

Spirituality Commission Chair Report
KCCW Board Meeting September 16, 2017
Sister John Catherine, O.P.

“Blessed are the Pure of Heart; they shall see God”

Purity of heart is to want one thing—the LORD

My name is Sister John Catherine Kennedy. I am a Dominican Sister of Saint Cecilia of Nashville, Tennessee. I grew up in a large, Catholic, farming family in Mt. Vision, New York, graduated from the Catholic University of America, and entered the Dominicans in the Jubilee Year 2000. I have been missioned in Knoxville for most of my religious life—this is my eleventh year in the diocese. Our convent is at St. Mary’s, Oak Ridge, I teach at Knoxville Catholic High School, and I am a graduate student at UT, Knoxville. As Spirituality Chair, I hope to offer a few reflections to remind us of what our lives are ultimately about.

Mary, the Woman par excellence, teaches us how to be pure of heart. Three themes suggest themselves in this one hundredth anniversary of the apparition of Our Blessed Mother at Fatima. While that anniversary will pass in October, it seems that the message is in some respects timeless, and will sustain us through the year.

The first of the themes to emerge is the absolute centrality of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Eucharistic Adoration. The Angel of Fatima taught the little children to adore the Sacred Host and to pray in reparation for those who did not. There is a call here for us, one hundred years later, to renew our devotion to the Mass, to recommit to Eucharistic Adoration, and to offer reparation for sin, especially on behalf of priests, for without them, we would not have Our Lord present in the Blessed Eucharist. If we gaze upon Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, and let Him gaze upon us, He will purify our hearts and the hearts of those for whom we pray.

The second theme is the centrality of devotion to Our Lady and in particular to the Holy Rosary. Our Lady taught the children at Fatima to pray the Rosary, and she invites us to a trusting confidence in her tender care for us in the big and little challenges of our lives and the lives of those for whom we pray. In the mysteries of the Rosary and in the quiet rhythm of its prayers, we are invited to reflect deeply on the love of God, His action in our world and in us, His power to transform and heal us, His passion, death, and Resurrection, the Holy Spirit's dynamic action in the Church, and our hope of future glory. Our Lady, beautiful Blessed Mother that she is, patiently sits with us and redirects us each time we take back our reliance on God and try to save or heal ourselves, and each time we forgetfully cling to the things of this world. Her quiet presence with us teaches us to accept ourselves in our weakness, to recognize that we are beloved daughters of the Father, and to trust the LORD to take care of us. The Blessed Mother has so much to teach us about who we are and who God is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. She helps us, quite simply, to be His.

Lastly, Our Lady of Fatima taught the children to pray for peace. There is turmoil in our world and so much division, resentment, violence, hatred, and anger. Our hearts cannot be totally His as long as we harbor any of these ills. We need then, to forgive one another in Jesus's name—not just those enemies who stir up strife and enmity between nations, but also those who are the closest to us. We make an act of faith that the LORD can heal the wounds they have inflicted on us, and we cease to define them and ourselves by the sins of the past. And we forgive ourselves, as well. The LORD wants to give us new hearts, pure hearts, hearts that are His, hearts that know peace, because they are no longer pulled in different directions, but, guided by Our Lady's gentle hand, directed entirely to the LORD. The Sacrament of Confession gives us the assurance that He has forgiven our sins, and strengthens us to live the charity to which we are called.

These will be the themes I hope to treat in my reflections this year. (I must credit Fr. Jacques Phillipe for many of the ideas above.) I look forward to serving you as the chair of this committee.