

St. Ann Solemn Novena

100th Anniversary

July 26, 2024

Preaching of Rev. Luis Daniel Guivas Gerena, C.P.

This is it. This is the last day of this year's solemn novena to St. Ann. So happy feast day to everyone.

Today we come together with joy and gratitude for these past few days of devotions, prayers and reflections. We rejoice in God for all his goodness and all his blessings during the past 100 years and in particular during the last 10 days.

We have spoken about gratitude. We have talked about joy. We have spoken about faith, love, compassion, forgiveness, appreciation. Many of you have come up to Father Nelson and me to thank us and to congratulate us for our talks and reflections. And we have heard many well intended and good comments that make us very happy. They help us to appreciate and share some of the blessings that you have received.

But what happens now? What's next? Like every year, we've heard many people say, I wish the novena would last longer. Others have said, I wish you and Father Nelson could stay with us. And I genuinely thank you for these expressions of gratitude. They mean a lot to us.

However, what's your plan now? Father Nelson and I have and every other preacher who has ever preached this novena have shared some of our reflections and our experiences with God. Our purpose has always been to plant seeds of faith with the hope that they will grow and flourish in your lives and in the lives of those around you.

We're only the messengers. God has always been the one speaking to you through our voices. God has been the one calling you to be grateful. God has been the one calling you to rejoice. God has been the one asking you to have faith in him, to imitate Mary in her gratitude, to love one another, to open our hearts and allow ourselves to experience God's love. God has been the one calling us to be compassionate and to forgive and reconcile with God, with ourselves and with one another. God is the one that has invited us to appreciate the big and the small miracles in our lives each day and has called us to serve him in our neighbors.

So, what's next? What will we do with what God has given us throughout this novena? How are we going to respond to God? Today, on this final day of the novena, we are called to renewal. As Passionists, our mission is to meditate on the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and to promote it with our words and with our ministries. We are called to contemplate his sufferings and his love for us.

And this is a beautiful thing to do, not just for us, Passionists, but for every Christian. However, we know that Jesus is no longer hanging on the cross. He is no longer in the tomb.

Jesus is risen. And this is what gives meaning and purpose to our message. As Catholics and as Christians, we are called to be Easter people.

We are called to be people of hope and life. We are called to live with and in the hope of the resurrection. In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis says, the great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience.

Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard. The quiet joy of his love is no longer felt. And the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers, too. Many fall prey to it and end up resentful, angry, and listless.

That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life. It is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit, which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.

And then he goes on to invite all of us to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus, or at least to an openness of letting him encounter us wherever we are at this moment in our life. All of us, each of us, is invited to this encounter, because no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord. I remember my first Easter after coming back to the church, after the Paschal Triduum, after three days of meditation and contemplation, after celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus, I remember standing at the door of my church and looking at the light by the tabernacle, just contemplating it. Everyone else was gone, and I was just there, looking at that light and allowing the joy of the resurrection to work in me, to sink into my heart. All the goodness, all the blessings that I had received, how was I going to let that work in my life? That small light was a reminder of my call to be someone, to be a change in the world, to be light for the world.

Yes, there is darkness in the world. We are living in difficult times, just as so many others have in the past 100 years, and throughout the entire human history. We all have problems, we all have pains and sufferings, but we also have our faith in God and in his presence in our life, supporting us, strengthening us, and guiding us along the journey of our life. Perhaps some of us are experiencing some sadness, or grief, or pain, or fear, or uncertainty, or anxiety, or so many other human realities.

But this cannot define our lives. It cannot determine how we live each day. Yes, it may affect us, but our faith sustains us in our weakness.

As St. Paul so beautifully writes in his letter to Titus, When the kindness and generous love of God our Savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in the hope of eternal life. With a tenderness that never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, Jesus makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and start anew. So, let us ask God to help us renew our faith and our hope that we may find new life, life that is full of gratitude, joy, faith, love, forgiveness, appreciation, and all of God's blessings.

Let us remember how good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost. And as we conclude our novena, may we always continue to look back and thank God, look forward and trust God, look above and praise God, look around and serve God, and look within and find God. May St. Ann and St. Joachim continue to intercede for us in our many needs, and may our lives be renewed with hope and gratitude. Amen.