

Over the past several months a publicity piece has been aired on radio and TV—it goes something like this... In 1907 four courageous women looked into the eyes of the old and sick people in desperate need and deserving of kindness—and they responded with compassion and respect for the dignity of every individual regardless of who they were, where they came from, and how much money they had.

Prior to these compassionate acts of the “4 Brooklyn ladies” (as they are called), -- two women who were recent immigrants to the US -- looked into the eyes of the poor and homeless women and children who were living in deplorable conditions on the streets of Manhattan. The year was 1876 and the women were Alice Mary Thorpe and her sister Lucy. Recent converts to Catholicism, they pronounced their vows in the presence of the provincial of the Dominican Fathers who for 2 years had directed them as they worked among the poor and homeless in New York City

A formal affiliation with the Order of Preachers came about several years later. At that time we became known as the Dominican Congregation of Our Lady of the Rosary. Alice became known as Mother Catherine M. Antoninus, founder. This new Congregation undertook the missionary work of providing refuge for needy women and girls, and of working with the ill and poor throughout the city.

In the words of the Prophet Isaiah, Mother Catherine and Sr. Lucy were grasped by the hand, called for the work of justice in response to what they saw in NYC. In Isaiah the works of justice are identified this way... to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness. In 1876, Mother Catherine encountered homelessness, poverty, hunger, isolation, neglect, illness—all issues of justice—urgently calling for relief-- compelling her to respond with compassion.

Interestingly enough, while M. Catherine was compelled to the needs she witnessed, and to seek companionship of other like-minded women, she left no ‘To Do’ lists. What she **DID** leave was her example and this has guided us for 135 years. Her example continues to compel us to respond to the pressing needs of our times.

The women who celebrate today came together into this Sparkill community in 1961. What brought us here? Well, as a youngster, I always concluded my prayers by saying that I wanted to do something special for God. Now wasn't that presumptuous! Several Jubilarians I asked told of a strong desire to do good for others. Now, the majority of us came from parishes/schools where Sparkill sisters taught. All of us were touched in some way by the human qualities and emotions we saw in these nuns. We were attracted because of who these Sisters were rather than what they did. We were called, and we came!

Was wanting to do something special for God really presumptuous?

Let these words from John's Gospel speak to that...**It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain... I have called you friends.**

Are we capable of doing good? Can All of us do good—not only vowed religious? Let these words from Paul's prayer speak for that... Glory be to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

You may have noticed that the scriptures we heard today are not addressed to Judy, or Mary, or Catherine, or Peggy or Ann or Rose or Mary Jo or Patsy or Katie, or Kathleen, or Nora or the 2 Eileens. This isn't a call to membership in an exclusive club. This call is to each individual -- feel its urgency, recognize the need and respond.

In 1961, 58 young women entered as postulants. Thirteen sit here to celebrate. Over the years many who entered with us felt a different call and responded accordingly. These women have continued to respond to their call as mothers, spouses, single women...many doing ministries that are similar to us who remain as vowed religious. The Jubilarians are so pleased that they could be here to celebrate with us today. They're forever a part of our lives.

Another woman who came to community long before we did and who still accompanies us today is Sr. Cecilia, our Novice Mistress. She should probably

get the Medal of Honor for what she has been for, with, and to all of the novices who came under her guidance. By her example, she taught us how to live the vows we promised and her consistent support is appreciated lovingly by all of us.

In this assembled congregation are hundreds of men, women, and children who by their love and companionship over the years have supported us in many ways. And we thank you all for that. Single or married or vowed or ordained—all are responses to a call. And you do good. By example, you demonstrate your commitment to enable others to have life to the full.

We gather for Jubilee—a time set aside to remember **with gratitude all that has been and all that will be.**

We gather for Jubilee --A time to celebrate. And so in the words of Constitutions I say for the Jubilarians,

WE celebrate the belief that we are called by God;

We celebrate the heritage that inspires us,

We celebrate that we are enlightened and strengthened through daily prayer,

*We celebrate that we can daily commit ourselves to do the work of the reign of God so that through God's merciful love we and those we serve may have **life to the full.** (Jn.10:10).*

In closing I pray Paul's prayer:

May God give us power through the Spirit

for our hidden self to grow strong,

so that Christ may live in our hearts

through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love,

we will have strength to grasp the breadth and

the length, the height and the depth;

until, knowing the love of Christ,

we are filled with the utter fullness of God.

Sr. Eileen Cunningham – October 8, 2011 – Golden Jubilee Liturgy