

July 25, 2021                      10:00 a.m.                      Nazareth Center  
**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time/Jubilee Mass Sisters of St. Joseph**

As I mentioned at the beginning of our Mass, it's so nice for me to be able to join with all of you again after what seemed like an incredibly long separation due to the circumstances of this past year and a half. It's wonderful to feel like we're getting back to some "new and improved" version of "normal life". I kept you all in my daily prayers throughout that long "hiatus", and I can only imagine how challenging that was for all of you---committed to a life of communal prayer and living Community Life---to have been separated even from one another, with little to no contact with anyone outside this House---even your own Sisters. So, thanks be to God, whatever "normal" will mean now and into the future, at least we're closer to the former, than to the latter.

Our reason to rejoice as we celebrate Mass this morning is increased even more than usual because, we honor 18 Sisters celebrating Jubilees (7 of whom are here with us in person and 11 of whom are participating with us virtually): 5---celebrating 75 years of Religious Life (2 from 2020; 3 from 2021); and 13 celebrating 60 years of Religious Life (8 from 2020; 5 from 2021). And we also remember in our prayers the 26 dearly departed Sisters in what would have been their Jubilee Year---may they continue to rest in the "jubilation" of being in the Presence of the Lord forever. Amen.

It's most appropriate that we are celebrating these jubilees in the Year of St. Joseph, your patron, and during the 50th anniversary year of our Beloved Diocese of Kalamazoo which has been richly blessed by your community's presence as well as by the individual ministries of your Sisters. Again, as I mentioned at the beginning of our Mass, it was so wonderful to see such a large contingent of the Sisters of St. Joseph in our Cathedral on Wednesday for our Mass of Thanksgiving as we celebrated 50 years of our establishment, and as a great support for your dear Sister Betty, who was appropriately honored with the "Bishop Paul Donovan's Founder Society" inaugural award. Once again, Sr. Betty, thank YOU---and as you said so humbly, thank YOU---all of the Sisters of St. Joseph---for the ways you have enriched the Diocese of Kalamazoo over these years, and many years before that.

Finally, I think it's fitting that today has been declared World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly by our Holy Father Pope Francis. Anyone who is celebrating 75 or 60 years of Religious Life surely qualifies as a

Spiritual Grandmother in the eyes of our Church! But as I look around this Chapel, some of you may actually be “grandparents”. But keep in mind that our Holy Father broadened Grandparents’ Day to also include “the Elderly” as well in this special World Day of Prayer. Again as I look around this Chapel, we might all qualify for that. (Well, except for perhaps one.....*Fr. Jeff!*) It has occurred to me more than once that my age qualifies me to be his grandfather--maybe even his great grandfather. Now there’s a reality check!

So there are many reasons for us to rejoice today. But most of all, we rejoice in the “nearness” and “closeness” of our God, and God’s desire to always accompany us and provide for us along our Journey of Faith. That’s what we celebrate every time we come to Mass as God reveals His Love thru His Word, and makes Himself Present to us in the Holy Eucharist! That point is made very clear in all the Readings for this, the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. In fact for the next 5 weeks, our Readings will be focusing our attention directly on the Holy Eucharist, in particular by listening to pretty much the entire 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter of St. John’s Gospel which is also known as the “Bread of Life Discourse”.

Today we listen to the first 15 verses of that Chapter 6 with the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. In this account, Jesus says very little; but He does so much. We could say that Jesus does three things. First, He “sees the crowd” and realizes their need; then, He “takes action” and miraculously provides food for this huge crowd from the limited gifts of 5 loaves and 2 fish; and finally, He “preserves” and “protects” what was left over so that nothing was wasted. So, as always, Jesus gives us a 3-step way of approaching pretty much anything that we have to do: to see and realize the issue; to do something, rather than ignoring the problem or doing nothing; and then to follow-up with making sure that nothing is wasted, misused, or discarded---because as we all know, God is the Creator of all creatures, and values everyone and everything.

Isn’t it interesting that the one who made all the difference in this miracle account was a young boy who was willing to share his precious but woefully inadequate resources. But, perhaps he wouldn’t have offered if Jesus hadn’t asked the question: “Where can we find food for all these people?”

My dear Sister Jubilarians, back in 1945 or 1946----or in 1960 or 1961---when you were initially discerning your Vocation, you probably did what

Jesus did: you “saw” the situation and realized the need; then you made the decision to act, and shared your life---your whole being---as a witness to the world of your Love for Jesus and His people; and over all these years, especially as you’ve completed most of your active ministries, now in these retirement years, you continue through a life of prayer and reflection which helps to “protect” and “preserve” those for whom you pray and continue to give such strong witness of fidelity. Back in those early years of discernment, you might also have made the same kind of comment as Philip made in today’s Gospel about entering into Religious Life. “What good are my limited resources to “feed” all these people---or to add anything to the Church?” But as I’m sure you have learned over these 75 and 60 years, and I hope what all of us have learned, all that the Lord asks of us is to make the offer and place ourselves at His disposal; then He is able to “miraculously” do the rest using our limited resources. Today, we thank you for making the offer of yourselves to the Church those many years ago for the first time, and every day since then, because the Lord continues to use what you offer for good.

For our Sister Jubilarians, and all the rest of us, the gift of ourselves to the Lord pales in comparison to the Gift that Jesus gives back to us, beginning with the Gift of Salvation, the Gift of His abiding presence with us through the Church and in the Sacraments, and most especially in this precious Gift of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is central to who we are as Catholics. The Eucharist is essential to who we are as People of Faith. The Eucharist is the reason why we come together every week---every day if we can---so that we can receive Holy Communion, and BE IN communion with, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

St. Paul summed it up perfectly in today’s Second Reading: *“to live in a manner worthy of the “Call” you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.”* That “Call” first was made on the day of our Baptism---the “calling”/vocation to live lives of holiness in union with the Body of Christ. And over our lifetime, we keep listening for the Lord’s “call” as to how to continue living through our chosen vocations. Today, we rejoice with all our dear Sister Jubilarians for responding to that “call” you heard, and that you continue to respond to each day, and until the final “call” the Lord gives to you, and us all, and to long to hear Him say: “Well done, good

and faithful servant, come inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of time.”

But, until then, we continue to rejoice in our God Who loves us----our God Who desires nothing more than to be One with us. Our God is with us, not against us. As our beautiful Psalm reminded us today: *“The hand of the Lord feeds us; He answers all our needs.”*

Earlier today in Rome, in regard to this World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly, Pope Francis, commenting on the last part of today’s miracle story when Jesus had the Apostles gather up the “leftovers” which filled 12 wicker baskets, said: “Our Grandparents and Elderly persons are not leftovers to be discarded. They are precious and to be revered for their wisdom and their gifts.” We are all precious in God’s sight. Let us continue to pray that we will see one another in that same way. Let us pray that we will continue to “see” the needs of our world with the compassionate eyes of Jesus; that we will have the courage to “act” with the Love of Jesus to do what we can to bring Jesus’ Love to the world; and that we will “protect” and “preserve” the precious gift of life through our awareness, care and prayers.

As we conclude this joyful Mass, in gratitude for the jubilarians who are celebrating 75 and 60 years, and in confident hope that the gifts of the Holy Spirit will make all of us courageous and bold in living our mission, let’s turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to St. Joseph your patron saint, and ask for their prayers for your community and for all the People of God you serve so faithfully.

And may we all continue *“living in a manner worthy of the “call” you have received”*.

God bless you, now and always!