

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, NOVEMBER 19, 2017
175TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY FAMILY
CATHEDRAL OF ST. LOUIS THE KING OF FRANCE, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the personal representative of the Holy Father in this country, I wish to express the Holy Father's heartfelt congratulations, paternal affection, and spiritual closeness as we celebrate and give thanks to God for all that He has accomplished in the Sisters of the Holy Family over the last one hundred and seventy-five years. I want to thank Archbishop Aymond and Sister Mary Greta Jupiter, for their kind invitation and to all the sisters for their personal witness, service and consecration to Christ.

Father Cyprian Davis, the late-Benedictine historian and scholar of Black Catholic History, in his book *Henriette Delille: Servant of Slaves, Witness to the Poor*, wrote the following, referring to the Venerable Servant of God and foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family:

The story of her holiness as manifested in the hearts and minds of those who remembered her and in the community that was formed by her can be summed up well in this passage from the Book of Proverbs: *She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy ... Many are the women of proven worth, But you have excelled them all. Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting; The woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her a reward of her labors, and let her works praise her at the city gates.*

If these words sound familiar, it is because they are the words of our First Reading! Henriette Delille and the Sisters of the Holy Family have extended their hands to the poor and needy, to the elderly, the sick, to orphans, to children and to many others. *The woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.* How many Sisters of the Holy Family, with reverence for the God who made each person in His image and likeness, have tirelessly worked to defend the dignity of the person for the praise and glory of God!

Think of all those who relied on the sisters in orphanages; of those who were educated by them at St. Mary's Academy; of those who still benefit from their child development programs; and of those who knew that the sisters would not abandon them at the time of Hurricane Katrina! Their presence in the world has been shaped by the dedication of so many consecrated women of faith!

Let her works praise her at the city gates. These are not only the spiritual and corporal works of mercy performed by Henriette Delille and the sisters who followed the path she charted, but they are also the many children of God to whom the sisters gave birth, who help make up the family of God, which is the Church.

With the support of Bishop Antoine Blanc and Monsignor Etienne Rousselon, in the face of racial prejudice and gross injustice, she, Sister Juliette Gaudin, Sister Josephine Charles, and others refused to give up on their dream of loving and serving God. At the Easter Vigil this past year, Pope Francis noted the presence of the women, who unlike the disciples, "*did not run away,*

who remained steadfast, who faced life as it is and who knew the bitter taste of injustice. We see them there, before the tomb, filled with grief but equally incapable of accepting that things must always be this way.” (POPE FRANCIS, HOMILY AT THE EASTER VIGIL, 15 APRIL 2017)

What a tremendous legacy she and the Sisters of the Holy Family have left -for the Church in New Orleans and beyond – of going, as Pope Francis would say, to the “spiritual and existential peripheries”! Of course, what has been accomplished in and through the Sisters of the Holy Family is a response to the gifts and talents bestowed upon them by the Lord.

This Sunday’s Gospel passage recounts the famous Parable of the Talents, related by Saint Matthew (25: 14-30). The man in the parable represents Christ himself. The servants are the disciples, and the talents are the gifts and inheritance that Jesus entrusts to them. What is the inheritance? His Word; Baptism, which makes us sons and daughters of God and renews the Holy Spirit within us; the Eucharist, His Body and Blood; faith in the one God and Father of us all; his mercy and love which we experience daily, and so many other things. This is the inheritance that He entrusts to us, not only to safeguard, but to make fruitful!

There are those servants who have an unhealthy fear of the Lord, who take His gifts and bury them in the ground, concealing them, or selfishly hoarding them. They are self-referential – only concerned about what will happen to themselves, not using the talents in the service of others.

In contrast, there are the servants, who exercising an entrepreneurial spirit, take their gifts and multiply them. In turn, they have even more which they can share with others. Yes, what Christ has given us is multiplied in its giving! It is a treasure made to be spent, invested and shared with all.

If God has given us His Mercy, He now asks us to multiply His mercy, sharing it with countless others. If He has given us the Faith, then He calls us to be missionary disciples, making new disciples, handing on the beauty and truth we have received, so that others may have a life-giving encounter with Christ! If God found us in our poverty and nothingness and gave us dignity as His children through the waters of baptism, then we have the task of protecting and nurturing the dignity of each person, drawing them to the waters of life!

One hundred seventy-five years ago, Henriette Delille, a free woman of color, having received the gifts of faith, hope and love from the God who made her, began the beautiful legacy of the Sisters of the Holy Family. The growth of that legacy will be up to us, trusting in the power of God at work in the hearts of believers. I suppose the key to a successful venture will be to keep the words of Henriette Delille before our eyes: “I believe in God. I hope in God. I love. I want to live and die for God.” *Je crois en Dieu. J’espère en Dieu. J’aime. Je veux vivre et mourir pour Dieu.*