

Homily for Jubilarians (June 10, 2019)

It seems to me that it is more than mere coincidence that this is the day on which we are honoring our brothers for 460 combined years in vows. This is the day our Church honors the Blessed Virgin under the title of MARY MOTHER OF THE CHURCH. It is a new feast which is celebrated annually on the Monday after Pentecost, probably because traditionally Pentecost is considered as the birthday of the Church. What better day could there be to honor Mary as the Mother of the Church and what better day could we have chosen to honor our brothers who have dedicated so many years of loving service to the People of God, the Church.

Let's look at the scriptures that have been given to us for this day as we honor Mary the Mother of the Church and reflect on them to see God's message for us and how it has been lived out in the lives of our jubilarians.

I said that traditionally Pentecost is celebrated as the birthday of the Church because it was the day when the Holy Spirit descended upon that small group of people gathered in the Upper room. From that Upper room the first disciples of Jesus spread His message to the ends of the earth. But as important as the Gift of the Spirit is in the story of the founding of the Church, there are other events that came before Pentecost and they are truly significant in the establishment of the Church. Those events have been placed before us in the readings we are asked to reflect on today.

In our gospel reading we have the account of Jesus dying on the cross. His side, His Heart is pierced and there flows out blood and water. Early Fathers of the Church tell us that the blood and water flowing from the pierced side of Jesus symbolize Eucharist and Baptism the sacraments of initiation into our Church. Mary is right there at this profoundly significant moment. Before Jesus dies He extends a tender gesture of loving concern. He entrusts His Mother to John's care and John to His Mother's care. In that tenderly loving gesture as Jesus is dying on the cross, in giving over John to Mary's care, Jesus entrusts all of us to her. She is the Mother of the Church. She is our Mother. Jesus and Mary no longer walk this earth with us and so they ask us to be the instruments of God's care for us. Today we recognize and honor the tender care and loving service our jubilarians have extended to God's People, the Church.

I believe we all want to have dinner after this liturgy so I cannot go into detail, but let me give you some idea of the variety of ministries and of the diversity of the people whose lives have been touched by these men, our SCJ brothers.

Fr. Praveen Kumar Richard is the youngest member of this group. He is from the District of India. He may be young but has already been involved in a wide variety of ministries. If he played American baseball he would be a utility infielder: always ready to jump in and serve wherever he is needed

Ralph Intranuovo has served in a variety of parishes, but he is also a skilled counsellor. He has a great sense of humor which I am sure he uses to help people by getting them to not take themselves so seriously—a necessary step on the road to recovery.

Terry Langley has served in parishes and in provincial administration. But Terry is especially

dear to his classmates celebrating 50 years in vows, because he is the only one who can tell them what the weather was like on the day they made their first vows, final vows and celebrated 25 years in vows, not only where those ceremonies took place but also in each of their home towns.

Yvon Sheehy is well known for his claim of presiding over the prairies of South Dakota and with arms outstretched telling others "all this and so much more could be yours" if they would join in the ministry out there. These days Yvon is the director of the ECS (formerly known as the ESL program). He is part of the Monastery community and I hear from those in initial formation about what an affirming and supportive presence he is for them.

Jim Walters has served in our parishes for Native Americans and in those parishes serving Hispanic people in Texas. More recently Jim has been and continues his involvement in the Hispanic studies program and because of his passion for teaching, he has been working on developing a new method to help students learn Spanish so that they are better prepared for their ministry.

Tom Westhoven has been engaged in numerous different types of ministry: teacher, pastor, development director, vocation director. However, these days he holds a special place in the hearts of so many of us in this area. Orville Redenbocker may be famous in the pop-corn industry, but he can't hold a candle to Tom Westhoven, our Pop-corn king.

Br. Andy is probably the quietest member of this group. He has usually been involved in doing what takes place behind the scenes. However, when he was part of the ministry at our retreat house in Bailey's Harbor, he built a huge rocking chair which he placed on the shores of Kangaroo Lake. Retreatants could sit in that rocker and imagine what it was like to be rocked in the arms of our loving God.

Ed Griesemer spent many years in Hispanic ministry. That did not stop when Ed retired. I can give personal testimony to the fact that he continues to be dedicated to serving those folks and wanting them to have a safe place among us.

Paul Casper has been a loving pastor in many places where we SCJs minister. When I look at Paul, I wonder how this gentle, little man survived doing ministry in a juvenile delinquent center, but he did, because of who he is. He continues to be a gentle loving presence among us at Sacred Heart at Monastery Lake across the street. He models what it means to grow old graciously.

In all those different ministries that our brothers were involved in there was a common thread, a shared purpose, that united them to one another and to God and that was to let people come to know and experience the love of the Sacred Heart for them.

I want to go back to our reading from Genesis to help us focus our reflection. The section from Genesis that we heard proclaimed describes what takes place after Adam and Eve have eaten from the forbidden tree. God comes looking for them. It seems that God used to walk with them in the garden in the cool part of the day. God calls to them: "Where are you?" But they hide. When God comes up to them, Adam responds: "I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself." God says: "Who told you that you were naked?" There is a wonderful book that has those words for its title: "who told you that you were naked?" To summarize its main point, it is as if God is asking Adam and Eve: who gave you this sense of shame? Who told you that when you become aware that you have sinned that you should run from me?? That is not the kind of God I am!! That

is what the evil spirit, that master of deceit, wants you to believe. I will send A WOMAN and set enmity between the evil spirit and his offspring and between THE WOMAN and her offspring. He will crush your head. He will overcome your lie and let people know the truth. Through the course of salvation history we have learned that this was a foreshadowing of Jesus and His message about the kind of God we have.

Our jubilarians have spent 460 years witnessing by their words and their lives to the kind of God we have. Their message is that we have a God we need to run to, not from, when we know that we have sinned. Our God is LOVE itself incarnate in Jesus and wonderfully symbolized in His pierced Heart. We can never adequately make up for any sins we have committed. All we can do is throw ourselves into the arms of our loving God who literally is dying to forgive us.

My brothers, as we honor you today, we thank you profoundly for all you have done and for who you are. Let us pray for one another that we all come to a deeper belief in and commitment to our loving God, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, whose message of love you have been spreading all these years. Congratulations and may God bless you.