

Meditation for 150th Jubilee Mass – June 25, 2004

(Based on Leviticus 25:8-22, Isaiah 61:1-4, Luke 4:16-20)

"Oh, only for so short a while have you loaned us to each other. Because we take form in your act of drawing us, and we breathe in your singing us. But only for a short while have you loaned us to each other..." Thus begins an Aztec prayer that seems very appropriate as we celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary. Our Scripture readings certainly remind us that God's blessings and directions are passed from one generation to another. First through the Israelites who receive divine instructions about the land promised them as they sojourn in the desert, then through the prophet Isaiah's messianic message to the exiled and oppressed Jews. Those words, centuries later, Jesus speaks with authority in the hometown synagogue. That same Spirit, working through Fr. Begel, Mother Madelaine, Mother Anna and Mother Mary of the Angels, passed on to all of those Sisters of Humility who followed and those who presently minister, continues the heritage of jubilee with its inherent service to the poor and oppressed.

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This historical connectedness speaks volumes as we first consider the implications of the 50th or Jubilee Year set forth by God in conversation with Moses on Mt. Sinai. According to Scripture scholar, Carroll Stuhlmueller, Chapter 25 of Leviticus, of which we have heard a small portion, summarizes the sociological setting of ancient Israel providing the regulations for land and family relationships. (*Biblical Meditations for Ordinary Time, Weeks 10-22*, p. 154) Accordingly, there is a call to re-creation, to repair the earth and to be mindful of all of its inhabitants especially the poor and down trodden. The Creator hands over to the chosen ones the great responsibility of caring for all of creation.

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Again, with the passage from Isaiah 61, Jesus identifies himself as the One sent by the Spirit, the human face of God who comes to proclaim a Year of Jubilee to the poor, the blind, the captive, the oppressed. In the words of Stuhlmueller, "The power of the resurrection is already being felt. The Jubilee Year of favor announced in Isaiah 61 which leads up to the new Jerusalem and the new heaven and the new earth has begun in Jesus. We are experiencing the wonder and joy of jubilee." (*Biblical Meditations for Ordinary Time, Weeks 10-22*, p. 238)

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As jubilee followers of Jesus, then, we must continue this concern for the poor and the oppressed. The Aztec prayer reminds us, we are on loan to each other. Loans generally require interest, a return in kind with added payment. If we tweak that word interest a bit, it can mean a giving of our attention -- attention to the poor, the blind, the captive the oppressed who are all around us. Our Founders invested themselves in educating poor children, a great need in those times. Throughout the history of the Congregation, the Sisters have responded to the "signs of the times" by ministering in the areas of education, nursing, and social work. Since Vatican II, I believe that we have been called to respond even more to the needs of the world in what Maria Harris in her book, *Proclaim Jubilee* calls, artistic imagination which she says may begin with dreams and visions, but it never ends with them. Mind, body and spirit must be involved. (*Proclaim Jubilee, A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century*, p. 14) Our task as jubilee people is to be energized by the Spirit of Jesus to minister to that Vietnam Veteran who lives next door so devastated by the thought of another war; to encourage those debilitated by mental illness to find suitable work or volunteer experiences; to speak out against the oppression of any person or

nation; to be the voices, the hands, the feet of the elderly and other disadvantaged; simply to offer a presence where the needs of the world exist in our own neighborhoods; and finally to use sparingly while sharing the resources of the earth -- because we are on loan to each other only for a short while.

In her Des Moines Register column a few weeks ago Reka Bashu wrote about Sarah Clark, an Urbandale teenager, who since she was 10 years old has literally raised thousands of dollars for the needy, through carnivals, talent shows, fun nights, haunted houses, and garage sales,. Motivating four of her peers to help her, for seven years they played Santa to needy families in the area. When questioned about these charitable activities, Sarah said, "It's not something I really want to be bragged about because it's not really extraordinary. It's just something I do.'

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As Sisters of Humility, then, we are challenged to continue the proclamation of Jubilee to the world around us. Article 16 of our Search & Service document, Book 1 says, "The true measure of appreciating the Congregation's heritage is movement into the future. Like those before them, the sisters seek to build a better world for those who will follow. The Congregation, guided by the Spirit, is evolving generation by generation." Again, in Article 6, we are reminded "Joined to the Church and its mystery in a special way, the sisters work to build the reign of God to herald that promised reign, to witness to it and to serve it in society. Maria Harris summarizes all of this well by saying that the proclamation of Jubilee cannot be done without re-creating systems, structures, and practices that oppress or keep people from freedom. The task as handed down through the centuries will require faith driven courage, and those engaged in it will be like the prophets of old rather unpopular!

Today, as we celebrate these 150 years of commitment and move toward the future with the inauguration of new leadership, the words of that Aztec prayer ring true, "Oh, only for so short a while have you loaned us to each other. Because we take form in your act of drawing us and we breathe in your singing us. But only for a short while have you loaned us to each other. Because even a drawing cut in crystalline obsidian fades, and the green feathers of the Quetzal bird lose their color, and even the sounds of the waterfall die out in the dry season. So, we too, because only for a short while have you loaned us to each other."

Grateful, then, for the faithful service of those who have gone before, may we continue to work with the Spirit of Jesus to create a safe and secure world for all people, now and in the future.