

JUBILEE MASS

July 8, 2009

The liturgically correct gospel for this day – Wednesday of the 14th week of ordinary time – is Mathew Chapter 10 – where the names of the Apostles are given.

The names of the Jubilarians are these: George, Thomas, John, Robert, Donald, Eugene, Kenneth.

We come neither to bury them nor to praise them. Gene Weitzel absolutely forbade me to extol his praises.

We do gather joyfully today to share with these seven as they celebrate 60 years and 50 years of living the life of faith in the unique response which is religious life and 50 years of ministry as priests.

Through my life as a religious, I have come to a deeper sense of our lives as stories, as pilgrimages, as, in a phrase from Henry James, the availability of experience.

For sure our lives are not ideas. They are certainly not systems, and often, despite our hardest efforts, they do not so much represent progress or accomplishments or external success, but rather, if we cooperate with God's endless grace, a certain maturation, perhaps a growing adulthood.

We do not even necessarily mature in wisdom, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Though we may hope to grow in understanding, dedication, and trustfulness, in self-forgetfulness and in what the Theologians call self-transcendence.

Our lives, we Jubilarians, but all of us really, are much less systems than they are progressive surrenders to the mystery of God. And we surrender to the mystery of God precisely as members of the human family, as members of Christ, and yes, according as His spirit is daily poured out into our hearts to make us one.

For sure change has cut the Church to its marrow. So there is a new look to priesthood; a new look to religious life. In a sense, priesthood means little in the abstract – what matters are these priests. Religious life means little – it is a matter of these religious. We must come through to you as persons.

Priests and religious are not the light: they do not have the light, but they must bear witness to the light. They have the light's features on their faces and yet they are themselves with their own names. George, Tom, John, Bob, Don, Gene, Ken. Like disciples – looked up – only Jesus – ordinary Jesus.

I wager that we Jubilarians on days like this, conjure up so many experiences – many of them explicit, sacramental experiences of priesthood for example. But there are so many others; experiences of joy in trying to sustain the well – deserved joy of the believing community in all

those places we have been and all those many things we have done and still do. There are experiences of struggle along with all believers struggling to be faithful and just. We have all, according to our vocations, stood at the bedside of someone we love who is dying. We have all wept with fellow mourners, however God has called us.

I wager that experiences of seeking to understand God's revelation have been intimate parts of our lives as religious and priests. There have been experiences of commitment and vision.

The best way to learn how concrete you are about them is to consider what you actually have done and what you actually do.

There have been experiences of healing, experiences of trying to reconcile, of comforting, and moments of helping others to find their spiritual direction. There have been experiences of administration and financial stewardship. In short, experiences of serving the Church, the body of Christ, the people of God have been central to our lives as religious and priests.

Better said, perhaps, they are experiences of serving the Gospel and the Kingdom of God, which is greater even than our Church entrusted with its good news about friendship between God and humankind. The experiences of a priest, of a religious, - and the experiences of every believing Christian – is always somehow about service to the friendship of God and humankind.

Living as a priest, living as a religious is at bottom a life of faith, and we, in our golden years, I wager, have come to sense that when faith becomes a passion expressed through these countless experiences, these stories, these pilgrimages, things change. We change. We are transformed. We are transfigured.

I think we can all testify, Jubilarians and all of us, that if you live lives of faith and discipleship you will see marvels of conversion, generosity, service, submission to God's inscrutable will that you would not think possible. For it is not only the Lord who is transfigured. It is we ourselves who, like him, are called to be Easter people. God can, God will, God has effected the change in us. Be patient in faith. Let it happen to you over and over again.

On behalf of we seven, let me say how very grateful we are to so many friends for the opportunity to celebrate our ministry.

It's a time when we recognize still our own dependence, fragility, incapacity; to see how more faithful, more prayerful and courageous we had hoped to be. How much more worthy of the memory of our families and friends and of those who have gone before us in the Community.

But above all, we are grateful that you and we have the incomparable grace and opportunity of knowing the name of God – the immense, immeasurable, loving, gracious, eternally present creator and redeemer of our World.

And finally, as long as we journey, as long as we are pilgrims and shaping our stories, we cherish the silence at the end of all of our activity and in the midst of our prayer, when God waits to be worshiped in mystery and to be loved in truth.