

July 24, 2022      10:00 a.m.    Holy Family Chapel, Nazareth

**Jubilarian Mass for Sisters of St. Joseph on the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary**  
**Time/Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly**

***8 Jubilarians 80, 1—not present (Sr. Ruth Harber); 75, 3 (2 present—Sr. Mary Patricia Denny, Sr. Mary Claver Hickmott; 1 died—Sr. Irene Waldman); 70, 1 (unable to attend—Sr. “Crackers” Damien Fitzsimmons); 60, 3 present—Sr. Cathy DeSantis, Sr. Pat Hergenroether, Sr. Mary Ann Wylie***

*(The first two Readings today were specially chosen; the Gospel is for the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday: Hos.2:16,21-22; Rom.12:3-16a; Lk.11:1-13 )*

Today’s Scripture Readings are not only perfect for this joyful Mass of Thanksgiving for all the Jubilarians we honor and pray with today---those who are here with us in the Chapel, those who may be joining us virtually, and the one who we trust is rejoicing from her Heavenly vantage point---, but these Readings also summarize so well what the spiritual life, and the Pilgrimage of Faith we are on, is all about.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the brief write-ups for each of our Jubilarians today. These 8 women have been involved in a wide variety of wonderful ministries: teaching at all educational levels, nursing and medical care, pastoral ministry, boys’ school care, chaplaincy, retreat work, social justice, community leadership---and oh, yes, Sr. Damien “Crackers the Clown” Fitzsimmons’ clown ministry”. These ministries have taken place from Ko-ko-mo (Tipton) to Kal-a-ma-zoo; from Detroit to Oregon; from North America to Central America to South Africa. And wherever these Sisters served, and whatever their ministries were, and still are, they fulfilled them as faithful religious women of the Congregation of St. Joseph. Whether they “heard” God calling them to enter Religious Life in 1942, 1947, 1952, or 1962, the attraction was the same: to follow Jesus, according to the charisms of the Sisters of St. Joseph. You each responded to Jesus’ call to give yourselves completely, generously and totally in this most unique gift of living religious life with a spousal love and a consecrated fidelity.

That’s exactly what we heard in this morning’s special first Reading as Hosea, speaking on God’s behalf, used passionate imagery to describe God’s call. He told us that “*the Lord allured her*”, “*led her into the desert and spoke to her heart*”. God’s calling is always very personal, appealing and challenging, because God wants us to give Him everything---especially our hearts. When we give our hearts

to the Lord in Religious Life, that relationship becomes “spousal”. As God said: *“I will espouse you to Me forever.”* And then Hosea helps us to understand what the qualities of God, the Heavenly Spouse, are: *“I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy. I will espouse you in fidelity.”* Your Heavenly Spouse is “rightness” and “justice”; God is “love” and “mercy”; God IS “fidelity”. And Hosea concludes by saying to the people: *“that is how you will know the Lord”*.

And so, in your lives as Sisters of St. Joseph, “espoused” to the Lord Himself, your primary calling is to give witness to God’s rightness, justice, love, mercy, and fidelity. That is how you have made the Lord known to countless numbers of people in your lives. While God “calls us”, it remains always an invitation; God never forces us. God not only respects our freedom---God needs us to choose Him freely, willingly, generously, whole-heartedly and joyfully; yet, God constantly makes the invitation, and extends the offer. God keeps inviting; He is always “knocking” on the doors of our hearts.

We heard in today’s Gospel that the disciples came upon Jesus just as He was finishing His prayers, which moved one of them to ask: *“Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples”*. And so Jesus taught them, and us, what we have come to know as the “Lord’s Prayer”. Of course St. Luke’s account isn’t quite the same as the one found in St. Matthew’s Gospel, the version which the Church adopted and that we all know off by heart; Luke’s version is a bit more “streamlined”, but the elements are the same. It’s a prayer that teaches us to bring our daily needs to our Loving God, Whom Jesus assures us, is our “Father”, and Whose Name is to be “hallowed”. And what are those “needs”? 1) bread/food to sustain our bodies; 2) forgiveness for our sins; and 3) Grace to overcome the spiritual tests and temptations of the Evil One. But then, Jesus “pivots” a bit and goes right into the Parable that we’re all familiar with. Many of Jesus’ parables have received descriptive names, so that as soon as we hear the name, we know what the parable is about and what it means; for example, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, or the Parable of the Good Shepherd, or the Parable of the Good Samaritan. But this one, which is clearly about “hospitality”, doesn’t seem to have a name. Do you know of any name??? I recently heard someone refer to this Gospel passage as the “Parable about the Pesty Neighbor”. I really like that and it’s a perfect fit.

Part of Jesus’ mastery as a “Storyteller” is in the details He sometimes supplies that are little “twists” or surprises. For example, in this one, just as it wasn’t any more unusual for someone to go to their neighbor’s house to “borrow a cup of

sugar” as people used to do when we were growing up, so in Jesus’ time, neighbors would go to borrow what they need---in this case “three loaves of bread”. But the “twist” is: the neighbor came, banging on the door, at midnight---when any normal person and their family would already be tucked in their beds and sound asleep. And that “twist” is what became the main point Jesus kept emphasizing----not the request for help, but the persistence of the one who came seeking the help, at such an un-holy hour as “midnight” is. Jesus was commending the “seeker” who was determined to get what he wanted/needed one way or another, either because of the goodness of the neighbor’s heart, OR just to get rid of him so he and his family could go back to sleep. And as Jesus continued with the application of this Parable, the “twists” also continued. He asked those who were listening whether they, or any one, would give their child “a snake” if he asked for “fish”; or a “scorpion” if he needed an “egg”. And that is why, in our prayer to God, we should be bold, persistent, “a real pest”. Or to use Jesus’ words, “*ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*” We need to come to the Lord in our need always.

But I think this Parable also can be applied from the opposite perspective. As we know, God invites our response----He never forces us. So, we must listen for God’s invitation when God asks us; when God seeks our willing response; when God knocks on the doors of our hearts. And God won’t stop---He too is persistent. We might say, on the one hand, this is the “Parable about the Pesty Neighbor”, and on the other hand, it could also be seen as the “Parable about our ‘Pesty’ God”. God wants us to respond to Him and to hear His “prayer”, pleading with us to Love Him and one another, as much as we want God to hear our “prayers”.

That’s what Jesus is teaching us about “hospitality”. It’s so much more than lending someone a cup of sugar or even three loaves of bread at midnight to get rid of them. Jesus’ hospitality is about our love for our neighbor when it’s convenient, or inconvenient; to care for others needs whether they are simple or challenging; to stand up for what is right and just even if it costs an “arm and a leg”, or as Jesus did, even when it took giving His Life, being crucified on a Cross.

The Sisters of St. Joseph not only make vows to be consecrated to God in a spousal and faithful relationship through “poverty”, “chastity” and “obedience”, but also in the matters of “hospitality” in always caring for the “dear neighbor”, wherever you encounter another person. It’s the hospitality Jesus teaches us to pray for in the Lord’s Prayer. It’s the hospitality of the Good Samaritan we heard

about two weeks ago who goes out of his way and beyond any call of duty to care for “a dear neighbor” who in reality, as a Samaritan, was his bitter enemy. It’s the hospitality of Martha and Mary that we heard about last week---a blending of active welcoming and prayerful listening, choosing what is “the better part” at the time it is needed. And it’s the Parable about the “Pesty Neighbor” who won’t go away until they get what they need, and the “Pesty God” Who never gives up on us. Hospitality is far more than being polite, or following the rules of etiquette.

It’s the kind of Love we heard about in this morning’s special Second Reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans. It’s a *“love that is to be sincere”*. It’s a Love that *“hates what is evil, holds on to what is good,... that anticipates one another in showing honor and respect”*, which means not waiting to be asked. It’s a Love that *“never loses its zeal, is fervent in spirit, and always is an expression of our service to the Lord”*. It’s reaching out in rightness and in justice, in love, and in mercy, in fidelity to those most in need.

Jesus teaches us, and God has revealed to us since the days of Abraham, that “hospitality” is an expression of God’s basic commandments, which Jesus used to sum up the Law and the Prophets: you/we must love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and love our “dear” neighbor in the same way.

I think that’s why Jesus kept the best part of this Parable until the very end, when He said: *“the Father in Heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.”* Yes, we have to ask---we have to seek---we have to knock on the door; we have to pray that our hearts can be transformed and guided always to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor in the same way. But, we can only do that with the guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit.

Dear Sisters, especially our Jubilarians, thank you for asking, seeking, and knocking for all the right needs, and for being such effective witnesses of Jesus’ Gospel to countless numbers of people, your “dear neighbors” in Christ. May the Gifts of the Holy Spirit guide and inspire us, and help our lives and our ministries to keep bearing the Holy Spirit’s Fruits in all that we do, so that, with St. Paul, we can *“rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, and persevere in prayer”*, making “pests” of ourselves, all the days of our lives.

And let all that we do and say be for the honor and glory of God, now and forever. Amen.