

CELEBRATION FOR PRIESTS - REFLECTION AT VESPERS

Mount St. Vincent – June 7, 2010 - Regina Bechtle, SC

READING:

Isaiah 43:16-21 - "See, I am doing something new! I am making a road in the wilderness, and rivers on dry land."

REFLECTION:

Gathered in prayer today, as the Year of the Priest draws to a close, we listen to God's promise through the prophet Isaiah.

That promise resounds through the generations:

"Look, see, I am doing something new!"

The prophet spoke these words to a people in exile, beleaguered, under a cloud. They were confused and demoralized by what was happening.

Yet, then and now, the prophetic Word of God calls us to look not just at what's happening, in us and around us, but to see what's really going on.

And what's really going on is this:

In the most impossible impasses and most desperate situations, the power and presence of God manage to break through.

Our ancestors in faith came to know this.

In times of exodus and exile, when their hopes for a Messiah hung shattered on a cross, when persecution threatened to snuff out the new community of Christ's Spirit,

God made a way where there was no way.

God always does.

"Look, see, I am doing something new" – count on it.

Hasn't that been the story of this archdiocese since its beginnings?

And a significant part of that story has been collaboration between priests and women religious, our shared ministry on behalf of the people of God.

- In 1817, nine years after the diocese began, Mother Elizabeth Seton sent 3 Sisters of Charity back to her native New York to begin something new in St. Patrick's Old Cathedral parish. That one orphanage and school multiplied beyond anyone's wildest dreams.

Immigrants poured into the growing city, and the Church gave them solace, guidance, spiritual and material support.

Your predecessors -- Bishops Dubois and Hughes, Monsignors Power, Starrs, McNamee, and countless other priests – were our friends, benefactors, supporters, vocation promoters, even fundraisers who preached many a “charity sermon” for our ministries.

Our relationship with priests in those early days was not exactly “collaborative,” but there was certainly **mutual respect for our shared commitment to the mission of Jesus.**

- Elizabeth Seton herself had a special and reverent affection for the priests in her life who nurtured (and sometimes tested) her faith. She once wrote that the vocation of a priest is “the easiest, surest road to God.” I dare say that every one of you would reply to her, without missing a beat: “There’s precious little that’s easy or sure about being a priest” – or a sister, for that matter.

Yet there’s nothing else that we would rather be or do.

A gathering like this is a way of proclaiming that **we treasure our respective vocations, and we honor each other’s vocations.**

- In our world, our church, our archdiocese, there is certainly no dearth of needs. Human limitations prevent us from meeting them all. I imagine that we share a common frustration because of that fact.

Yet day after day, all of us here give our lives to be broken, blessed and shared like bread. We seek to build up the Corpus Christi; we seek to become that Body of Christ.

Passion for God and for God's people is another one of the precious gifts that we Sisters of Charity share in common with you, our brother priests.

- Mutual respect for our vocations**
- Passion and compassion for God and the people of God**
- Dedication to the one mission of Jesus**

This evening, we Sisters of Charity say to you, our brothers:

Thank you for your goodness, your prayerfulness, your faithfulness. Generations of families, neighborhoods, parishes, and institutions in this archdiocese and far beyond have felt the impact of your lives, even though that rarely makes the headlines.

In the words of Sr. Miriam Therese Winter's prayer:

*We are partners in the ministry of service,
partners in the ministry of justice and peace,
partners in the liturgy of church and of life,
partners in healing and hope....*

*Blessed is our partnership rooted in love....
(A Psalm of Shared Mission and Ministry)*

Let us honor each other's gifts.

Let us celebrate the mission of Jesus in which we are privileged to share.

Let us recommit ourselves as partners in that mission,
rooted in the God whom we love,
and focused on God's people whom we serve.

And let us give thanks and praise to our loving God
who is always doing something new!