

Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
Diamond Jubilee Liturgy  
Sunday, Sept. 10, 2023

Homily by Margaret Sannasardo, BVM

Each one of us Jubilarians and **all** of us BVMs, have memories of our entrance day, be it in July, August, September, or February. We left familiar places, home, family, relatives, girlfriends, and even boyfriends, to respond to a mysterious *urging* to become a BVM . . . a call to religious life!

I can remember that morning, Sept 8, 1953, like it was yesterday. My dad drove me to Union Station in Chicago with my mom at his side. I was in the back seat with my little brother Joe, and little sister Rosaria. The ride was unusually quiet and still.

When we arrived on the platform to board the train I was greeted by several of my classmates from The Immaculata who were also entering the congregation, some other girls I recognized from St. Mary High School and the Chicago area, and others I guessed were headed for the same destination as I was. There may have been about 30 or so of us on that train!

After the three hour train ride and lots of conversation learning that these other young women were from other states, such as Arizona, California, Missouri, and Montana, and where else— I'm not sure. We were met at the Dubuque station by a bus that drove us to Clarke College for a lovely luncheon. After which we boarded the bus and headed south on Grandview Avenue to our final destination.

I had a unique experience which I would like to share with you. As we pulled up to the front door of Mount Carmel, I looked toward the river and noticed a novice and an older gentleman sitting on one of the benches. I looked again, and recognized that it was my friend from St. Vincent Parish, Eileen Gillespie, a novice at that time, and her dad. I am delighted to say that Eileen is present with us today, thanks to her nephew Vince and his wife Kathy.

As I got off the bus, I made a bee-line toward the two of them and must have stepped into a rabbit hole and fell right at the feet of Eileen's dad. Being the gentleman that he was he just helped me up and greeted me with open arms, which was more of a consoling welcome than an embarrassing fall! I then headed for the front door, Oh, those beautiful doors . . . and life as a BVM began, along with the 72 other young women whom we called "Our Set."

As Jeremiah says in our first reading this morning, "For I know the plans I have in mind for you, plans for your welfare, not for woe, plans to give you a future full of hope." God certainly had plans for each of us. Plans which are permeated and saturated with God's unconditional love, with every breath we take. All 72 of us on that day greeted our call with mystery, curiosity, and sheer faith!

In the two and a half years of our novitiate we prepared for our first profession. Our training and instructions were met sometime with wonder and questions; but the wise and kind

mentoring and instructions from BVMs Sister Mary Catherine Ann and Sister Mary Leo who used scripture, spiritual readings, and poems from Jessica Powers, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and others.

With Sister Mary Saint Christina we were well fortified with solid theology as we learned the methods of mediation and contemplation—and oh yes—not to forget, dusting, polishing floors, washing pots and pans, cleaning vegetables, and cutting-up chickens! The other professed sisters who had special roles at Mount Carmel gave us encouragement, support, and confidence (most of the time) too!

During those two and a half years, each of us made every effort to live out the desire to do God's will and as our *Constitutions* state, "To live the Gospel of Jesus Christ in community and acquire a spirit of inner freedom, characteristic of Mary, Mother of the Church, and of Mary Frances Clarke, our Foundress.

Finally, on our profession day, March 19, 1956, we were assigned to continue study at Clarke College, or sent out to minister in grade schools, high schools, college, or to teach music and piano. Whatever our assignments were, the days and years ahead brought experiences beyond our imaginations. We encountered classrooms of young people, friendly parishioners, eager parents, poor and homeless human beings, discrimination, injustices, and wars.

We were teachers, principals, college professors, parish ministers, social workers, hospital chaplains, poets, writers, and even one of us became the Mayor of Dubuque! We were sometimes challenged by community living but grew each day in love with our all-present God and service to God's people. Our spiritual life deepened and our love for Jesus, as his disciples, moved us into a future full of **Hope**.

And now, lo and behold, here we are in this beautiful time of our lives, in this holy and sacred place we now call Mount Carmel Bluffs. We find ourselves now, more on the receiving end than the giving end. Some of us need assistance with mobility, and some of us experience aches and pains we never had before. The distances are farther than we thought from the chapel to the dining room or to our apartments and rooms. We are fewer in number and dearly miss those in our Set who have gone before us to meet their loving God. We have grown in the knowledge and wisdom of believing that our all-present and loving God is continuing the process of transforming us along with all of creation into a more sacred and holy coexistence.

Our gratitude is deep and all-embracing to all the living and deceased who have shared life with us on this journey. We continue praying the words Mary used in her response to the angel at the Annunciation, "Be it done unto me according to your word."

Yes, we surely have a reason to Celebrate, Be Joyful, and Give Thanks! SO LET'S DO IT!