful. To God's call to us. To our covenant with God. To our life and mission in CFC-FFL. We need to walk in the way of Jesus and grow in holiness. And we need to be committed servants whom the Lord can use as He wills.

In the midst of spiritual warfare, we rejoice. Precisely because spiritual warfare is a consequence of our walking in the way of Christ and doing his work, all the more we rejoice.

Brothers and sisters, our joy is in Christ. But it is more than that. It is actually about the Father's joy in us. Our theme of joy for this year comes from the book of the prophet Zephaniah. And here we see that it is our God who rejoices over us (Zep 3:17). God rejoices in our restoration. God rejoices in having His holy remnant. God renews us in His love.

And God gives us His promises through Zephaniah. "I will remove disaster from among you, so that none may recount your disgrace. Yes, at that time I will deal with all who oppress you and at that time I will gather you: For I will give you renown and praise, among all the peoples of the earth, when I bring about your restoration before your very eyes, says the Lord." (Zep 3:18-20).

Now that is great cause for rejoicing. The angel Gabriel said to Mary: "you have found favor with God." (Lk 1:30). "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." (Lk 1:28). With our restoration, I believe we have once again found favor with God. And with our consecration, we have found favor with Mary.

Let then our response be, just like Mary: "my spirit rejoices in God my savior" (Lk 1:47).

Exultant joy. Let this be at the core of our very being, now and forever.

God bless us all.

Your servant in Jesus and Mary,

Frank Padilla