



Reflections for Homecoming

January 2, 2016

165th Anniversary of the founding of the Oldenburg Franciscans

Most of us are familiar with the commercials for Motel 6 in which Tom Bodett promises, “We’ll leave the light on for you.” A porch light is a sign of welcome, be it for dinner guests, for “Trick or Treaters”, or for a loved one returning home late from work. Light reminds us of Christ, our Light, who shines in the darkness and whom the darkness cannot overcome.

I hope that as you return home to Oldenburg today, you consider all of the light that you experience to be a sign that Christ is here, that it is good for us to be here, that it is good for us to celebrate 165 years since our founding, and that it is good for us to rejoice in the light of one another. From decorated trees and wreaths, to blazing candles, to the fireplace in the Hearth Room, to the sparkle in the eyes of each person you meet, may the light signify that you are indeed home, that you are welcome, that the light of Christ shines in you and through you, and that we are grateful for each other and for this opportunity to be together today.

Surely, light has always been important to us as Oldenburg Franciscans. We were born on the Feast of Light, Epiphany, January 6, 1851. The light of God’s grace was the Epiphany Star that gave Mother Theresa the courage to venture to a new world. When she arrived in Oldenburg and founded our community, “a new light shone in the darkness” of southeastern Indiana. The flame of a new Franciscan foundation flared forth, setting ablaze all those whom we have met and to whom and with whom we have ministered. And we have kept the light of our prayer, love, hospitality and service burning brightly ever since --- for 165 years.

We heard in the Gospel reading from John that, “all things came to be through Christ, and without him, nothing came to be.” We, came to be through Christ, the Light, as individuals and as a community. It is through faithfulness to Christ, the Light, that we have been able to live the Gospel of Jesus, responding to the needs of our world and proclaiming and extending the reign of God for 165 years.

The Epiphany Star is a symbol we cherish. It is incorporated into the logo for this anniversary year. It represents for us God's continual care and guidance as we journey through the years. If we walk faithfully in the light of God's ever-present star, we will be led to a bright future full of hope. The Babe in the manger was not what the wise ones expected. Oldenburg was probably not what Mother Theresa expected. The path to the future, illuminated by the Star of God's inspiration, may bring surprises and challenges, but we will be on the journey together. And we come from a long line of pioneers and adventurers.

We can't help but remember today, all those who have gone before us: Sisters, Associates, former members. (The scrolls displayed here in the sanctuary list every person who has ever been a Sister of St. Francis, or one of our Associates.) Each one shone a light into our lives. Some showed us the way. Others companioned us on the journey. Many challenged us to be our best selves. We are richer for having known them. We are grateful to them and for them. Let's just take a moment of silence to recall those in our history who are special to us. (Pause)

Joyce Rupp has a reflection in which she invites us to pray: *"Radiant Star in my heart, in every generation you pass into holy souls. Thank you for the illuminated beings who have touched my life with their goodness. Your light shining through them has inspired me and filled me with spiritual energy. Assure me that I can also be a Light-bearer for others, a clear window of your eternal starlight."*

Thank you to each of you, for being light-bearers. Thank you for being clear windows of God's eternal starlight. Thank you for being Oldenburg Franciscans. You wear your 165 years quite well!

I'd like to end these reflections with a poem by Christine Rodgers, entitled "Song on the Feast of the Epiphany". It is my prayer for all of us.

*Be bold like the Magi.
Do not tarry, settling into your comfort,
But rather, set out,
keeping the star in your vision,
It will lead you to the place you are most in need of, the place where God is.
And, if an angel warns you in a dream not to return by the old way, please listen.*

Let's continue to assure our world which experiences so much darkness that "We'll leave the light on for you!"