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Maria

Mother Mary Rose, members of the General Council, Sisters of the Avila community and Carmelite Friars here present, and all of the members of the McCrory Family, Sisters and Friends of the Sisters watching via livestream, I greet you once again as we mark the 37th Anniversary of the death of Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa, Foundress of the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm, and the 128th anniversary of her birth. Today is an unusual celebration taking place in an unusual and challenging time for humanity. Nevertheless, we go on, grounded in our faith in God that He will direct us all and unfailingly, and using modern technology and human ingenuity we can share this Mass and commemoration with those unable to be present. I told my Brothers assisting at the altar that at least we should all wear the same color masks so that we can present a harmonious vision on T.V! Even with the different procedures in place, we are still holding on to the essentials. We are gathered together around the altar, an altar the Venerable loved, and in a place that she loved. We are offering the Holy Mass to which she was so devoted, and we are thanking God for the gift Mother Angeline was and remains to us. We seek to draw from her life and charism the strength, guidance and inspiration we need today as we face into the wind and storms of the moment.

There are many kinds of literature, books, movies and podcasts and many of us are attracted to different genres. Popular among the variety including fiction and non-fiction works remains biography and its twin autobiography in which we, the reader or viewer, listens to and enters into the life, challenges, thoughts and actions of the hero, or subject of the work. Biography can captivate us, and motivate us. Biographies can make us think and do self-examination, comparing ourselves to the person we are reading about. As a boy, I was taken up by the figure of Thomas Jefferson, recently pilloried, and everything about Monticello and all that he did there. I thought, "I would love to accomplish some of what he did." Not a modest thought for a Brooklyn boy of the 1950's. However, each of us, I think, has been taken up by some historical figure and been lifted up just a little, and pushed forward just a bit by having our imaginations and spirits touched by them. The study of Carmelite Spirituality gives us a marvelous example of this. Our spirituality is not found in a textbook of dry principles and practices, but is gleaned by studying the life, deeds and

writings of real holy and human people who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, met God, faced life, and responded in their unique ways – yet with common threads. Studying their lives helps us to know them, God and ourselves better, and face God, life, ourselves and one another in a way we define as Carmelite. We continue to nurture a kind of historical consciousness that gives us our identity at a time in history when Pope Francis warns so clearly in *Fratelli Tutti* on how forces in our world seek to banish historical consciousness so as to rewrite history and cause major disruptions in culture and peoples and their identity, and not for a good purpose.

To say that we are living in a unique moment would be an understatement, I think. This time of pandemic has disrupted almost everything in our lives, and we are sad at the loss of life around us, and the loss of the familiar. While watching TV last week, I saw people together at a party in a restaurant and laughed: “Wow, bunches of us used to sit around a table in public, eat and laugh and hug each other goodbye.” Some part of us knows, though, that plagues, diseases, and natural disasters have always been very much a part of human history, as has been wars, famines, and other kinds of mass- suffering. We can look to the past to see the response of people, of course, beginning even with our Blessed Lord who faced such pain, rejection and trials, or Mary and St. Joseph and all that they endured. The Old and New Testaments are ripe with stories about dangers faced and conquered, sometimes mini-biographies told for their meaning but always, always saved by one means: the help and providence of God. Samson may be a hero, or Elijah, or Judith or Moses or St. Paul, but God was and is always the bigger hero who in his mysterious yet provident way, saves His people. Reflecting on this reality comforts us. St. James wrote his understanding, you might say, of troubles. “Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, and lacking nothing.” Our Lord Jesus himself proclaimed “Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted” comforted, we may add, by God Himself who helps all things turn to good for those who love and believe in Him.

On this day, we think of Mother Angeline as “Courageous in Adversity” and we read the biography of her life through the lens of our theme. The many radiant photos of Mother, accepting flowers, or kneeling in a chapel praying, or posing

next to a smiling Bishop, do not tell the whole story. Mother began her religious life in La Tour St. Joseph, the motherhouse of the Little Sisters of the Poor in France during the early days of the First World War, one of the bloodiest conflicts of all times. She notes that the places used for old people were then turned over to be used by injured and dying soldiers, cared for by the older Sisters. She embarked for America during the same war, and shortly after arriving, lived through the Spanish flu epidemic that killed millions of people around the world and lasted several years. Throughout her religious life, there were trials of every kind, not just illness, but economic crises, wars, and even cultural upheaval. The Venerable founded a religious Congregation, and led the same for a half a century. There had to be untold difficulties and problems to be solved, and we know some of them. It is inconsistent to read the life of Mother Angeline and say that she barely mentioned these trials except in passing and at the same time, affirm as her biographers and those who lived with her say, that she was a woman of deep compassion, of empathy for her neighbor and the plight of the lonely aged, and cared profoundly for the health and welfare of her Sisters.

Courage, or fortitude, is a gift of the Holy Spirit received in baptism and perfected in the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is a God-given capacity in our souls to face into the dangers of this life, both moral and physical. About Mother Angeline, we can certainly say from studying her life, that she had this virtue of courage to a high degree, as the Church has affirmed, to a heroic degree. Her early life was not easy- displaced from their home in order to find work so that the family could survive and becoming emigrants; the young and painful death of her beloved father Thomas and other such events did not, as it might in some people, produce a hardened or cynical attitude in the young Brigid McCrory but, rather, a more compassionate, loving and trustful spirit that she carried throughout her life. A face of courage, which we call bravery, enabled her to leave her loving home at a young age, and venture into a foreign land to follow her vocation, the same bravery that led her and her companions to leave the Little Sisters and found the Carmelite Sisters during the Great Depression. Faith, which births hope and human understanding, was the hallmark of Mother's spirit, and this gave her the courage she needed to face all things. Faith, unshakeable faith even when there was human pain galore, enabled Mother to cry, and to trust at the same moment, as her biographers note. Her

courage in adversity came from a heart focused on Our Lord, Our Lady and trust in the Saints, a heart of faith that she nourished and was her grounding.

This faith also showed forth in the calm and sense of purposefulness with which she faced all things, and it produced joy and optimism in those around her. This spirit attracted many young women, such as yourselves, to follow a Carmelite vocation. Faith enabled Mother Angeline and can enable us as well, to take the long view, and not to be too quick to announce, "All is lost". Maybe a lot will change, but in faith and with courage, we have to commit ourselves to search for the finger of God in all things and allow ourselves to be surprised by what actually is revealed. You affirm in your Homes, "Heroes work here" well, yes they do, but like the biographers of the Bible, the greatest hero, the Lord God of Hosts, is even more completely and effectively at work. It is in Him in whom we place our trust, come what may.

Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount with the words, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven." Heaven yes, at that time which will come to all of us, but also to the heaven that is in our souls where God dwells at this moment. Even now, in faith, in hope and in love, we are able to rejoice and be glad because through the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, is granting us the virtue of courage and that we need. Mother Angeline Teresa, pray for us.

Father Mario Esposito, O.Carm.
Vice-Postulator
Avila-On-Hudson
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