

December 10, 2019



Detail of *Translation of the Holy House* by Francesco Foschi

Message from our Director

Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to greet you at the beginning of the Advent season, when we prepare our hearts to commemorate the birth of the Word Made Flesh. The Incarnation of the Lord is at the heart of our Christian faith; only Christians believe that God loved the world so much that He not only saved us from sin and death, but did so by taking on our human nature, and living a real human life. The nine months between the Annunciation (March 25) and Christmas (December 25) teach us that, in his desire to make us one with Himself, Jesus Christ did not skip one moment of a full human life, nor does He shy away from any part of human experience, except for sin. So, the foundation of our faith is also the reason for our hope: no matter what suffering or sacrifice we may be facing, we know the Lord Jesus is able "to sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb 4:15) and offer us the wisdom and grace we need to face it with His help.

Today (December 10) is the memorial of Our Lady of Loreto, which for the first time is extended to the general liturgical calendar of the universal Church. Since the 13th century, the shrine in Loreto, Italy, has been home to what is believed to be the Holy House, the dwelling of Our Lady during her youth in Nazareth and the site of the Annunciation. It has been the destination of countless pilgrims, including many popes, and the most famous litany in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Litany of Loreto, was composed there. Because of a tradition that the Holy House was transported to Loreto by angels who carried it through the air, in 1920 Pope Benedict XV proclaimed Our Lady of Loreto the patroness of pilots and all who travel by air.

I did not know much about Our Lady of Loreto before coming to the Courage Office, but we have become very close in the last few years. In my five years here, I have flown almost 270,000 miles on 275 flights, an average of one flight every week! I pray the Litany of Loreto at every takeoff and every landing, and I can testify to many times when the intercession of Our Lady kept me safe through bad weather, or helped me avoid flight delays and complications. Today begins a special Jubilee Year for Air Travelers to celebrate the centennial of Benedict XV's proclamation, and I am looking forward to this special opportunity to give thanks to Our Lady of Loreto for keeping me and my fellow travelers under the mantle of her protection.

More importantly, of course, I know that Our Lady has been interceding for me and our apostolate, and for all of the work that has been accomplished during those many trips. Whether I was flying to dioceses in the USA and abroad to speak to clergy, seminarians and others in ministry about our work; or to retreat houses around the country to spend time with our members; to the annual Courage/EnCourage conferences or our Truth and Love conferences, I am certain that Our Lady has been interceding for me and for those who share their expertise and personal witness, as well as for those who gather to hear the Good News that we have come to bring by sharing the teaching of the Church about chastity and authentic love.

It was an important decision that our founding generation made to refer to Courage and EnCourage as an apostolate. Like the apostles, we are sent out by the Lord to bring the message of the Gospel to all whom we meet, to testify to the power of His redeeming grace, and to lead others, by witness and example, to draw near to the Church. In Advent, we are encouraged by the example of the first apostle of the Incarnation, the first missionary: Our Lady herself. As soon as the Word became flesh in her womb in the Holy House, her first thought was to take him "with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah" (Lk 1:39) and to bring His presence to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Many centuries later, she appeared as Our Lady of Guadalupe (whose feast we also celebrate this week), again carrying the infant Christ in her womb, and again announcing the Good News of His grace and mercy as an apostle and missionary to the Americas. Like Our Lady in Advent, because we have received Jesus Christ into our lives, we are called to carry Him to others by our words and actions, and above all by our love. As the English author Caryll Houselander wrote in *The Passion of the Infant Christ*, "In those who have received Him ... Christ goes among whom He will. ... Christ wishes to be with them and has chosen us to take Him to them."

I pray that this Advent season will be an opportunity for you and your loved ones to reflect more deeply on the gifts of grace we have received from the Lord through our apostolate, and on the apostolic responsibility that is entrusted to us to share the Good News we have received with the Church and with the world by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15). May the example and intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary—Our Lady of Nazareth, Our Lady of the Visitation, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Loreto—console, inspire and sustain you in this important task.

Yours,
Fr. Philip G. Bochanski

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Father Philip G. Bochanski", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Executive Director