

Deep River, A Change is Coming, The Change is Right Now

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(An African American Sister of Saint Joseph's interpretation of 17th century documents, the Little Design, The Congregation)

“Deep River

My home is over Jordan

Deep River

Lord I wanna cross over into campground

Oh don't you want to go

To that Gospel feast

That promised land

Where all is peace?

Walk into Heaven

and take my seat

And cast my crown

At Jesus' feet” (One of the oldest African American Spirituals that slaves sang)

The Spiritual: Deep River

Our Deep river, our ancient, prophetic documents, the foundation our little designed is modeled in the life of the Holy Family and the ministry of Jesus Christ. To be like Jesus! The gift of the charism is the gift to always move towards something, the beacon of littleness, seemingly insignificant, the little design illuminates the true power of our beloved



God, in the little design, the magnitude of God. In French we say: Les hospitaux, self-emptying for another, like the Holy Family. As our name suggests, for Saint Joseph who with his beloved wife, Mary followed, in self-emptying love to care for Jesus.

The Holy Family, through the turbulence of their times, continued to cast themselves at the heart of nurturing love and care for Jesus. We, sisters, agrees, associates and workers are challenged to embrace all in the same as the Holy Family did. “To see God in all things” as (Maxim 93) states, a maxim that should continue to aspired virtue in the 21st century! But, does it?

The song, Deep River, is an early Negro spiritual. It is a song from the heart and soul of our Dear Neighbor. The heart of the prosecuted. The slave, the chatelled, the captured, raped, sold down the river, the segregated!

“Pursue above all the pure glory of God, your salvation and perfection, salvation and perfection of the neighbor and not the satisfaction and consolation often found in these pursuits.” (Maxim 48) Salvation and perfection will mean taking action; how will we? As Sisters, agrees, associates and workers, do this in the twenty-first century? Will we continue to be radical prophetic voices to the people of today? Will we emulate to follow Jesus? Will All Truly Be One?

All May Be One Today: A Change is coming, the Change is Now

Father Jean Paul Medaille, the nature of the Little Congregation

According to the design, seemingly inspired by the divine goodness, this congregation is to be a group of widows and women living in the same house, in the manner of religious...they will devote themselves...pious works of mercy...they will try by means of these works to bring about as



best they can the salvation and perfection of their neighbor.. (From the Constitution for the little congregation OD Sisters of Saint Joseph Father Jean-Pierre Medaille, page 2) The little design was like no other, a change had come to Le Puy, France, and this community would be in the world.

Change is always coming. Unioning love changes everything, dedicated to God and immersed in the world was the goal in 1646 and continues today. Where will we be? The world has changed, engulfed in COVID-19, Virtual Pandemics and we, sisters, Agregees, associates, Joseph the worker are all called to an unioning of love for the dear neighbor too. 1646, 2020 there is much work that still needs to be done!

“It's been a long time, a long time coming

But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will.....

There have been times that I thought I couldn't last for long

But now I think I'm able to carry on

It's been a long, a long time coming

But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will...”

Who Do We Say We Are?

As Sisters, Agregees, Associates, workers, we must be diligent to the plight of our dear neighbor and act in restorative justice traditions always in great love and in compassion. We are called to this! We must tell the truth! The truth is we must acknowledge that most of us have simply not done enough! Some of us have none nothing at all!

We must act zealously, our love for the dear neighbor must be great. “As for zeal it will always be proportionate to the love for God in your heart; see that it springs from a great love and it will be great. Do so with generous courage.” (Ancient Sister of Saint Joseph documents)



Sisters, the truth is, zeal is more than a Webster's dictionary definition, and zeal for us is placing, and dedicating everything we are in the service of the dear neighbor, in the service of another. Zeal is more than a strong devoted interest in something or someone, zeal is at the heart of social justice. In zeal, our charism comes to life!

These Gospel themes were the truth in the 17th century and this must be our truth today! 379 years later, we cannot be indifferent to Black Lives Matter, to racism, to the plight of our marginalized sisters and brothers! The truth is, that in the 21st century we must continue to be courageous. Our religious communities cannot:

- Play lip-service to addressing the sin of racism that destroys communities of color around this nation.

“As Christians, as Catholics, as people of faith, as part of our congregations we must do more than just pray; we must model Jesus’ message to love one’s neighbor.

Our neighbor cannot breathe! Our neighbor is being lynched! Our neighbor is dying!

Our Red Record of Hate must end now!”

(The official statement from the NBSC)

Will we relieve the suffering of or neighbor?

A Change Is Coming

(The world is changing, the tide is shifting, can we empty ourselves once again? The truth will set you free)

The song, a Change is coming is a Civil Rights song of the oppressed. If we are to continue to “empty ourselves”: for the sake of the other and listen to our dear neighbor..... this Civil Rights song (A Change Is Coming) becomes our own! The song tells the truth, acknowledges the



truth. The truth is we live in a racist country, a racist society and unfortunately worship in a racist non-inclusive Catholic Church! The truth is that white privilege and white supremacy make some of us very comfortable. The truth is there can be no restorative racial justice if we don't understand the plight of the oppressed at the hands of white supremacy, especially in America, especially in our Catholic church. We must go more deeply in our study and in our dialogue. We must have the courage to go deeply into relationships with our dear neighbor. Then we must go into the streets, into the city and become like Jesus; putting aside self.

Our charism has always called us to: deepen relationships, to do what Jesus would do. Maxims of Perfection # six, translated by Sr. Marcia Allen, CSJ, ,Father Jean-Pierre Medaille, ssj writes: *“put aside your old self so that you can put on the new.(Eph.4:22-24)self-love, full of gentleness, humility of heart, true sincerity...charity toward the neighbor in word and life completely modeled in Jesus.. Thus by your grace draw many people who will profit by your example and your conversations.*

WWJD, The Gospel of John

Following Jesus we must be emulate Jesus at the well! Works of charity and humility begin at home, in our congregations. America's original sin, four hundred years of sin, of racism and now a pandemic of hatred spilling all over our streets..... We must still continue to be in double union; both neighbor to neighbor and neighbor to God.

“Stimulated by the Holy Spirit”, standing on the shoulders of our founders and the zealous activism and love of our past! We must enter the *deep river* of change and be the transformation the world seeks. Sisters, Agreeges, Associates and Saint Joseph workers we must be prophetic apostles!



As Sam Cooke's Bloody Sunday Tribute (A Change Is Coming) to the March on The Edmund Pettus Bridge lyrics. The lyrics speak to our civil rights movements today:

"Then I go to my brother and I say, Brother, help me please, but he winds up knocking me down on my knees... It's been a long, a long long time coming but I know a change is coming oh yes it will." Will we all help our sisters and our brothers? In uncommon trust in God we must become activist.

Uncommon Trust in God: The History of Sisters of Saint Joseph of Springfield by Sr. Kathleen C. Keating:

"We are mindful of the goal of our Congregation, our own strengths and weaknesses and the God's of God's people. In the changing deep rivers of our past at many times we have been called to be love and act without distinction." Do we love without distinction?

Several years ago the late Congressman John Lewis thanked the Sisters of Saint Joseph for saving his life in 1965. I witnessed the pride my local Congregation demonstrated when the late congressman thanked the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Congressman Lewis told the story of his encounter at Good Samaritan Hospital which at the time was run by Sisters of Saint Joseph from Rochester, NY. I thought to myself: "what were our sisters doing here? I do earnestly celebrate with pride, we all should, what those sisters did was an example of what we would all expect an SSJ to do! John Lewis was thanking us all!

Civil Rights History-Barred in the Past

As a student of history. I know that many religious orders of sisters, were barred from the Civil Rights protests under threatening circumstances by men in power. Some religious were threatened with excommunication by local Bishops!



I am cognizant that even in the 17th century with the guillotine looming over them some of our sisters made radical decisions or had those decisions made for them. The difficult, radical road in following Christ during revolutionary France, up their Calvary Hill costs them everything! Trending deep rivers will always be dangerous! Sometimes we lay our lives down for our dear neighbor! There is a tree in Lepuy, France that marks the ultimate loving sacrifice of our sisters! The tree marks the spot where several of our sisters were guillotined during the turmoil of political unrest, of religious persecution, during the terror of the French Revolution!

“Lord there was a time that I thought I couldn’t last long but now I think I’m able to carry on...” (Lyrics from A Change is Coming)

Perfect and Pure Love for the Dear Neighbor

What self-emptying, perfection look like?

- Motivated sisters in St. Louis, believed to be part of the Underground Railroad, hide a trap door, that door led to a cellar, a passage way.....sisters, watching, waiting and helping the Dear neighbor, chattel people, runaway slaves to escape into Canada and reach the Promised Land to freedom! Sisters of Saint Joseph committed to profound radical love of neighbor!
- In 19th century Springfield, Mass. in the midst of mistrust and prejudice against Catholics, immigrants, the poor, sisters committed themselves to education, prison reform “Come sisters we must see them!” A gentle Sister Mary Cecilia Bowen instructed her sisters to do.

Maxim 100 instructs us to: *“The virtues which will help you acquire and maintain this union ...purity of heart, emptying one’s self, stripping of self, placing everything in the providence of God’s love....very perfect love of neighbor... every kind of other.”*



Twenty-first Century love: How will we work toward racial justice today? The Gospel message in deep waters:

John's Gospel Chapter Four the Samaritan woman. In these deep waters of Pandemic racism, I am your sister, the dear neighbor, the Samaritan woman and my life matters, Black Lives Matter.

Our past reminds us that we must be stimulated to act fairly, wisely, passionately.... Jesus Christ's model of reconciled love at the well.

The Samaritan woman was not silent, we cannot sit in silence.

On the shoulders of our prophetic sisters we must follow the radical Jesus going to the well to dialogue, challenge and then to be transformed by God's living water. The transformation we will share with the world! If the Catholic Church is silent, we must call the church out. We, like the woman at the well must put down the water jug and tell the people:

“come to see the man who told me everything.”

Hidden Power in the Spirit Sisters of Saint Joseph, Agreges and associations, to be the “most ordinary but to recognize the in the hidden, the greatest of God's love in our relationships with our dear neighbors.

Closing

“Stimulated by the Holy Spirit of Love and receptive to those inspirations

*The Sister of Saint Joseph moves always towards
profound love of God*

and

*love of neighbor without distinction
from whom she does not separate herself*

and

*for whom, in the following of Christ
she works in order to achieve unity
of neighbor with neighbor
and neighbor with God*



*directly in this apostolate
and
indirectly through works of charity
in humility – the spirit of the Incarnate Word
(Philippians 2:5-8) In sincere charity (cordiale charité)
– the manner of Saint Joseph whose name she bears In an Ignatian-
Salesian climate: that is, with an
orientation towards excellence
(Le dépassement, le plus)
tempered by gentleness (douceur), peace, joy.” This is who we are!*

Amen, amen.

