

INSTALLATION LITURGY REFLECTION

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Good afternoon, good evening, ohayou gozaimasu, hafa adai! Greetings to you, dear sisters, associates, family members, mission leaders, colleagues, partners in mission, and friends! It is so wonderful to celebrate this day with you here at Sancta Maria in Ripa, both in person and via livestreaming!

I begin with a word of thanks to the now outgoing Provincial Council members, Anna Marie, Christine, Lynne and Dawn. Along with Helen Jane and Mary Kay (Brooks), we have travelled on quite an unexpected and adventurous journey over the past four years. Please know of my gratitude for the ways you each gave totally of yourselves in loving service again and again, as you lived out the SSND mission wholeheartedly, and were trusted members of our Council faith community. I know that the newly installed Council members are extremely thankful for the ways you have prepared the path for the next leg of the journey, including a wonderful week of transition meetings and a promise of ongoing support moving into the future. Thank you!

Once again, I feel deeply humbled and grateful to all of you for your support, prayers and love throughout the time of the election assembly and as we, the 2023-2027 Provincial Council for the Central Pacific Province, have readied ourselves as best we can for what is to come.

To Regina, Mary Kay, Joan, Helen Jane and Sandra, I look forward to creating a faith community with you as together, we commit to be spiritual leaders and to promote unity in such a way that the province is enabled to further the mission of Christ, as expressed in our SSND constitution and rule of life, *You Are Sent* C76. I thank each of you for your “yes” and for your contributions to this reflection.

It is fitting that we are here today commemorating the most holy body and blood of Christ. As we hear in the Prologue of *You Are Sent*, our foundress, “Blessed Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, who, longing for the oneness of all in God, grounded the congregation in Eucharist.”

We read that “Eucharist is the center of our vowed life, the strongest impetus and challenge to our community in mission,” within the section on Eucharist in our constitution. It states in paragraph 33 that, “We are called to be one and to bring all to oneness with God... In Eucharist, we are caught up in the love relationship of Christ with [God, our Creator] in the Holy Spirit. The sharing of his body and blood in this sacrificial meal unites us more intensely with him and with our sisters and brothers.”

In the first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses says to the people, “Remember how... your God has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep God’s commandments.” Then his people were fed with manna, a food unknown to them, in order to show them that they did not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

Although we may not like or be familiar with the food that is put before us, it is comforting to know that we will always be nourished and sustained. The word of God is a nourishment that keeps our mind, body and spirit healthy and energized, ready to be of service to others. We are given what we need each and every day.

Though we may be tested, God will provide. Even though we may only see the difficulties before us and wonder if God is present in it all, we are called to participate in a trust walk of sorts – we truly walk by faith and not by sight.

And in the second reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, we hear that the cup of blessing that we bless and the bread that we break are a participation in the blood and body of Christ... The loaf of bread is one, and we, though many, are one body.

That passage mirrors the distinct call we read in that same section on Eucharist in *You Are Sent*, paragraph 35: “Struggling for reconciliation and unity wherever we are, we return to the Eucharistic table with a keener awareness of our own sinfulness, of the brokenness of our world, and of the power of Christ’s saving love. Our Eucharistic worship is authentic when we generously accept the entire body of Christ and live as witnesses to God’s reign. We are most truly who we are when we celebrate and live this sacrament of unity.”

Finally, in our Gospel reading from John, Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”

We eat this bread and drink this cup at a table of communion, a place where we can share a communal meal, an offering of gratitude and thanksgiving. Who is welcome at this table? What does it look like? Is it a place of nourishment, thanksgiving, and unity? What else is served at this meal?

As you probably know, I come from Italian roots and was raised in a household that oftentimes welcomed a variety of people to the table for a meal. Many of you also know that I learned the importance of serving more than enough food so no one would leave the table hungry, which sometimes leads to an abundance of leftover pizza and pasta! Beyond the actual menu served, it was during those mealtimes that I learned that anyone who appeared at the door was a special guest, as if Christ himself was among us. I carry that object lesson within me to this very day, remembering that no one was excluded from the Sciano kitchen table.

That lesson is alive within the readings for today and within the call from our SSND constitution to generously accept the entire body of Christ. No one is to be excluded from the cup of salvation, the bread of life, the table that joins us together as one, no matter how different we are from one another. There is room for everyone, regardless of who we are, what we look like, where we live, what we believe, or how we live our lives. We invite all to the table and we stay at the table until each one is fed, is heard, is appreciated and loved as children of God. This communion is truly a sacrament of unity.

As we now begin a new chapter in the life of the Central Pacific Province, I was recently reminded of what I shared at the Election Assembly, shortly after being reelected as Provincial Leader, when asked about how I envisioned the Provincial Council for the next four years.

Of course, I shared that being spiritual leaders and promoting unity were primary for this role of provincial leadership. As I reflected on what else I offered to the group, I realized that I would wish the following for all the province and those connected to us, in keeping with our SSND mission.

I hope that each of us can be team players and grow deeper in our relationships with one another, leading to greater trust.

I hope that we can have a fresh start, building on what has been done in the past, but not holding preconceived ideas of how we should function. That we will determine together, with input from those most affected, how best to function moving forward. A Provincial Council can never have all the skills needed, but it will require an openness to learn, and to collaborate with others in a variety of ways. All of us are called to be unifiers, to bring people together, to listen, to be sensitive and respectful, especially when there isn't agreement about how to proceed in any given situation.

I hope that each one of us will have compassionate hearts, called to love, to serve, to share our gifts, and to be the face of SSND, the face of Christ, bringing all to that oneness we long for, as emphasized in our mission.

I hope we will be global and universal in vision, ready to meet urgent needs, and to adapt, be flexible and be creative when something unforeseen happens. I hope we can share and delegate responsibilities across the province and become a strong faith community that is supportive and caring, which will be a positive example for others with whom we interact and who seek our counsel.

I still believe that perfection is overrated, so I hope we can accept one another in our vulnerability and with all our limitations, in patience, with openness to diverse opinions and choices, with compassion, forgiveness, trust, honesty and respect for one another.

May we experience Eucharist as the liturgical expression of the living river of love that streamed out at the beginning of time and now flows everywhere.

To end this reflection, I invite you to join me in singing a mantra written by Suzanne Toolan that is my prayer and our prayer as we grow into this time of loving, caring, and making a positive difference in this fractured world of ours...

“Sacred is the call, awesome indeed the entrustment: tending the holy, tending the holy.” (2x)

Thank you and know of my prayers, support and love always. Peace be with you...