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Sister reflects on recent Vatican actions

by Alice Popovici

The following piece, titled "Just Thinking," was sent to the *National Catholic Reporter*, for publication, by Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word Sr. Joan Holden, of St. Louis:

I was just thinking about the latest mandate, fresh out of Rome, concerning the religious sisters in the United States. I wondered, "What would the founder of my religious congregation, Bishop Claude Dubuis (1869), have to say? What counsel would he give? Would he echo the words of a funny video, now traveling the Internet? "Sit down! Sit down!" Or would his first call be one of prayer? calling us to pray and to reflect upon the words of sacred scripture, especially Matthew 5:1-12, which sums up all of Christ's teachings in the beatitudes.

Catholic teaching claims there are four marks of the church? the church is one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. Dare I add a fifth, for it is also persecuted! From the very beginning of Christianity, the church, meaning all of the people of God, has been severely persecuted, but mostly from outside the structure.

As a high school student in the '50s, I read a biography of Maria Goretti, "In Garments All Red," by Congregation of the Passion Fr. Godfrey Poage. Maria was brutally killed, but before taking her last breath, she uttered words of forgiveness to the one who did her harm. "In Garments All Red" is a fitting title for the story of a girl who had the grace and courage to follow God's will, even though it brought death.

The church has always worn red? a symbol of love and persecution. History gives us vivid and shocking details of those events. What is sad today is that we are experiencing within the institutional church a real and unexpected persecution. We are seeing more and more "white-robed martyrs" who are being persecuted because they hear God's voice within their hearts and have the grace and courage to speak, to write, to act and to follow the drumming.

My community, along with communities of courageous religious women everywhere, strives to live the gospel with its focus on the needs of the poor. Sometimes we do this extremely well; at other times, perhaps not so. When that happens, we pick each other up, brush ourselves off and gently remind one another of the promises we made ? to foster human dignity, to be instruments of God?s love, and to strive to heal a broken world. As the ?little drummer boy? models for us each Christmas ? we play our drums for him ? we play our best for him!

As a religious woman, I am grateful to the people who encourage us to let our light shine and fear not the darkness that comes. Let us continue to pray for one another and remember those who feel the need to fix what they perceive as broken. They, too, stand in need of prayer.

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