

PONDERING >>>>.....WONDERING>>>>>.....

Footnotes from a port chaplain's days during Christmas and New Year 2004!

Pondering and Wondering: these are key words in the readings of these days... and in the lives of those visited by the Christmas mystery in 2004! ...Mary visited by an angel and giving us record of what happens after such visit ! Mary again making a surprise visit to her cousin and surprised by the welcome, just to realize that this is how faith and blessing work! This is God's language, good news for her generation and those to come until these days of 2004! It so happen that these 2 " words" bring people to realize that a new beginning, a change, even as small in size as a mustard seed, is taking place, in the secret of a night or at dawn or even on the eve of special feasts like Christmas or New Year! These are special moments ... maybe for special people who practice and know the secret of these 2 words and have something to learn anew!

Christmas is very much an event of the "outside", up there in heaven God looking at the humanity in all its diversity and deciding for a change, a change of language maybe, a new beginning... Angels are sent making waves and signs, each in their unique way, for each one to understand their language! Shepherds are also outside, out there in the fields or and start moving towards a place and a manger before wondering and pondering in their lonely nights what happen and what is going on ...Stars and magi are also going out of their way, out of their normal route and routine... and they make a difference in the sky, along the road and in the darkness of the nights! Maybe they are the first to put into practice the "going the extra mile! After the angel's visit, Mary begins a new pilgrimage to her cousin, or to the temple along with the crowds to the well-known pilgrim center in Jerusalem... Sometimes there are also some events and change of route happening in a pilgrim center... This will be her experience and the ponder and wonder will continue for her and Joseph... Who is his father, what kind of teaching or listening is taking place in such familiar place like this temple?

Sometimes some events happen so rapidly that we do not notice or pay attention! Or we are struck by the big waves and do not care for the gentle breeze making only ripples! Or what we are just able to notice is what is happening but we are still confused or even experience fears with what is going on! Maybe things happen so rapidly on the first Christmas that Mary did not have time to comprehend them; so, on the day she is pondering and wondering, that is really Christmas taking place, a birth for her and for all her people...a special homecoming and a special way to make people feeling at home and do the same for and with others...

This Christmas was the first in our New Stella Maris in Cebu...We did not celebrate that night in our "lighthouse" overlooking the sea and the islands and the lights of the ships and the city! We first started with a Eucharist on the ship Asia- China where seafarers' families gathered and, good luck for the seafarers, the ship "slept in her home port" that night! Then, during the afternoon of the 24th, we decided to visit again the people staying and living in the port nearby Pier 4 and 5 where the Stella Maris is located, and we had our Christmas celebration OUTSIDE with the "people of outside"... The spirit of the lighthouse managed to reach out and bring some tidings, comfort and surprises that night. But what was decided in a rush during the afternoon, has now to be "pondered" as we did not know what to answer to the people of the port asking if there will be mass during the Sundays also... more than 300 "tawo sa pantalan" (people of the port) with the kids gathered as port community and the maritime students, apprentices and the staff of seafarers wives managed to care for the songs, the lugaw and the games for the kids...

Another surprise visit that same evening of the 24th of December came from a “tago ng tago” (“long time no see” !!!) seafarer and friend whom I had not received a visit for many years, a former staff of our containers Stella Maris years back! He managed to find the new center and was accompanied by a seafarer’s wife who just received a Fax from the agency in Manila that her husband was found dead on the bridge at sea... She could not believe in the happenings briefly described on the Fax since she knows her husband as a healthy man... How to get a contact in all “closed doors” of shipping offices and government offices in charge of overseas welfare on the evening of December 24, or even with the ship while sailing to Persian Gulf? There are “shepherds on the watch” even on that evening... and even on the evening of December 31st ... the International Seafarers Assistance Network, known as ISAN based in London. A free “call and care service” connected to Seafarers centers worldwide who are just there able to speak your language and first listen to your request that will reach them most of the time with an emotional voice! This is how the communication with the ship started after many unlucky attempts...so that “from ship to shore” we would be able to pay attention and ponder the bad as well as the good news, “in times of routine or in times of crisis”...as we pray everyday in our family prayer for seafarers...Reaching out to seafarers “out there” for a gangway and a ministry of caring and listening to the family “out here”, waiting now for the body to arrive in Cebu, pondering in silence and sorrow “what happened and what is going on now” with the lives of the family left behind !

Just to make sure that we have understood God’s language, there are also “repetitions”, which is much part of “hitting the nail gently” according to the Spiritual Exercises! ... A way to understand the true name of the “One-with-US” at Christmas and along the days and nights! December 31st was a repetition of another event in a seafarer’s family life... and a Chaplain’s ministry life as well! Just before our Eucharist at 9 00 pm with friends and the remaining staff of the Stella Maris, another call from ISAN to the Chaplain...They received a call from a seafarer’s wife in Cebu who could not stand her emotions... after an experience of harassment and violent words by the in-laws! She was put out of her home with the kid and remembered the ISAN card given by her husband before joining the ship...just in case !!! A “star” for her in these troubled moments...and a way for this international network to “act locally” with the Chaplain, asking him to call the wife, assuring her that they will do their best to contact the ship... And they did during the night... even with the captain’s fury that the seafarer was requested to call his wife in crisis due to the parents of the seafarer himself A beginning of a good and honest dialogue even in times of crisis from ship to shore this time, followed by the wife’s visit to the center, wondering how a Chaplain in Cebu is involved in this network!

Time to wonder and ponder! It brought along the many visiting young Chinese seafarers in our port during these days, asking for more cards and cell phones to call “outside there”, that they are lonely and in safe company! It brought along emails from a ship where we know a “Sailing Eucharistic Minister” from Bohol. The ship happened to be close to the epicenter of the earthquake in Sumatra. While sailing they felt an abnormal vibration and the officer on bridge stopped the engine... then, after the routine of checking possible damages coming from the engine, they decided to start again and continue their route...just to learn afterwards the devastating power of a wave! Enough to PONDER and WONDER at the many waves and ripples around...and not only the waves of loneliness or “the waves of destiny”, “ang mga balod sa kapalaran”!

PONDERING and WONDERING: a daily bread for developing an inspiring Ministry ashore and at sea, and a Vision-Mission for a LIGHTHOUSE anchored in the waterfront of Pier 4 -Cebu Port for the People of the Sea!

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