

# **Solemn Novena to St. Ann**

## **100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**July 24, 2024**

**Preaching from Rev. Luis Daniel Guivas Gerena, C.P.**

As we journey through our novena on this eighth day, let's take a moment to reflect on our shared experience. We all remember day one when we spoke about gratitude, and for the past 100 years, people have been gathering on this hill, on these same grounds that surround this church every year, to praise God and enliven their faith.

This shared experience binds us together as one community, and it's the testament to the power of faith and the testament to God's abundant graces. There is so much that we all, that we, all of us, can be thankful for. As I have said before, there are so many miracles and friendships that have developed throughout the years, and so many preachers have blessed us with their experiences and their preaching, helping us to grow in our faith and in our lives.

There are many reasons for us to be grateful for, and yet despite our gratitude for all these things, there are also many deeper reasons that bring you to this novena. Many of us come seeking for a miracle through the intercession of Saint Ann. Others are seeking God's counsel for their problems and situations in life, and others are simply here to continue a tradition that began years ago in their family.

All of us, each of us, has a purpose. All of us are here for a reason. So, let us take a moment and think about this reason or purpose that has brought us here throughout the last few days. Let us ask ourselves, what is it that brings me here? What is God speaking to my heart, and how is God calling me closer to himself? You see, today's novena readings are about gratefulness and appreciation. As Father Nelson and I planned the talks for our services, we thought it would be fitting to talk about appreciation as part of our gratitude. In our readings today, Saint Paul writes to the Philippians and shows them his appreciation and his love for them.

And in the gospel, Jesus praises God, acknowledging his graciousness and his presence among the people. Gratitude comes from the acknowledgement of something or someone that has happened in our life, something or someone that is often good. According to the Oxford Dictionary, to appreciate something is to first of all recognize and enjoy the good qualities of someone or something. Another definition says that appreciation is to have or achieve a full understanding of the situation. And a third definition says that appreciation is to increase the monetary value of something. We appreciate something or someone when we recognize their goodness, when we understand them in a deeper way and not just based on superficial feelings and perceptions, and when we see them as something valuable and important in our life.

This doesn't mean that we will always see the goodness of something or someone immediately. Sometimes good things come from bad or difficult experiences. So sometimes we need to give ourselves time in order to appreciate something or someone in our life.

There are so many stories and reflections about appreciation. I remember something I saw on Facebook some time ago, and every now and then it pops up to remind me. It's a couple of images that show up that begin with a man on a wheelchair looking at a man who was walking by him and says, I wish I could walk. And then the following image shows that man who was walking and seeing another person riding by on a bicycle. I wish I had a bicycle to move around, he says. The next image shows the person on the bicycle looking at another person who was driving by on an old car and thinking, I wish I had a car like that. That way I wouldn't get to work all tired and sweaty. And then the next image shows us that same man driving in the old car looking at another person with a newer car driving by and saying, I wish my car was as good as that one. And it continues to show similar images of people comparing their reality to others and wishing something different, something better.

Now I'm not saying that we shouldn't wish to be better or to have better things or different things. We should. However, we should also be grateful for the things that we do have, and we should also appreciate their value in our life.

Unfortunately, we live in a world of competition and comparison. We all want to be better than the other, and we don't always appreciate what we have in our life. As they say, the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, but sometimes it's not. Sometimes it's just our perception of how things are. I remember my first trip to the Dominican Republic. It was a life-changing experience.

That's what brought me to where I am. But I remember that on the first day that I was there, not even an hour after arriving and to the place where we were staying, I already wanted to go back to Puerto Rico. I had always preached about poverty, about the people living in poverty and the different countries and needs in those countries, but that was my first experience. And it was a shock. It was a shock to see so much poverty or so much difference compared to where I lived. And I'm not a rich person. I'm not a wealthy person, but compared to what I had in Puerto Rico, it was very shocking for me, and I wanted to go back immediately. The surprising thing is that 17 days later, I didn't want to go back to Puerto Rico. Something had happened.

I had learned to appreciate the many blessings that God gives us, and it's not always in material ways. It's not always with things that we overvalue. It's in the small things, in the sharing, in the happiness of the children playing with whatever they can, just because they are children, in the joy of finding something to eat, even if it's not what we would like to have, in the simplicity of life. That is where life has its meaning. And those are the things that we need to start appreciating. Those are the things where God hides the beauty of life.

So, let us today ask God to help us appreciate all the blessings that we have. Let us ask God to help us appreciate our family, even though sometimes there are arguments among us or difficulties. Let us ask God to help us appreciate the job that we have, especially knowing that there are so many people who do not have a job.

Let us thank God and appreciate the food that we have on our tables and in our refrigerators, knowing that there are so many people who are hungry and go to bed without food, or perhaps don't even make it throughout the day because they do not have food. Let us thank God. Let us appreciate all the blessings that we have in our life.

And let us be mindful that things are not always the way that we think they should be. And sometimes we are more blessed than we realize. So, let us count our blessings and appreciate the good things and the people in our lives.

Let us look back and thank God for all the goodness in our life. Let us look forward and trust God for the blessings to come. Let us look above and praise God for the hidden beauty in our life.

Let us look around and serve God with gratitude and appreciation. And let us look within ourselves and find God in the simplicity of our lives. Let us ask St. Ann to help us in our needs, but also to help us appreciate our blessings and the love that God has poured in our lives. Amen.