

First Sunday of Advent – December 2011



Happy New Year! Today we begin a new Church Year. A month ago, we celebrated the beginning of Mother Marie's [Saint Marie's] 200th anniversary of birth. As we begin this Advent Season, we have a new opportunity to reflect more deeply and learn more fully from the life and witness of our foundress.

In the Sunday Gospel from Mark, we hear Jesus say to his disciples, "*Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the lord of the house is coming ... May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping!*" [Mark 13:33]

What or Whom does Jesus call us to watch for? What is it that Jesus calls us to be, to do, today, and in the days and years ahead? Are we living our days fully aware of Jesus' teaching? Are we asleep or watchful? Are our senses dulled or alert? Can we pay closer attention to the quiet voice of God and be more alert to God's Word and God's grace?

Where can our God of Providence be found on earth today? In us? In others? In events? We trust in faith that Jesus is already in our midst: "*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them!*" We believe that God is present within our inner selves: "*My Father and I will come to you and make our home in you! I will send my Spirit to dwell in you!*"

When I was a child, the *Boston Sunday Globe* magazine included poetry on its last page and, often, my sister and I would read the poems and occasionally memorize them. I remember one such poem that began,

*If Jesus came to your house to spend a day or two,
If he came unexpectedly, I wonder what you'd do.
I know you'd give your finest room to such an honored guest.
And all the food you'd serve to him would be the very best.
But when you saw him coming, would you meet him at the door
And show him he's the one you seek to worship and adore?
(Or would you have to make sure your house was presentable,
... move the magazines and put the Bible where they'd been?)*

Mother Marie's life as a Sister of Divine Providence was short. She never even made final vows. Yet her legacy is great! She offered herself in love and service to the first Sisters as their teacher and spiritual leader. She served where she was called, whether as first superior and generous benefactor, using her dowry to pay for the first motherhouse in Finthen, or as the deposed leader sent to open the community's first mission in Herrnsheim, or as the first superior of the orphanage, mother to many small children in Neustadt, or as the servant of the orphans and Sisters during the epidemic that cut short her life! It seems she was ever watchful, alert, accepting, loving, serving! In her inner house, Jesus was always the finest guest, made welcome and at home.

Are we watchful? Conscious of the moments when God is visible, present in our midst? Are we alert to God's holy and mysterious deeds in us or others each day? Today and every day, we have a new moment to prepare our hearts and minds. We have a model in Mother Marie to remind us of our call and commitment. We begin a new church season, reminded by every Scripture and prayer and song to be watchful for the coming of our God, of Jesus, Emmanuel, in our midst. May we live these days and weeks with new fervor, open to God's call and God's gifts, so that the Christ who came for each of us and invites each of us to be more, so that the God of Providence, the Prince of Peace, will, by our words and our lives, be made more visible in our world today!

Mary Francis Fletcher, CDP
Provincial Director