

60TH JUBILEE OF RELIGIOUS PROFESSION FOR ELIZBETH MARY, CECILY AND PHILIPPA RSM

It was a very healthy instinct that led you to choose for today's Gospel the words of Jesus "I have called you friends". You can rightly apply that description to yourselves personally, and to your Religious vocation. But more: as you know, Religious life has a purpose beyond itself – a prophetic role - it is a message to others – about *their* calling into God's friendship. And so, the joy and thanksgiving that is yours on this occasion, belongs also to the wider community to whom the message of Religious life is addressed.

The message is ultimately the same as that revealed in the Person and life of Jesus himself. In him we come to know how greatly we are loved by God. We are all called to discover the mystery and the wonder of that very great love.

The trouble is: there is so much to distract people from making that discovery. Consequently, they easily settle for a vague idea of God's love for them, and anaemic ways of loving in return. In this way, wider society has less opportunity to experience the transforming, liberating, exhilarating love of God, and its echo in everyone's love for each other.

"'Ordinary', 'normal', 'sensible', 'reasonable' ways of loving can be anaemic; they can need a boost. That is what vivid reminders provide. The woman who broke the jar of precious ointment and poured it over Jesus' feet did so against the reasonable objections of the disciples – the money could have been given to the poor! Protestant theologian Paul Tillich suggests that her love represents the 'unreasonable', excess factor in our love for God when we are struck by the 'unreasonable' and excessive love of God for us. As the saying goes: love does made things. Her action fits that description. Religious life fits that description! The sacrifices Religious make are vivid reminders that God deserves to be loved above all else; above every other love! That's its prophetic role.

The same healthy instinct led you to choose as your first reading, Ephesians' claim that God's power is at work in us "doing infinitely more than we can ask or imagine". To love God as God deserves is beyond our own strength. It is God's power at work in our lives that enables us to recognise how much we are loved, and to love generously in return. So, while we rightly rejoice in the 60 years of your faithfulness, we rejoice even more over God's faithfulness to you; God's power working in you.

That's what we are looking at when we remember what God has had to work with! For most of us our origins, backgrounds, childhoods were very ordinary. But that's an asset, because throughout all of salvation history, God has had a habit of choosing the ordinary, the 'weak', and the 'least' to accomplish the greatest purposes. That's why it is important to look into our lives to recognise a divine purpose, and divine presence, and divine action within all that is ordinary. The wonder and beauty of it is that God's purpose is not thwarted by the various twists and turns and hiccups and wrong turns that can be part of our journeys. God even uses them – so much are we loved!

In remembering our journey, we remember all those who have been part of it – family, friends, associates... Who knows how their prayers may have contributed to our journey? One day we shall know. Who knows what persons unknown to us have benefited by the prayers and sacrifices we have made? That too will be revealed.

Fortunately, these ways of participating in God's unfolding plan do not diminish with the aging process. Let's remember that when the apostles needed to off-load some of their work, it was so that they themselves could give more time to prayer and the message. So, as we have to leave off some of the work we did, what is left to us is still the more important part – the part the apostles continued with – prayer and the message. So let it be. (March 2022)