

**RELIGIOUS JUBILEE MASS HOMILY****24<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A)****ST. AGNES CATHEDRAL****MOST REVEREND JOHN O. BARRES****September 17, 2023**

Today we celebrate the Religious Jubilee Anniversaries of our dedicated women and men religious who are with us here today.

The total number of years in religious life of our Jubilarians this year is 5,530.

Now that's something to celebrate!

We give God thanks for our prophetic religious – who in their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience – point us to our true home, eternal life with God in Heaven.

We also thank Sister Pat Moran, CIJ, our Vicar for Religious, whose ministry supports all the religious of the Diocese and our Chancellor Sr. Maryanne Fitzgerald, SC.

The lives of our religious can be seen as a commentary on Matthew 18's Parable of the unforgiving servant.

Our religious teach us about Spirit-driven mercy, justice, charity, humility, magnanimity and forgiveness.

The great Trappist biblical theologian, Fr. Simeon Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, puts it this way: "The only reason I can forgive, have mercy, be compassionate, perform a work of kindness, is that God has done these things toward me first. In the very act of having mercy on me, he has communicated to me the ability to do likewise – as an existential condition, we might say, of his mercy having its full effect in me...Our vocation is to ignite conflagrations of love and forgiveness all around us." (*Fire of Mercy*, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Vol. II, 645,649)

Our religious have been igniting “conflagrations of love and forgiveness” in so many contexts for decades. They show us the connection between forgiveness and interior freedom.

On August 7, 2022, the Pulitzer Prize winning American historian David McCullough (1933-2022) died.

McCullough was constantly asking us to go deeper in our understanding about how the American pioneering experience, presidential leadership, entrepreneurial and inventive ingenuity and a spirit of hope forged and developed the American character and spirit.

This, in turn, sparks in us a curiosity to go deeper into an understanding of how the Catholic American experience propelled by the Eucharist and the Catholic Mass has impacted the American experience.

The great Catholic women and men religious who were evangelization pioneers of this country were contemplative and swash-buckling missionary risk-takers.

Think of them.

St. Isaac Jogues (1607-1646) and Companions, St. Juniper Serra (1713-1784), St. John Neumann (1811-1860), Blessed Fr. Solanus Casey (1870-1957), St. Mother Francis Xavier Cabrini (1850-1917), St. Katherine Drexel (1858-1955), St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821), Blessed Sr. Miriam Teresa Demjanovich (1901-1927), St. Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680), Venerable Sr. Thea Bowman (1937-1990) – the list of holy American Eucharistic men and women religious missionaries goes on and on to the present day.

Think of how often they evangelized this country and the world through a spirit of mercy and courageous, relentless forgiveness and the Gospel-driven logic of Matthew 18.

The road they paved in American history was a road of mercy and forgiveness that went through the Catholic confessionals of this country.

As we celebrate this moment of American Eucharistic Revival and the role of religious in promoting this Revival, we remember that each one of these holy

religious, by definition, was a *Eucharistic Revivalist*, a *Eucharistic Evangelizer* and a *Eucharistic Catechist*.

They understood the bond between the forgiveness, justice and mercy of the Catholic confessional and the cosmic charity that radiates and flows from the Eucharistic Altar of Sacrifice.

Most were short on personnel and short on funds. They had no sophisticated business plans.

They were contemplative wheelers and dealers in the best sense who trusted in the Lord and forged ahead by trusting in the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

It would do us well to recapture some of that humbly audacious Catholic missionary spirit for these 21<sup>st</sup> century times.

So many of you and the other members of your congregations were the ones who educated and formed us in the Faith, who cared for us when we were in the hospital, who welcomed with charity the immigrant stranger, who marched against racism and promoted racial harmony, and who counseled us when life's struggles felt overwhelming.

Our religious communities have always realized that a commitment to the Works of Mercy and the social change that occurs through the Works of Mercy, the Gospel of Life and Catholic Social Justice teaching could only be sustained and enriched through prayer, silence, contemplation, a commitment to *lectio divina* of the Sacred Scriptures and being “plunged (in the power of the Eucharist, the Mass and the Sacraments) into the Paschal Mystery.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In his June 29, 2022 Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi: On the Liturgical Formation of the People of God*, Pope Francis writes: “The Liturgy is the priesthood of Christ, revealed to us and given in his Paschal Mystery, rendered present and active by means of signs addressed to the senses (water, oil, bread, wine gestures, words), so that the Spirit, plunging us into the paschal mystery, might transform every dimension of our life, conforming us more and more to Christ,” (21) The saints, mystics and martyrs live this transformational liturgical truth existentially.

As we rejoice in your faithful response to God's call, we pray for our young people -- that they be open to the work of the Spirit in calling those who are called to the priesthood and to religious life.

I invite all of us here present at the Cathedral of Saint Agnes and all those watching on the Catholic Faith Network to pray daily for an increase in vocations to the religious life -- our Church and our society needs the presence and witness of holy and dedicated Religious!

Please join me in thanking our men and women religious!