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A new dawn - again

by Jocelyn A. Sideco

Young Voices

Special highlights this Advent include Pope Francis being named *Time's* Person of the Year; Nelson Mandela's death causing the world to reflect; and the continued attack of Obamacare.

I guess you can say we are still waiting for the coming of Christ, even when we have experiences of hope in the limited experiences we have now.

Pope Francis

Millennials are feeling freer to question and doubt their faith with this new pope. Last January, we held a young adult retreat that was so needed that our spaces are halfway filled up this year even before the advertisement went out. Cardinal Timothy Dolan has seen a resurgence of youth in their 20s and 30s returning to church each month in New York.

This latest generation, unchurched or wrongly churched, is finding some kind of relief and joy with Pope Francis. How fitting was *Evangelii Gaudium* as his most recent apostolic exhortation! After all, this does translate to "The Joy of the Gospel."

As a friend of mine said, "I am always skeptical when leaders in the church are not joyful. I wonder what Gospel they listen to." Although she is not a millennial, she, like many others, are feeling a sense of excitement with Pope Francis -- not because he takes selfies with people or returns the phone calls of people who personally seek out his help, but maybe because cultural Catholics who have been accused of being cafeteria Catholics (or picking and choosing which teachings and doctrines to follow) are seeing themselves accepted by the "official" Catholic church.

Pope Francis as a teacher has extended humility and grace through his listening and his example of

simplicity and modern sense. I wouldn't say "common sense" because the church does hold a stance as a bold contradiction to some of the world's priorities, but "modern" in the sense that his lived experience has connected with 20- and 30-year-olds and many others in a truthful and authentic way.

Nelson Mandela

I was sitting with a friend when he read a tweet he received announcing the death of longtime activist and moral beacon Nelson Mandela.

Surrounded by children barely born in 1999, I sat there grateful for his witness and convinced that I can continue spreading his legacy by the mere act of sharing his story and retelling his story.

President Barack Obama spoke at his memorial celebration, capturing the truth of Mandela's life -- that this generation will never see the likes of Nelson Mandela again. And yet, these words come from the first African-American president of the United States, a possibility and dream to many of us just decades before.

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Mandela's witness to reconciliation, just action, and persistence echo in my being as rising doubt and fear try to paralyze me into believing that change is not possible or that the status quo is what will win in the end.

The Affordable Care Act

It was President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1943 who introduced a concept of government-assisted health care, then it was President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration that amended the Social Security Act in 1965. Now we have agreed (tentatively, according to some politicians) on the Affordable Care Act of 2010.

What a gargantuan effort to provide health care access to many more Americans.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has long advocated health care for all. In their 1981 pastoral letter "Health and Health Care," the bishops called for a "comprehensive health care system that will ensure a basic level of health care for all Americans."

And yet, so many are disappointed in the website, criticize the lack of preparation and continue to naysay the efforts of many people to transform our current insufficient system.

And of course, we Catholics are all over the map when it comes to our opinion on this new law and its consequences. Ethically, how can we promote life in all its forms? From the struggling family in poverty to the unborn child to the person who has sinned and committed crimes against others.

Hope is in what we say and what we do

St. Paul in his first letter to the people of Corinth writes, "Love ... bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7).

With the example of Pope Francis, Nelson Mandela and President Obama and all the LOVELY people who support them and their visions for a better world, may we, too, learn to speak of a better future AND act

in LOVE and kindness to others as we build this kin-dom of peace, justice, grace and love. May we begin to see ourselves in the examples of these men, that we are capable of humility, discipline and truth.

And yet, here I am, a woman in the church, pressed for some GREAT examples of women includes in this column. So, who better but Mary? The celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe each Dec. 12 gives me a new vision of church and of kin-dom. A friend reminded me of Yolanda Lopez's work and prayer. She depicts Our Lady of Guadalupe in three images. As I have just reflected on the three male figures that share the worldwide stage, I continue to reflect on a world that is inclusive and has room for all people. Ms. Lopez's depiction of Our Lady is stunning because she in the in reflection of herself, her mother and her grandmother.

May God's likeness be reflected in our very lives as well. May WE bring about the revolution of a New Dawn, the Advent of our time, a CHRIST-mas! of sorts.

[Jocelyn A. Sideco is a retreat leader, spiritual director and innovative minister who specializes in mission-centered ministry. Visit her budding new online ministry, In Good Company, at contemplativecompanions.org or email her at jocelyn@contemplativecompanions.org.]

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