

FIFTH ENCUENTRO**Ana Maria Pineda, RSM****Sept. 20, 2018**

Let me begin by sharing a short line from Scripture which speaks to us of God's remembrance of us: God remembers forever his covenant, the word he commanded for a thousand generations...

We are children that are part of the thousand generations that God remembers and remembers

Forever...

We are the elders and the off-spring of a sacred history woven with the many threads of the past and the present...and looking toward the future...

We recall the past...and how God has travelled with us throughout these many decades as Catholic Hispanics/Latinos, as a people who journey together in search of a promised land

We are pilgrims always on a journey to create a world of beauty, truth and justice...

This afternoon, we are blessed to be gathered at the Fifth Encuentro and to have another opportunity to remember the many ways that God has travelled with us on this blessed journey...I began borrowing words from the Second National Encuentro for Hispanic Ministry as a way of beginning a journey of remembrance...of drawing from our memory—and recalling the blessings of this journey...

It is true that this sacred journey of ours stretches back to a time marked by conquest and on-going struggle. But, throughout this history, we have experienced God's faithfulness. We are part of the thousand generations that God remembers in his steadfast love for us. In God's mercy and goodness, we given nourishment in the desert, and the manna that we fed upon was the gift of national gatherings of Catholic Hispanics who sought out not only their place in the church, but how to live out their baptismal commitment.

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... And, this is the memory, and the story that I would like to recount today. It is a story of the “Encuentros—the National Encuentros for Hispanic Ministry” that were held in the United States beginning in 1972. In our sacred history this marks an important moment, God remembers us, and the idea of a national pastoral gathering surfaces to find ways to respond to the growing pastoral needs of our community. In 1972, the first Encuentro was held in Washington, D.C. and the church leaders...bishops, priests and some laity...proposed significant ways to attend to the pastoral needs of Catholic Hispanics. Five years later in 1977...once again God remembers us ... and the Second Encuentro is held in Washington, DC with the theme of “Pueblo de Dios En Marcha,” . And in this journey the Spirit hovers over us as never before. In my memory, it is like a “Pentecost” moment...The Hispanic Catholic leadership across the country reflected on **Evangelization, Ministries, Human Rights, Integral Education, Political Responsibility and Unity in Pluralism** ...and with great enthusiasm it wanted to be part of this “momento histórico” – a time of grace and outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our community. No one expected such outpouring: over 1200 attended. Those were days where countless stories were shared—stories of joy, sorrow, neglect and hope. As a people, we were drawn together as a Latino community rich in diversity... and bonds of solidarity were formed bridging our cultural differences and giving us the awareness that “WE are a PEOPLE,” and of how intimately our lives are linked. We realized how together we could shape our existing realities and those ahead of us in the future. We became aware of the unique contributions we offered the Church and our society in the United States. And, as never before, we embraced a mission to evangelize as a people sent out by our baptismal commitment to those in need of hearing God’s word. The experience of the Segundo Encuentro promoted and re-affirmed an ecclesial vision that was evangelizing, communitarian and missionary. In this way, the Church itself...was motivated to respond more authentically to the needs, desires, hopes and realities of the growing Hispanic community in the United States. Filled with enthusiasm, Hispanic Catholics found themselves in a new moment of grace and challenge. The next

eight years was a period filled with some successes and failures as Hispanics tried to find ways to participate more actively in the life of the Church...at home, in their local parishes and in their communities. In 1985, the Third Encuentro Pastoral was convoked; the theme "Prophetic Voices" signaled our growing understanding of God's preferential option for the poor, and how we are called to a prophetic vocation. A call to act on our baptismal commitment to promote the dignity of the human person, and to **dedicate our energies to eliminate all that** denies the dignity given by God to each human being. This realization and new consciousness led to "the development and promotion of the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry. It provided the vision, objectives and strategies to carry out Hispanic ministry, giving way to new pastoral initiatives for Hispanic communities in thousands of parishes across the United States. An essential part of this Encuentro was a recognition of the needs of Hispanic youth, and of our responsibility to meet their pastoral needs, and to make room for their active participation in forging their future. Once again, God remembers us...and the fruits of the Third Encuentro prepare Hispanic Catholics to assume another role...that of a host to the many culturally diverse communities in the United States. Thus, the Fourth Encuentro was aptly titled "Encuentro 2000: Many Faces in God's House." ...opening the doors to acknowledge the diversity of cultural communities in the U.S. which are blessed with unique histories, languages and religious and cultural realities that also enrich the Church. WE ARE CHURCH. This "encuentro" was marked by the color and vibrancy of our sisters and brothers who share the same faith and desire to be a vital part of the Church. In a society permeated with disrespect for the "other", the hosting of this event by Hispanic Catholic leadership was truly a gift to all of us. Once again, God remembers us...

In the years that followed, we have witnessed gatherings that have brought together the young, and more seasoned pastoral leaders. All of these gatherings have shown us how God remembers forever his covenant...

As we gather this evening, for the Fifth Encuentro, I want to now reflect on the word memory and to share some thoughts on how it has enriched us.

There has been a dimension of “**Memoria histórica**” – an incarnational acknowledgement of how we are situated within history itself. How we are part of an unfolding of history in the “here-and-now”... and how this is where we stand. On this journey, we can glance back and see our past—the many years with all its “acontecimientos”—we stand in the present and we see what is happening in our world today—and we look ahead to a “desired future” for ourselves, our loved ones and the many “others” that we share this planet with...a desired future especially for those who have little to no options. The people of “no consequence”... those whom our world has made “disposable.”

Memoria “subversiva” a dimension that fills us with the determination never to forget who we are, our history, where we come from or what our communities have experienced...the good, the beautiful, and the questionable. We refuse to forget because in remembering, we hold fast to our existence, our identity, our ancestors, our joys and struggles and all that has shaped us. This subversive quality of memory ensures that we are not forgotten.

“Memoria profética” helps us to live out our baptismal promises. We reject evil, all its works, and empty promises, and we do this not only for ourselves but on behalf of others. Drawing from the prophetic tradition, we also renounce evil and proclaim the good. And, we commit ourselves to be “present and active in the world.” This reality is what leads us to work to protect the life and dignity of all people and to care for God’s creation here on earth.

And, lastly, **Memoria Mística**... our lives, and the history of the Encuentros have been and always will be permeated with a sense of God’s presence. God surrounds us with love... God is near and all encompassing... God never fails us. God is our constant companion, our father/mother. God is Emmanuel, God-with-us. We draw from the many practices taught and passed down to us from one

generation to the next...Maria is at the heart of our spirituality. The saints are extended family—the communion of saints. The Word of God speaks to us...inspires us...draws us ever closer to the mystery of God. This and many more expressions have always been part of our journey and of our Encuentros.

And, so tonight, let us once again be grateful for the gift of this memory which we continue this evening. God remembers...the promise made to Abraham... the promise made to us... and we as a people remember who we are as a people who enjoy God's fidelity, promise and love. And, this is the commitment that will keep us going... claiming who we are today... claiming our identity here-and-now today and into the future. We invoke God's name... and commit ourselves anew as a Hispanic community to the important work ahead. And, in the spirit of the disciples of Emmaus, may our hearts burn within us... and may we recount what has taken place on our journey and how Jesus was made known to us in the breaking of the bread...*y en salida*.