

**Your Bride is Beautiful: She is blameless and without blemish**  
**By Mother Olga**

We often read in the passage of Saint Paul to the Ephesians, chapter 5, speaking of Christ as a Bridegroom in His relationship with the Church, described as His Bride, whom He loved and gave His life for her. I have often prayed and pondered on this relationship between the Lord and the Church under this particular title, His Bride.

In general, when I contemplate the history of our Church and witness the work of the Holy Spirit that still breathes in the Church since the first time He breathed on the early disciples and then sent them out as missionaries on Pentecost, I'm always amazed by the power of His love that never ceases to sanctify His Bride and to make her evermore fertile. Indeed His Bride is a mother of many children, of the past generations and those of today and for those yet to come. The Bridegroom has made her a beautiful Bride and a fruitful and a holy mother who has raised holy men and women from every race and nation.

And in a more particular way, in this past year since we moved to Quincy, our Community, Daughters of Mary of Nazareth, lives in an area where we are blessed, first, by our own home parish Saint John the Baptist next to our convent, Saint Joseph of Nazareth convent, but also surrounded by many other good Catholic parishes all within a ten minute drive from our convent with so many Masses throughout the week. Since we moved to this community I have arranged for our Community to make a visit to all the other Catholic parishes in the area once a week to participate with their parishioners at their daily Masses.

Living in a neighborhood and a community surrounded by seven active, dynamic Catholic parishes served by amazing, holy priests and attending daily Masses at our own parish regularly and once a week at other local parishes gave me another insight into the Heart of the Bridegroom for His Bride. How beautiful she is and how much He loves her...

At daily Masses our faithful people never cease to amaze me by their commitment in hot days or freezing weather they are there; the old, the young, people of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures, colors and languages, life experiences and stages of life, yet they all come to this one place for one reason, to meet the Bridegroom. The sisters in our Community, often sit closer to the front part of the church, and I had the privilege of witnessing a long aisle of people at daily Mass and much more on Sunday Mass walking down the aisle to meet the Bridegroom at the altar.

I feel that privilege even more when I am serving as a Eucharistic minister and look at their faces and their body language walking toward Jesus to receive Him just like the bride when she walks down the aisle on her wedding day for her bridegroom to receive her. Often I say to Jesus in my heart, **“You know all of them by name. You know their stories. You know their joys, their sorrows, their dreams and their hopes, all their petitions are here before you as they come to you in faith.”** It is the same like the bridegroom who awaits his bride to walk toward him on their wedding day. He knows her by name and he knows all about her inside and out as she comes with trust to walk with him for the rest of her life.

At Saint John the Baptist church, our parish, I have been amazed to see the faithfulness of our laity who volunteers faithfully in so many areas so generously throughout the year; from our liturgical committee, gifted choir members, countless volunteers of our food pantry, ushers, liturgical ministers and many more good samaritans who serve in season and out of season. It is their faithfulness that is the engine that runs many of our spiritual programs, devotions and ministries of our parish.

This awe and wonder captured my heart even more, when our Community had the opportunity to serve in an Archdiocesan event on December 4<sup>th</sup> at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, called the Cheverus Award Ceremony. Our service as sisters was to assist with registration, welcoming, seating, etc. It is an event to honor men and women, mostly laity, who have served our Archdiocese, particularly parishes, throughout the years. Most of them they get nominated by their pastors and regional bishops.

Attending that event and looking at the faces of the recipients and reading the names of their parishes who came from all the regions of our Archdiocese, seeing the joys of their family members and friends who traveled from across the state and even beyond to attend this joyous day and the most moving thing for me was to see how many priests came, not only to support their parishioners, but even to save seats for them and for their loved ones. It was a beautiful sight to behold, to contemplate, and to treasure. The recipients were also people of different ages, cultures, ministries, etc. It was a day that represents the true beauty of our Church that is united in her diversity and enriched through her generosity. On that day I couldn't help but to offer prayers of thanksgiving to the Lord with the same words that I say to Him whenever I see the faithful people of our parish in Quincy: **“Your Bride is beautiful, Lord.”**

There is no doubt that as Church we experience our own weakness and our limits. We all have them for we are all sinners and still in need of His mercy and the history of our Church is not without dark nights. At the same time, when I look at the faith of our people here in the Archdiocese and see them in their relationship with the Bridegroom at every Mass I cannot help but to think of the people of Israel who, though they walked at night in the desert, they were guided by the column of fire to give them light and help in their travel during the dark. As Pope Francis said in his catecheses on the Church on October 29, 2014 that *“despite our smallness and our poverty, the Lord has made us a true vehicle of grace and a visible sign of His love for all humanity [...] and by His grace we can also become a cause of witness, by saying with our life what Jesus wants of us.”*

Saint Paul in his letter to the Colossians (1:22-23) says that our sanctification, the Bride, comes from the Bridegroom through His real presence, Who is the Way and the Light: *“He has now reconciled you in His Body through His death, to present you holy, without blemish, and irreproachable before Him, [...] Provided that you persevere in the faith, firmly grounded, stable, and not shifting from the hope of the Gospel that you heard, which has been preached to every creature under Heaven [...]”* This is the image that I see daily in our faithful at our parishes who come to the Bridegroom because of their perseverance in faith, hope in the Gospel that they have heard, and trusting in the reconciliation that they receive every time they come to His Table to be sanctified by Him Who gives Himself to us to be one with Him Who is holy.

How blessed we are to be called a Bride of the Eternal Bridegroom, Who came to reconcile us to the Father and continues to pour out Himself out of love for us so that we may be blameless and without blemish so His Bride would always be called beautiful for the King has brought us to His chambers, His pierced Heart, from where the Church was born pure and without blemish from the Cross.

***“The Church’s holiness consists in recognizing herself in God’s image, showered with His mercy and His grace.”*** Pope Francis