

## Jubilarian Mass for Sisters of St. Joseph/17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 28, 2019 10:00 a.m. Holy Family Chapel, Nazareth

*(The first two Readings today were specially chosen; the Gospel is for the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday: Hos.2:16,21-22; Rev.3:14b,2022; Lk.11:1-13 )*

Today's Scripture Readings are not only perfect for today's joyful celebration of this Mass of Thanksgiving for all the Jubilarians we honor and pray with today, but they also succinctly summarize what the spiritual life, and the journey of Faith for all of us, is all about.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the brief write-ups for each of our Jubilarians today---and according to my sometimes questionable skills at basic math----our 12 Jubilarians of 75, 60, 50 and 25 years individually, are celebrating a collective 710 years' worth of dedicated service to the Church, mostly here in Michigan, but also outside this State, and even in other countries, in a variety of ministries, but all as faithful religious women of the Congregation of St. Joseph. I also found it interesting to note that whether one heard the "calling" to enter Religious Life and did so here at Nazareth (or elsewhere) in 1944, 1959, 1969 or 1994, 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 first Reading as Hosea, speaking on behalf of the Lord, used passionate and dramatic descriptions of God's call. He told us that "*the Lord will allure her*", "*will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart*". God's calling is always very personal, and attractive, because God wants us to give Him everything---especially our hearts. And then Hosea tells us that when we give our hearts to the Lord in religious life, that relationship becomes "spousal", as we heard: "*I will espouse you to Me forever.*" But then, the Lord describes Who that "Me" is with the qualities, the characteristics, that goes into making God, God! So, after the Lord says "I will espouse you to Me forever", He says it again in different words: "*I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy. I will espouse you in fidelity.*"

That is Who God is: God is "rightness" and "justice"; God is "love" and "mercy"; God IS "fidelity". And Hosea concludes: "*that is how you will know the Lord*". And so, in your lives as Sisters of St. Joseph, "espoused" as you are to the Lord Himself, your witness, in whatever your ministry has been, or is now, is to witness to God's rightness, justice, love, mercy, and fidelity. And, as Hosea told us, that is how you have come to "*know the Lord*", and in turn, that is how you have made the Lord known to countless numbers of people in your lives.

Obviously God never forces us to respond, and God always respects our freedom to choose. But God is constantly making the invitation, and extending the offer; in other words, God is always "knocking" on the door of the heart of every person, whether they know God or whether they don't.

We heard that theme in each of our Readings this morning. Hosea used words like "allure" and "lead", but it's clear that He is "knocking"; He is inviting, and it's up to us to follow. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading from the Book of Revelation, we heard the beautiful passage that Jesus, "*the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the source of God's creation, says this: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.'*" He can only come in if we open the door so we can "*dine with Him, and He with me.*" And of course, in today's Gospel, we hear Jesus tell another parable about "knocking" & the importance of Hospitality.

We've heard that theme a lot these last few weeks. Two weeks ago, Jesus told the Parable about the Good Samaritan. Last Sunday, we heard the story about Abraham and the 3 divine messengers, as well as Jesus' visit to the home of Martha and Mary. And immediately after that, in today's Gospel, we hear Jesus teaching the disciples, and us, how to pray, and then, teaches about a different virtue of Hospitality, namely persistence. Do you think there's a message there---perhaps how very important, even essential, hospitality is to our spiritual lives?!

Today's parable is memorable because Jesus includes some extreme details, namely that the friend comes to make this request at midnight, when everyone was already in bed, and should not have been bothered; and this "friend" was not going to take "no" or "go away" for an answer! The conclusion is that if the man doesn't show hospitality out of the goodness of his heart, he will eventually do so just to get rid of his noisy neighbor. Not necessarily a good motive, but a good result!

And that's why Jesus makes the point that we must "ask", "seek" and "knock"---not just once, or a few times; but we too need that virtue of persistence. We must come to the Lord in our need. But also, we must listen for God's invitation to us when God asks us; when God seeks our willing response; when God knocks on the doors of our hearts. It works both ways---it's a "two-way street", in a sense.

And obviously, this hospitality, or concern for our neighbor, is all tied into our prayer to God, our Father. Everything else flows from that. We come to God, asking, seeking and knocking with our requests, and God in turn will give us what we need.

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 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---a blending of prayer and welcoming---a combination of doing what is required, and doing what is "the better part" at the time it is needed. And it's the hospitality of taking care of someone's needs even when it's inconvenient, and when the door has been locked and we're already in bed.

Hospitality is far more than being polite, or following the rules of etiquette. It is caring for others even when it's inconvenient; it's taking care of other's needs before we take care of ourselves; it's reaching out in rightness, in justice, in love, in mercy, and in fidelity to those most in need. What Jesus teaches us, and what God has revealed to us since the days of Abraham, "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 to love our "dear" neighbor in the same way. And when we do that, THEN we will be able to love ourselves in a spiritually holy, and integrated, manner---not out of a sense of selfishness, or being self-absorbed, but loving ourselves as we love our neighbor.

Once we have all that straight, then God will be able to give us what He most desires us to have: His Holy Spirit. That's when our spiritual lives will be strong and mature.

That's how Jesus concluded this powerful parable. When a child comes to his parents and begs for a cookie or some candy just before dinner, the good parent will probably say "No, but

how about a piece of celery or a good carrot". The parent gives the child what is good for them, not a snake, or a scorpion. Just so, Jesus tells us, "*how much more will our Father in Heaven give (us what is good for us:)-- the Holy Spirit*". Of course, we have to ask---we have to seek---we have to knock on the door and 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 dear neighbor in the same way. And of course, we can only do that with the guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit.

Dear Sister 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, throughout these 710 collective years of faithful service and loving hospitality. May the Holy Spirit continue to be God's answer to all your prayers.