

DIAMOND JUBILEE HOMILY

by Marjorie Heidkamp

In today's Gospel, we heard the phrase, "Accompanying Jesus were the Twelve Apostles and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary Magdalen, Joanna, Susanna, and MANY other women." paraphrased Jesus, unlike his contemporaries, included women as followers, friends and disciples. Today's Jubilarians joined that long line of women disciples when they entered the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in February and September of 1952.

We numbered about 80 and ranged in age from a 17-year-old girl fresh out of boarding school to a former principal in her mid-thirties. We came from small city apartments, palatial homes, a farm just being wired for electricity and everything in between. While our ages and experiences were varied, the CALL echoing in each of our hearts was the same – "Come, follow Me." We loved the Jesus of History and the Risen Christ of our lived experience. We longed to serve our God in the people of the world, even though it might have been hard for us to articulate this call all those years ago.

Notice the cover of the worship aid for today. Pat Fitzgerald presents us with a collage, a collection of unrelated things, images or symbols placed in such a way as to bring forth new insights. The edges are torn and uneven, pasted into place, inviting us to ponder why these images, shapes and words are juxtaposed in just this way. Pat's summation includes the phrase, 'with gratitude, with love and with joy we say yes.'

We are gathered here this morning with hearts filled with gratitude for 70 years as BVM sisters. In our early days at Mount Carmel, we were led by wise women who opened our hearts, minds, and spirits to a deeper presence of the Sacred in our lives. They built on traditions most of us first learned in our homes.

Our faith was to be lived, not practiced. The living Christ was present in the way we interacted with one another and all people. We spent time in study and we spent lots of time sewing, stirring, dusting and waxing floors – mostly in silence. We learned to pray although it was many years before we realized how really simple prayer is – just settle quietly and breathe in God's presence.

With gratitude to God, our families, our faith community and the BVM Congregation, we professed Vows in 1955 and moved eagerly into the world of ministry. Through the decades we have been teachers, principals, superintendents of schools and university presidents; we have carried signs for justice and have signed just contracts. We have stocked food pantries for the hungry and staffed shelters for the homeless. We have been present at deaths and births and every kind of human trauma; each leading mysteriously to new life. We have done internal service in the BVM Congregation; on our Leadership Team, as administrators, in Formation ministry and on numerous committees.

We have led dancing prayer and Tai Chi, played with puppies and kittens created art and music, cared for elderly relatives, run alumna programs, done professional counseling; and we have been good mentors, friends, and neighbors. We have done it with love. Because we have been loved by our God,

through our BVM sisters, our families and friends, colleagues, and clients we have been able to love others abundantly.

Recently there came a time when our joints ached a little more each morning. We noticed other people were whispering all the time. And the worst! Someone started making car lights that blurred at night! We were semi-retired but somehow still kept busy with the hungers and thirsts of the human community around us.

The inner voice called, "My people are still hungry and thirsty, homeless and afraid, unwelcome and lonely." We taught English as a second language, wrote letters to Congress, served meals in shelters, listened to the lonely on regular visits, brought Communion to the homebound, made friends over backyard fences and in community centers. Each human and natural encounter reintroduced the Risen Christ we loved and our hearts filled with joy.

Sometimes now, it is humbling to admit that we are the ones in need of assistance and service and ministry, and we find it here at Mount Carmel Bluffs in abundance, from our sisters, from PHS staff, and from 40 Main Street and from our very own BCLES! (Short for BVM Life Enrichment services). No wonder our hearts are overflowing with gratitude, with love and with joy as once again, we say "Yes!"