

Golden Jubilee
September 7, 2013

What a remarkable,
lovely crowd!

There can be no doubt
about why we have come together this morning.

Your presence
along with
the readings and
the music proclaim
with unhesitant certainty
that this is a jubilee celebration--extraordinaire!

It is a festival of abundance;
it is a liturgy of thanksgiving;
it is a gala of remembrance, renewal, and recommitment.

But it is also religious tradition --
rooted in the past,
marked in the present,
committed to the future,
with clear and specific social obligations and responsibilities.

The past, present, and future thematic elements of jubilee
are reminiscent of
a rite that is practiced in an East African tribe,
whereby a woman who hopes to conceive a child
goes off to sit alone under a tree.
She sits and listens
until she can hear the song of the child
that she hopes to conceive.
Once she has heard it,
she returns to her village and teaches it to the father,
so that they can sing it together as they make love,
inviting the child to join them.
After the child is conceived
the mother sings it to the baby in her womb.
Then she teaches it to the old women
and the midwives of the village
so that throughout the labor
and at the moment of birth itself,
the child is greeted with the song.
After the birth,

all the villagers learn the song
and sing it to the child when it falls or gets hurt.
The song becomes a part of the marriage ceremony
when the child is grown.
And at the end of life,
loved ones gather around the deathbed
and sing this song for the next passage of life. (Megan McKenna)

I've often thought that the song Mary heard,
pondered,
hummed,
and sang throughout her life
is the Canticle proclaimed in today's gospel-- the *Magnificat*.

It was an old familiar tune from the Hebrew Scriptures,
known by other biblical women—
like Miriam and Deborah,
but specifically, Hannah
who was also favored by God with a longed for son.
With that age old melody stirring in her heart,
Mary was compelled to run
and share the good news of God's Providence
with her closest woman kin—Elizabeth.

When one is abundantly blessed,
those blessings have to be shared.
They are never for our selves alone.

So, it is no surprise that Mary's greeting to Elizabeth--
had a rippling effect that
set the little Baptist leaping and womb dancing.

The themes of Mary's canticle are the same as those sounded by her Son, Jesus,
throughout his human sojourn,

And so it's no wonder
that the Magnificat
is the familiar and chosen refrain of those,
who, like our Jubilarians,
have committed themselves to religious life.

Mary's song was a joyful anthem,
celebrating the lavish abundance of Providence,
energetically poured out,

with wild abandon.
It is also about how God totally changes the order of things.
God takes that which is on the bottom;
and turns everything upside down;
God puts the bottom on top and the top on the bottom.
The poor are put on top; the rich on the bottom.
Outsiders are brought in and insiders are put out.
This reversal of the order of things is not mere caprice;
it is brought about because of the compassion of a Provident God.

Jesus enacted his mother's song so exceptionally well.
Everywhere he went he changed the order of things.
He broke the vicious cycles of poverty,
bondage,
fear and death;
He healed,
transformed,
empowered and brought new life. (Bruggemann)
He was the compassionate Providence of God made visible.

And, as this company of women,
our Jubilarians could tell us,
when we fall into the arms of God's Providence,
God's Spirit gets inside of us, stirs us up.
We, too, find a renewed compassion
and become advocates for and with the marginalized
as our hearts are turned upside down and inside out.

For the past 50 years
our Jubilarians
Rita, Janet,
Margie, Marilyn, Judy,
Rosella, and Lisa
have been faithful to the search
for the heart of our Provident God.
At the same time they have been faithful to their commitment
to make God's providence visible
to those among whom and with they minister.

(And many of you here today
are numbered in those ministerial circles)

Over the years,
their hearts
have become the place
where the laughter and tears of God

and the laughter and tears of God's people
have merged.
And that new heart space
created by the co-mingling
of the laughter and tears
of God and God's people
has become the dwelling place of Providence made visible
in compassion. (Ronald Rohlheiser)

Compassion is something of the heart.
It is our generous response
to the generous love of God shown first to us.
We each are challenged, in our hearts, to be compassionate.
When it comes to compassion of the heart,
at its best,
we give it away not so much because other people need it,
but because we need to give it away.

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