



CELEBRATION OF THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WOMEN OF HOLY CROSS WITH THE MARIANITES

During spring of 2016, Monique Paquette offered me the unexpected and surprising opportunity to participate in the retreat on the 175th anniversary of the foundation of the women's branch of Holy Cross which was organized by the Marianites in Louisiana! What an opportunity to experience this – and, if you please, in English! So it is that in mid-August, Denise Desrochers (having received the same offer) and I prepared ourselves for the journey. We were to be in Louisiana from October 16-25: the retreat at Lumen Christi Center at Schriever was only until October 21. Consequently, from October 22-24 we were to be tourists in New Orleans. We learned that Lise Veillette and Norma McDonald from the Western Sector of Canada were to be present with us as were Rachel Jette from New Hampshire and Aline Antil, Claire LeBoeuf and Therese St. Pierre from Florida.

From the time of our arrival at the New Orleans Airport, we experienced the warmth and hospitality of our Marianite Sisters. Sisters Gretchen and Kathleen met us at the airport and brought us to Lumen Christi – about fifty miles to the south. Thus, we traveled through immense fields; "Is it corn? Well, no! Those are the sugar cane plantations!" We were beginning our initiation of the landscape of Louisiana.

At 5:00 PM

all participants, Joel and the organizers gathered in the chapel for the Eucharistic celebration and the opening of the retreat. This time of reflection and of sharing as members of the Family of Holy Cross invited us to "journey in faith with Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors", the first Superior General of the Women of Holy Cross. The reflections offered by Brother Joel



Giallanza, CSC, brought us to the heart of the spiritual journey desired by Blessed Basile Moreau and actualized in the life of Mother Mary.

Our own inner journey

was sustained by the liturgies whose texts spoke to us of the faith, generosity, courage, and fidelity of Mary, Mother and Model in whom Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours found her own fidelity and commitment. These were five days of grace during which time we were bathed in the source of our foundation.

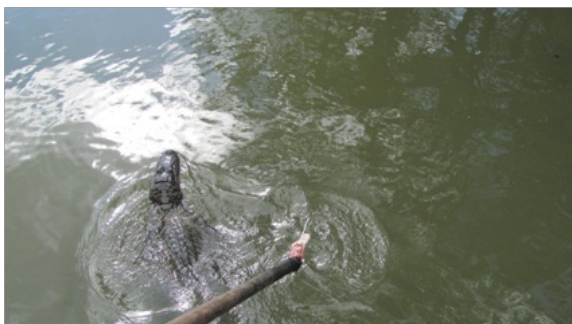
At the closing meal

the fervor of silence was transformed into a joyous cacophony; with the unfolding of speech, we took the opportunity to become acquainted with our Marianite sisters and the three sisters of the Holy Cross from Indiana, as well as with Joe, the CSC priest, and Robert, a CSC Brother. We could have sung: *O How Good It Is!*



In addition to the spiritual nourishment,

we had the opportunity to discover some of Louisiana's particularities: among them, the alligators, the bayous, the Spanish moss in the great oaks, along with other wonders of nature as well as Cajun cooking, the famous *beignets*, the "po'boy" sandwiches and the "*muffuletta*".



We sailed in the bayous. These canals along the damp soils are where the alligators live. Our boatman even prepared a lunch for them. They are so very voracious!



During this jaunt we were able to see the great green mosses that hang from the branches; they add a sort of mystery to the landscape. The moss does not damage the trees – it just tends to grow on and on everywhere!

While most were returning to their places of ministry,

our Canadian group took advantage of the opportunity to visit the city of New Orleans. With Sister Noel, MSC, and Brother Robert we



visited the big Holy Cross institutions. There we also understood the degree of damage caused by Hurricane Katrina.

Upon our return, Roberto and Joe brought us to a restaurant for a Cajun dinner! Fried chicken, rabbit, and shrimp all seasoned with spices. The evening meal ended with the Halloween Parade's allegorical floats with a distribution of gifts and fanfare ... a genuine family party.



On the morrow we began our Sunday at the Cathedral of New Orleans for the 11:00 AM Mass. This was followed by a fine dinner at Landry's on the edge of an enormous lake. A twenty-six mile bridge connects the two sides of the lake.



Later, Sister Noel brought us to visit Holy Angels, the first mission of the Marianites in Louisiana. It was first an orphanage for boys, then a college for young girls which terminated. This mission was sold since it could not be sustained.

Yet another surprise awaited us...

We joined the Marianite community for a fine supper. There was much laughter around this friendly table. Truly, we belong to a wonderful family, rich in every way! Time moves on and the hour for departure arrived. Lise was off to Edmonton, Norma to Winnipeg, and Denise and I were returning to Montreal.

Borrowing from Robert Lebel, what remains within me of this spiritual journey is:

*Awed by so much love,
how can I tell you, my God, of my immense joy.*

Claire Vanier, CSC



Joel on the boat

Four Canadians on the shore of the Mississippi

Musicians and a glimpse of French architecture



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