

Reflections for Jubilee - Sisters at Provincial House 11/1/2014

Good Morning and Congratulations on your 50, 60, 65, 70, 75, or 85 years of being a Providence woman!

Such commitment is definitely worthy of celebration – even more than one celebration!

Jubilee time is Alleluia time – time to be happy about who you are, what you've done, how much God loves you!

And today's celebration of Jubilee is extra-special because it's taking place on the feast of All Saints, those in heaven and those in this chapel – and the first two readings for today describe how you have been enabled to be a Providence woman through so many years because of God's unconditional love for you – and finally, the Gospel describes the many ways you've shown your love for God by living the Beatitudes.

It's as though the stars are in perfect alignment for a celebration: All Saints, Jubilee, the proclamation of God's love, the Beatitudes, beautiful music, and committed Providence women surrounded by those who love you! For what more could one ask?

So, Jubilee time is a time to celebrate you, all you've been and done through the years, to celebrate the person you've become.

It's a time to be happy, to rejoice in your lives of giving and forgiving, of caring and sharing, of loving and being loved!

I want to tell you too what Jubilee time is not!

I know you all remember how, in former days, we used to do a daily examen. We took time once or twice a day to examine our conscience, to consider how well we were doing in overcoming our flaws and weaknesses. Then we marked our progress, or lack of it, in our examen book so we could see which of our 200 flaws we had already conquered and which we still needed to work on.

Well, Jubilee time is the exact opposite of the examen! It's also the opposite of the Chapter of Faults! Jubilee time is instead a time to celebrate all the joy in your lives. It's a time to remember your good deeds, your gifts and talents, your accomplishments, rather than your faults and failings. It's a time to reminisce about all the people you met and loved through the years, all the friends you made and cherish, all the community celebrations you enjoyed, all the Sisters, students, patients, parishioners, colleagues with whom you shared time, ministry, and fun. Jubilee time is a time to marvel at the miracle of your lives and to be grateful for every moment of it!

Pope Francis called the Beatitudes, today's Gospel, the blueprint for holiness. I think that they might also be called a Jubilee Guide for Joy, the guide for reminiscing and rejoicing. In the days ahead, as a gift to yourself for your Jubilee Year, I encourage you to reflect on each Beatitude and be happy and grateful as you remember the times you lived each one of them.

I did a little of that remembering on your behalf before writing these reflections and felt really happy for who you are as I did it, the same happiness that I hope you'll feel too when you reflect and reminisce on your goodness.

Here are just a few of my rememberings, (You don't have to raise your hand if you recognize that this story is about you!)

When I recently passed one of you in the hall here at Providence Heights, I immediately thought of a story you had told me long ago about how two of your relatives hadn't talked with each other for several years and you brought them together and helped them forgive each other and they're good friends now. Blessed are the Peacemakers.

I often think too of another one of you whenever I go to a funeral, because you told me once how you committed yourself, years ago, to go to every Sister's funeral and mourn with her family and friends because you know well the pain of losing a loved one. Blessed are those who mourn.

More recently, at our latest Assembly, I heard someone criticizing a Sister who hadn't come and you spoke up and defended her, explaining that she had planned to be there, but was in too much pain recently to travel. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice.

One of the former Directors of the Provincial House told me long ago how, when one of you moved her, you deliberately chose a small room because you were trying to learn not to accumulate more things than you really needed and a smaller space would help you do that. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

And more personally, one of you said to me a while ago: "I was really mad at you for what you said to me, but I prayed about it and I can forgive you now." Blessed are the merciful.

Because Jubilee time is to be a time of rejoicing in who you have become through your years as a woman of Providence, it is truly right and just that you focus on your gifts, on your fulfillment of the Beatitudes, and on the accomplishments and joys you cherish from those years. There are naysayers who might caution you about the need to be humble and not become proud or get a big head, but those who give such advice have, perhaps, forgotten what you know to be true. You know that humility is truth and the truth is that all you are and all you have ever done was, in fact, God's gift to you.

So when you rejoice in your abilities and your successes, you are not being vain; you are, in truth, acknowledging God's goodness to you because every thing you are, everything you've ever done, and everything you have is gift from a God who loves you. The immensity of that love is unfathomable.

When I try to imagine God's love, I think of a mother whose son is a convicted murderer and she loves him anyway. I multiply that love by infinity and know that still doesn't equal God's love for us. Or I think about someone like Nelson Mandela who was imprisoned for many years and made those who imprisoned him part of his Council when he was freed. Such forgiveness, such love of others, is beyond my understanding and it still doesn't come near to being as great as God's love for us. In the end, I know that God's love is mystery. We know that we can do nothing to deserve it and also that

we will never lose it. As Julian of Norwich tells us “between God and our soul there is neither wrath nor forgiveness, because there is no between.” So when you rejoice about the good you’ve done in your life, you’re recognizing that, through no merit of your own, but only because God loves you unconditionally, indiscriminately, and graciously, you have been showered with an abundance of graces, the grace to live the Beatitudes, and most significantly, the grace to have been a faith-filled, dedicated woman of Providence for many years.

So what is the appropriate response to our Provident God for all the gifts and graces you’ve received through the past 50, 60, 65, 70, 75, or 80 years? Because God, amazingly, is both the Giver and the Gift, there is only one. In the words of Meister Eckhart: “If the only prayer you ever say is thank-you that would be enough.”

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