

HOMILY FOR FINAL PROFESSION

Almost three years ago I stood before this congregation and retook my temporary vows. At that time I told you that my name for God was Elohim Yachal or God of Hope. Some 25 years ago, when I was finally able to remove my profession ring, I placed it in this seashell and kept it on a table where it was always in my view. My hope was that one day I would again have this ring placed on my finger. When I left, I was lost. My familiar world was gone and I felt like a stranger in the world, caught between two worlds and at that time, home in neither.

I often take time to reread the journals I have kept over the years. I was reflecting on this quote from Evelyn Underhill in her book *Mysticism*. "By a free act, independent of man's efforts, God self-disclosed to the soul: and the soul rushes out willingly to lose itself in Him...." In my first year on the mission I had such an experience. This experience was pure gift. From my perspective, this self-disclosure of the infinite had no rhyme or reason to have happened. For God, it must have made perfect sense. The experience did confer on me a deep and profound knowledge of the reality of God. Whether I ever had a similar experience in the future didn't matter. I had it and I knew. No matter what doubts I entertained in the future I could not escape the memory of God so deeply imprinted on my psyche. This visitation left an indelible mark. I recognized the God who always sought me.

Hope is basic and essential in living a spiritual life. St. John of the Cross insisted that great despair generally leads to great hope; that great hope eventually leads to great faith; and great faith invariably leads to great hope. Hope is a reflection of the faith we have in God's promises to us which allows one to trust God's ways to guide us. It is the grounds for believing that something will happen. With faith we get to know the heart of God which is love. Love has the power to help us believe and is the engine that drives our spiritual lives. Hope is defined as a feeling of expectation. Yachal translates as hope and means to patiently wait and endure until you reach the expected end. Hope is the fuel that keeps faith alive. In the meantime, you wait. This waiting process requires work, enduring the trials of life and surrendering to God, and adjusting to God's time frame and plan for your life.

Finding faith, hope and love for ourselves does not mark the end of anything. It can mark the beginning and ignite a new belief that lures one to a new outlook and vision for the world conceived in the struggle with faith. According to Rachal Solnit; "Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act. When you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcome" by your choice to cooperate with Spirit. Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable. It is the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand. We may not, in fact, know them afterwards either, but they matter all the same. In August of 2014, "I wrote;

“God, those stirrings and restlessness are invading my soul as in times past. Is there a new season for my time here? I’m ready! Point the direction and give me what I need for what you need in this world.” Our faith illuminates these fallow periods when something new is being born. God counts on our fiats to the invitation to transform.

Though hope may be the thing that pulls one forward and keeps one going, it is also dangerous, painful, and risky because hope is a force. Hope is giving yourself permission to fail, reflect, learn, and retry with no expiration date. We allow ourselves to be launched into the deep beyond our control and human understanding and to be overtaken by God and in allowing God to shape us, stretch us, and lead us to new depths of trust, love and freedom. In hope, we often wait in the dark until God slowly unwraps the plan for our life once we are ready to accept it.

The beginning of my journey back to you started June 20, 2014. I wrote, “I just had lunch with Sr. Anne and I am so filled with emotion. I’m still one of them and my grief for having to take a different path is painful and deep. Sometimes, if I let it be, it crushes me. In July of 2015, I recorded in my journal the following: “Sometimes I am so full that I can’t put into words what I feel. You are a God of surprises. I still don’t know what you are up to but, I know through the gift you have given me in one of my sisters, a direction is slowly emerging. I know of my openness to it with some anxiety but moving forward. In faith I will travel where you are taking me.”

November 16, 2015; God you have given me distance, time, space, companions, dreams and perspective during this time of discernment. There is only one final step for me to take and my part will have taken me as far as I can go. You have removed all obstacles and have brought me to this place. Unless I am fooling myself, I am at peace with this. I still have concerns but I also have faith that you will be with me and will work out all things to good.

June 2016, I am home again at Providence Heights and so deeply touched by the response of my sisters. My heart is full of love for them. I felt the tension in my body released with the exposure to their acceptance. May I be faithful to all they have invited me to as a part of this community.”

If I said to you that things have been smooth sailing, I’d be lying. Before my 30 day retreat in 2017, I was grappling with continuing in religious life. Most days for the last 30 years I spend time in North Park reading, praying and writing. One day as I was sitting there a young man from Rwanda, who has known the destruction of his people by hate, the misuse of power, the genocide of his culture and the life of his people, walked up to me took my hand and prayed for me. He didn’t know me. We didn’t discuss my situation, yet, he knew. He read my heart. He radiated love and divine compassion. He was a messenger who delivered what I needed to hear at that moment. He unearthed the things I needed to surrender and refocused me on the

path I needed to walk. Could God have been any clearer? No riddles, no uncertainty about the direction, a reassuring that God knows what is going on and I am invited to trust the journey. What I learned about him was that he used to work in the kitchen here at Providence Heights.

The last thing I will share with you from my Journals was written during the last days of my 30 day retreat. "I didn't really understand what it meant to be called. I came to religious life because I admired the sisters and what they stood for. I never felt what others described as a call. When I left, I was directionless, lost and grieving. There was no meaning or purpose to my life. Then sitting in a high mountain red rock desert in the southwest, you, Lord, came to me in a meditation on pulverized red rock. "Heal the broken hearted, those crushed in spirit he will save." You pointed a direction.

While participating at mass in a little dusty mission church in Chimayo, New Mexico, you overwhelmed me with a wordless voice spoken to my heart and asked me to stand with those whose spirits and hearts had been crushed by the institutional church. My ministries have been dedicated to that whether working with the addicted, their families on what I do at Kearns.

Now I feel your hand on me in regard to religious life. I watched this fire grow in me. I now know that call and I am willing to give everything to serve your people. You have asked and I have answered.

This waiting process requires work, enduring the trials of life and surrendering to God, and adjusting to God's time frame and plan for your life. Finding faith, hope and love for ourselves does not mark the end of anything. It can mark the beginning and ignite a new belief that lures one to a new outlook and vision for the world conceived in the struggle with faith.

"For I am the God of hope, Elohim Yachal, and I am most able to do all that I have set out and promised to do. Rest in faith. Rest in hope. And believe."