

July 23, 2023 16th Sunday of the Year 10:00 a.m. Nazareth Center

Mass to celebrate the Jubilees/Anniversaries of 6 Sisters of St. Joseph: 1 - 75 years; 4 - 60 years, 1 - 50 years)

Jesus was constantly teaching the profound message of God His Father's Love and Mercy, God's abiding Presence with the world in the very Person of Himself as God's Son, and God's Plan for our salvation guided by God's Holy Spirit. But He also knew that He had to communicate those Divine Realities in ways that we mortal beings could wrap our human minds around. And so, as we heard at the end of today's trifecta of Parables Jesus told trying to explain what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, St. Matthew editorializes: *"All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables...to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world'."*

Even His closest disciples couldn't quite make the connection between the Parable and what Jesus' point was, so when they asked Him particularly about the Parable of the Weeds in the Field, Jesus broke it down very simply and explained each image: the one who sows good seed = Son of Man; the field = the world; the good seed = the children of the Kingdom; the weeds = the children of the evil one; the Enemy = the Devil; the harvest = the end of the age; and the Harvesters = God's Angels----so that they couldn't help but understand the point. That's why Jesus said: *"Whoever has ears ought to hear"*. Even when we understand, there's still another step that has to be taken---making the application to MY life, and going through whatever conversion of heart process I need to do to embrace the Kingdom of Heaven. THAT's when we've truly HEARD what Jesus has to say.

And that's our life-time challenge that began on the day of our Baptism: to hear the Good News of God's Love, and to allow that Good News to take root and grow within us, and like a "mustard seed", to come to full bloom as a large bush; or, to put it another way, to embrace the Kingdom of Heaven and the yeast of the values of the Gospel, and, in spite of lots of weeds, and the attacks of the Enemy, to bear good, rich, abundant Fruit for the Harvest. In our world, weeds and wheat/sinners and saints/evil and good, live and grow together, both around us and within us. Our primary responsibility is to grow in holiness; God's responsibility is to judge. It's very important that we keep those responsibilities clear----and remember that we are not God. It's also our responsibility to make sure that we know Who God truly is.

That's a big part of what we heard in today's First Reading from the Book of Wisdom. Don't you just love the first line of that Reading: *"There is no god besides You Who have the care of all."* It struck me that this brief Wisdom passage is about God's "God-ness"---and that God's "God-ness" is actually God's "Good-ness". As the Wisdom writer goes on, God doesn't need to "show-off" through demonstrations of power or might. As we read: *"And though You are master of might, you judge with clemency; with much lenience, You govern us."* But I think the really important line in that Reading is: *"You taught your people by these deeds, that those who are just must be kind."* God shows us His Mercy not just to let us "off the hook" when we sin, or as a gift for us to keep to ourselves; but so that we can learn from His example and, in turn, can show Mercy to others; so that we, in turn, can learn to be like God by living "goodness".

Today we celebrate Jubilee Day here at Nazareth Center. And we celebrate the lives of 6 Sisters of St. Joseph: 1 celebrating 75 years, 4 celebrating 60 years, and 1 celebrating 50 years of Religious Life. By the way, that's a grand, cumulative total of 365 years-worth (or 36 ½ decades-worth) of Religious Witness in the world. I love the theme of this year's Jubilee Day: ***"All is Gift"***! How true that is. When all is said and done; when we have lived our lives to the point that all of us here have; that's the only conclusion we can reach----it's all Gift from THE Generous Giver, our Loving God and Father. It is He Who has given us Life; it is He Who has given us unconditional Love; it is He Who has given us His Son Jesus, Who in turn has won for us our Salvation thru His own Suffering, Death and Resurrection, and Who, in turn, has given us a share in His Mission to share the Good News of God's "Goodness" with all the world. And it is Jesus' Most Precious Gift of the Eucharist that is our daily, constant, Source of Spiritual Nourishment that keeps us spiritually strong, alive, and able to keep giving witness of our Love for God in the world.

These 6 Jubilarians have given their witness as Teachers, Pastoral Ministers, Administrators, Leaders, and Volunteers. But, no matter what the particular ministry of each of these Jubilarians, they have done what they've done as a Sister of St. Joseph, as one consecrated to the Lord Jesus in an intimate relationship of love and service; they have lived their lives truly as witnesses of the Gospel, and, to use Pope Francis' favorite title, as "missionary disciples" going out to the peripheries to bring the Gospel of Love and Mercy to those in need. Your lives, dear Jubilarians, and the lives of all of you, my dear Sisters of St. Joseph, are a lived-out version of Jesus' "Parables", because through your lives

and ministry, you have taught what the Kingdom of God is like. Jesus would surely be able to point to you, dear Jubilarians, and the lives of consecrated Religious Women everywhere, and say: the Kingdom of Heaven is like these women who have chosen to embrace a life of absolute commitment to following Jesus, vowing to live according to the Gospel values of poverty, chastity and obedience, and service to your dear neighbor. And in the example of our Lord Himself, and taking our cue from Pope Francis who is constantly challenging us to see Jesus in those who are most in need, you have gone out to meet the dear neighbor in the parishes, schools and institutions where you've served, and there, have helped people to use the "ears" God gave them to come to "hear" the Saving Message of the Good News of the Gospel, and to come to know God's God-ness in His Goodness.

On this day when we're celebrating the number of years that you have served in Religious Life, we begin that count with the day that you began your Religious Life: 75 years ago in 1948, 60 years ago in 1963, or 50 years ago in 1973. I enjoyed reading the short synopsis prepared for each of you, which clearly indicates that you came from many different parts of Michigan, and beyond, and as a result of many different contributing factors. It's also very clear that when you entered, you knew in your heart that God was calling you to live your life as a Sister of St. Joseph. But, you couldn't possibly know on that day where God would lead you throughout these years of your Religious Life. But God did---God knew 50, 60, and 75 years ago---in fact God knew before you were conceived in your mothers' wombs--- all the wonderful ways you would give witness on His behalf. He knew all the countless number of people's lives you would touch and perhaps even be instrumental in bringing to conversion, from "weeds" into "flourishing wheat". He knew the places you would willingly go when you were sent because of your pledge of obedience, and God knew all the times that your vows and your Religious Commitment would be what sustained you in times when you were challenged or tempted to do otherwise. I love how, as one of you wrote in your synopsis: because of your community life, throughout all these years, you never felt "alone". Today, dear Jubilarians, we think back to that day 50, 60 and 75 years ago when your Religious Life was just a "mustard seed"; but look what it has grown into all these years later. While, as one of you so beautifully phrased it, "today, ministry has become less doing and more interceding for all of creation", we give thanks to God for your willingness to keep being God's witness, in whatever way He asks. Because of all the "yeast" that has been added into the raw dough of your religious life along the way---through

prayer, support of your dear Sisters, the inspiration of our dear Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, and the countless graces of God---your lives have “bloomed” into a great Gift you have given to God and the Church.

Pope Francis earlier today, in conjunction with this “Third World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly”, said: “Old age is a blessed time, for it is the season to be reconciled, a time for looking tenderly at the Light that has shone despite the shadows, confident in the hope that the good wheat, sown by God, will prevail over the weeds with which the Devil has wanted to plague our hearts.”

Today, in this Present moment, we give thanks for all that has been through all the moments of the Past to bring us to this day, being so very thankful for “all that has been God’s Gift”. As you prepare now to renew your commitment to continue into the Future, ready, as another one of you so beautifully put it, to continue the mission of “Unioning Love”, may you---and all of us---remain ever open to God’s holy Will, relying on the power of God’s God-ness---His Goodness. As our Diocesan Patron, the great St. Augustine, said: “Trust the past to God’s Mercy; trust the present to God’s Love; and trust the future to God’s Providence.” In other words, God is merciful, God is loving, and God will always provide for our spiritual needs.

Congratulations, dear Jubilarians! May God shower His blessings upon all of you, dear Sisters of St. Joseph, as, together, abiding in God’s loving Providence, we give thanks to God, the Giver of all that is Good.