A Fortunate Encounter

By Michelle Andito

April showers bring May flowers, or at least that is how the saying goes. This May, however, we seemed to just get more showers. The first week of May was set aside for our school’s annual Arts Festival, with almost as many outdoor activities scheduled as indoor sessions. We had rain off and on each day, changing our planned outdoor Inforum to an indoor arts session. On Friday, May 6th, the date scheduled for our procession and May crowning, Mother Nature intervened once again and we crowned the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary inside the church rather than outdoors in the groove of the school circle.

As unfortunate as the weather was that week, our school community was fortunate enough to have as our keynote speaker and Mass celebrant Fr. Stan Fortuna C.F.R., one of the founding members of the Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, located in the Bronx, NY. Prior to his conversion, Fr. Stan was a professional jazz musician, and during his homily, when Fr. Stan began to talk about Mary, it was clear to see, and hear, how his background as a musician influences the way he carries out his ministry.

The church was mesmerized as he read to the congregation of students, faculty, staff, and parents, from his notebook, something part rap, part prayer, part poem. As he recited “MM 33 Lines”, his deep booming voice emphasizing certain syllables, Fr. Stan’s words painted a living portrait of “Mother Mary” for all to see, and more importantly, to feel. Several students commented that they felt Mary’s presence in a new way when they listened to Fr. Stan’s “MM 33 Lines”, and they continued on page 26.

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Justice & Advocacy Council of Montgomery County

The U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops and the Maryland Catholic Conference serve as the Catholic Church’s voice on public policy issues, at the federal and state levels respectively. In Montgomery County, the Justice and Advocacy Council (J&A Council) of the Archdiocese of Washington advocates for poor and vulnerable residents.

Since 2004, the J&A Council has encouraged parishes to participate in this important work. Our advocacy efforts are based on the tenets of Catholic Social teaching which include the sacredness of life, the dignity of the human person, the responsibility to care for others, a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, and the need to act in solidarity, recognizing that we are all part of one human family.

As you know, from the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has called upon us to remember the poor, the vulnerable, and the voiceless. There are numerous examples of his call for justice, including the following from last fall:

The call to serve involves something special, to which we must be attentive. Serving means caring for their vulnerability. Caring for the vulnerable of our families, our society, our people. Theirs are the suffering, fragile and downcast faces which Jesus tells us specifically to look at and which he asks us to love. With a love which takes shape in our actions and decisions. With a love which finds expression in whatever tasks we, as citizens, are called to perform. It is people of flesh and blood, people with individual lives and stories, and with all their frailty, that Jesus asks us to protect, to care for and to serve. Being a Christian entails promoting the dignity of our brothers and sisters, fighting for it, living for it. That is why Christians are constantly called to set aside their own wishes and...
Scientists and Faith Leaders Urge President Obama to Announce Steps in Hiroshima to Reduce Nuclear Risks

The heads of four leading science and faith organizations call on President Obama, who will visit Hiroshima, Japan, later this month for the G7 summit, to announce specific steps the United States will take to reduce the real and urgent risks posed by nuclear weapons and prevent a new global nuclear arms race.

"Since Iain Pope John XXIII issued Pacem in Terris in 1965, the Catholic Church has called for a world free of nuclear weapons. Faith and reason, religion and science, agree on this issue," said Bishop Oscar Cantú, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB)'s Committee on International Justice and Peace.

"Nuclear weapons pose a moral challenge and represent an existential threat that requires action now." A statement released May 4, by Bishop Cantú; Ken Kimmell, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists; Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals; and Gabriel Salguero, president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition calls on President Obama to:
- Scale back the U.S. plan to build a new generation of nuclear weapons, including canceling the new "destabilizing and unneeded" nuclear-armed cruise missile;
- Reduce the U.S. deployed strategic arsenal by a third, a level the Pentagon agrees is adequate to maintain security; and
- Remove U.S. land-based nuclear missiles from hair-trigger alert, which would reduce the risk of an accidental, mistaken or unauthorized launch.

The groups met with U.S. National Security Adviser Susan Rice in November 2015 to express concern that the risk of nuclear weapons use may be on the rise, and to urge the administration to take concrete steps to reduce that risk.


National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for Mariners and People of the Sea, May 22

The National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for Mariners and People of the Sea will be celebrated on Monday, May 22. The day is observed in conjunction with National Maritime Day in the United States, which has been celebrated since 1933, to recognize merchant mariners and others in the maritime industry.

The Apostleship of the Sea ministry is active in 48 dioceses in the country, providing pastoral outreach in nearly 53 maritime ports in 26 states with a network of about 92 chaplains, priests, religious, deacons and lay ministers.

"In this Jubilee Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis, may we bring the opportunity of encountering the mercy of God to our brothers and sisters who are seafarers, fishermen, and those whose occupations require them to spend most of the year away from their families, in the high seas, and sometimes facing dangerous situations," said Bishop I. Kevin Boland, retired bishop of Savannah, Georgia, and Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) promoter. "They too are our brothers and sisters with spiritual needs, may we accompany them in their joys and trials in life, so they may also grow in faith and understanding of God's love."

ENCOUNTER
Can't from page 3

thought of that as they recited the rosary later that week after the May crowning.

When I spoke with Fr. Stan after the Mass, I asked him if I could have a copy of "MM 33 Lines" for an article I was writing. He asked

for my phone, opened his notebook, and took a photo of it, commenting on the date it was written, and the crossed-out error in one line. As a middle school teacher, I asked him what we could do to further engage our young people in their faith. He made an analogy of digital connections and satellites beaming things from one to the other every second of the day. None of this is visible, yet we fully trust that our emails, photos, text messages, and updates are being sent and received. Our faith, he explained, has to be much more tangible; we need to show how we are connected to our faith in order for our young people to model that. It's our job, he said, to show that we are ourselves engaged within our faith.

His words struck me and brought to mind a point in my life when I needed to be further engaged in my faith. I was born and raised Catholic, attended Mass every Sunday, said my prayers, received the Sacraments, but in 1993 when my mother was first critically ill, I was filled with despair, and I found it very difficult to pray. My mother's cousin, visiting from Scotland, said to me, "Pray the rosary. Our Lady will never leave us." She and I sat for hours in hospital waiting rooms and at my mother's bedside, praying the rosary together, and it was through the rosary that I prayed through my despair. It was through Mary and the rosary that I felt the power of healing of my own fears and worries. Our Lady did not leave me, and her renewed presence in my life changed the way I pray then and now.

During this month of May, the month of Mary, let us pray with renewed hope and faith, let us turn to Mary with a new vibrancy for our "universal mother, of children far, of children near, transforming fear, eternity clear, already here, celestial maternity, Ave Maria Mother Mary." Thank you, Fr. Stan, for the reminder.