

National Prayer Breakfast

May 17, 2016

Good morning. My name is Sr Constance and I am a Little Sister of the Poor. We are the community you never heard about in the news

During the legal journey that led up to our day at the Supreme Court many people offered us advice and support. Three counsels stuck with me and have strongly influenced my life in the last few months.

First, an archbishop told us, "Don't let anything rob you of the joy of the Gospel." After our oral argument he repeated, "Dare to be of good cheer."

Second, an advisor coaching us on how to engage with the media encouraged us to be "happy warriors" and to look upon each person we encountered as Christ would.

Third, a consecrated virgin who has become a good friend gave me advice in the form of a question, "As Catholics we have the full deposit of the faith," she said, "but do we really have faith?"

Dare to be of good cheer ... See Christ in each person, whether friend or foe ... Believe that nothing is impossible with God. These are the convictions I would like to share with you today.

Pope Francis has entitled his first two apostolic exhortations, *The Joy of the Gospel* and *The Joy of Love*. I think he is trying to tell us something! I believe our contemporaries will listen to us only if we can show them by the way we live that the Gospel brings us lasting joy and happiness. Why follow it otherwise?

In *The Joy of the Gospel* Pope Francis pleaded that evangelizers not look like people who have just come back from a funeral. He wrote, "There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at

moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.”

Haters crucified Love Incarnate; the forces of death killed the Lord of Life. But Jesus rose, so let us not be Christians who communicate Lent without Easter, but believers who know how to speak the truth in joy and love! Amen?

This brings me to the second counsel I was given: to look upon each person, both friend and foe, as Christ would, because even our most cunning adversary is a person ultimately longing to love and be loved. Here I would simply like to quote Pope Benedict XVI: “In God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ.... Going beyond exterior appearances, I perceive in others an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern.... Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave.”

We have spoken of joy and of love; what remains is to speak of faith. As my friend put it, “We Catholics have the full deposit of the faith, but do we have faith?” Or put another way, what enables us to be joyful under the most trying circumstances, and to show love even to those who hate us? Pope Francis suggests that it is “the joy of faith” manifesting itself “as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress.”

I trust because I know that I am infinitely loved and because I believe — with all my heart and soul — that Jesus is risen and that his power now at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. This quiet yet firm trust is what will enable us to overcome our natural timidity, our discouragement, or even our just anger in the face of a dominant culture that disrespects our most strongly held convictions.

This faith is based on a personal relationship with Christ and is expressed through confidence in God’s loving Providence. This was the faith of our foundress, Saint Jeanne Jugan, who had little

education and no resources when she founded our congregation, but who said, in all confidence, “If God is with us it will be accomplished ... God will help us, the work is his ... If God fills the house he will not abandon it.”

When journalists ask me what we will do if we lose our case, I always think of our foundress’ confidence in Providence and I tell them that we have no escape plan because like her, we believe that God will never abandon us. I do not say this because it is a clever sound-bite, but because I have deliberately chosen to believe it.

I have asked myself — and I invite you to do the same — Do I believe only in Lent, or do I also believe in Easter? With St Paul do I believe in the hope to which God has called us, in the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and in the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, this same power that God put to work in raising Christ from the dead (cf. Eph 1)? In a word, do I really believe that Jesus is alive and that he remains in our midst and in my heart through his abiding presence in the Eucharist?

If you believe that Jesus is risen and is still God-with-us, then **please join me in praying these intentions based on *The Joy of the Gospel* by responding “Christ in us arise.”**

Lord, we have let ourselves be deceived; we have shunned your love, yet here we are once more, to renew our covenant with you. Save us once again, Lord; take us once more into your redeeming embrace as we pray, **“Christ in us arise.”**

When we are tempted to give in to “a sterile pessimism” that turns us into ... disillusioned “sourpusses” we pray, **“Christ in us arise.”**

When we lack confidence, burying our talents rather than recalling the words of St Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9) we pray, **“Christ in us arise.”**

When we find ourselves getting caught up in management strategies and institutions rather than persons and our compassion is deadened by “the culture of prosperity” we pray, **“Christ in us arise.”**

When we are afraid to take on the smell of the sheep, to touch the suffering flesh of others and to accept our role in “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets,” we pray, **“Christ in us arise.”**

When we see Jesus in the faces of others, and hear his voice in their pleas; when our hearts inform us of persons and situations whose poverty cries out for our response we pray, **“Christ in us arise.”**

For the confidence to believe that the saving power of God is always at work in our world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we pray, **“Christ in us arise.”**

I would like to close by invoking our Blessed Mother: God of life, you have given joy to the world by the resurrection of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Through the prayers of his mother, the Virgin Mary, bring us the happiness of eternal life. Amen.