

While the rest of the Catholic world celebrates
the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time.
the Sisters of Divine Providence
are commemorating
168 years since the Foundation of the Community in Mainz, Germany.

According to our Community chronicles
this is how it came about:

Soon after assuming the pastoral duties of the Diocese of Mainz in 1850,
a young Bishop Ketteler
assessed the needs of his diocese.

While visiting the parishes
he observed that the education of young girls was in a deplorable condition,
especially in the rural districts,
while the condition of the poor and sick appeared to be hopeless.

These miseries weighed heavily upon him
and he resolved to find a way to relieve these situations.

From his home diocese he knew of Sisters
who had dedicated themselves

to the twofold ministry
of educating young girls and nursing the sick, especially the poor.
This motivated him to examine whether it might not be possible
to found a similar Community in his new diocese.

Meanwhile
in 1851 four young women spoke to a local parish priest
about their desire to live together as a religious community.
The priest shared this news
with Bishop Ketteler
and 168 years later,
here we are...

Today,
Sisters and Associates from that original foundation on September 29, 1851
are making God's Providence visible
in the ministries of health care,
education,
social service
and Spirituality.
We are found living in community
in Germany,

Korea,
Italy,
Peru
Vietnam
and throughout the United States
and the Caribbean.

The Community began —
small and unpretentious.
The world took no notice of the Sisters,
multitudes did not know them,
they were scarcely considered
in their own diocese.

However,
as the Scriptures
chosen for today's Liturgy evidence
in the hands of Providence
a little is sufficient,
a few is enough.

The story of God's providence
to Elijah and the widow
is an illustration
that hospitality to the stranger
may not only help the other,
but actually be the catalyst
for our own survival.

The widow
who gave of her own sustenance
who actually gave **all** that she had
was a foreigner.
The central role that she plays in the Scripture
challenges us to look differently
at those people in our midst
whom we barely spare a second glance:
the immigrant,
the homeless,
the person from a different religion,
the person with a different political affiliation,
the person with a different sexual orientation,
the person of a different race,
the person of a different economic class,
the person of a different culture
or whatever barrier manages to divide us.

Just as surprising
as the widow of Zarephath's intervention
in the life of Elijah would have been,
so we may find ourselves
surprised and blessed
by those whom we would least expect
to serve as our source of survival.

The theme is played out yet again
in the Gospel story
of the Feeding of the Multitudes.

In John's version
a little boy offered his meager lunch.
He only had a few loaves and fishes,
and Jesus had 5,000 mouths to feed.

Who was the boy—
certainly not someone very significant.
Barley loaves were the bread of the poor.
So, by his age, and his economic status—
we know that he is one on the margins.
He was not someone
we would expect to have the resources for a miraculous feeding.

Like the widow he gave his sustenance.
Like the widow he gave **all** that he had.
And it was enough—
even more than enough
because there were leftovers.

This is another instance
when the miraculous
is in the hands of the marginalized,
the seemingly insignificant.

I often wonder
if we might be overlooking resources
which, at first glance,
seem as though they would not be enough.

And finally
in the Acts of the Apostles
we are treated
to a description

of the early Christian community.
They shared all that they had in a common life
and none were needy.

Clearly, abundance is recognized
in the experience of community.
Scarcity is born out of competition and division
When we stand alone,
we feel we have to be in competition over resources.

Abundance is born out of cooperation and community.
When we each share what we have,
we have an abundance of resources—
even an overabundance
Community is the context
in which scarcity can replace abundance.
The very experience of community
is an experience of abundance.

It is that experience of Community that we celebrate today
as we widen our circle and welcome Sister Benedicta
as the newest member of the Marie de la Roche Province.

We are delighted that she has found a home among us.