

Serenity

no. 165 Little Sisters of the Poor January 2015



WAKE UP THE WORLD!

— 2015 Year of Consecrated Life —

Special
Vocation Issue
celebrating
the Year of
Consecrated Life



Our Mission

Continuing the work of Saint Jeanne Jugan, our MISSION is to offer the neediest elderly of every race and religion a home where they will be welcomed as Christ, cared for as family and accompanied with dignity until God calls them to himself.

Cover photo: Novices enjoy the grounds at St. Ann's Novitiate, Queens Village, NY; U.S. logo for the Year of Consecrated Life

Back cover: Saint Jeanne Jugan emblem, "La France des Saints;" <http://saintsdefrance.canalblog.com/archives/2009/05/08/index.html>

Serenity

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Warming Hearts

the Year of Consecrated Life

Pope Francis has given the Church a compelling gift — an invitation to live 2015 as a special time of grace — the Year of Consecrated Life! This “Year” began on the first Sunday of Advent, November 30, 2014, and will continue through the feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, February 2, 2016. We Little Sisters of the Poor will be marking this time in varied ways, one of which is this special issue of *Serenity*. It has been a tradition, every few years, to publish an issue of *Serenity* focused specifically on our vocation, inviting young women to “come and see” what the life of a Little Sister of the Poor is all about. Past issues have included descriptions of our spirituality and mission, our daily schedule, the details of our formation program and testimonials from our novices and Little Sisters.


This year we have taken a different approach. In preparation for the Year of Consecrated Life, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life published a letter entitled *Rejoice!*, which is comprised of the words and teachings of Pope Francis to consecrated men and women. So we invited Little Sisters of different ages to reflect



on specific passages of this letter, and to share their thoughts with you, our readers. The resulting essays were written from the heart and are full of conviction, communicating on a profound level what it means to be a Little Sister of the Poor today.

In their reflections, several of the Little Sisters cited the following words of Pope Francis to consecrated men and women: “If the warmth of God, of his love, of his tenderness is not in our own hearts, then how can we, who are poor sinners, warm the heart of others?” To put it more positively, each of us is convinced that we are able to bring Christ to the elderly — and thus to warm their hearts — only because we first spend time with God, embrace his love and allow him to fill our hearts with his warmth and tenderness. This is the grace of the consecrated life — to be able to order our lives in such a way that we can remain in and with the Lord before setting out to do the work he has confided to us.

“Warming the heart” seems to be a favorite image of Pope Francis, especially in speaking to consecrated women and men. “People today certainly need words, but most of all they need us to bear witness to the mercy and tenderness of the Lord, which warms the heart, rekindles hope, and attracts people towards the good. What a joy it is to bring God’s consolation to others!” he said last year to seminarians and young religious. On another occasion he said, “We welcome in daily companionship the joys and sorrows of the people, giving them ‘heart warmth,’ while we tenderly care for the tired and the weak, so that our journey together has light and meaning in Christ.” Francis has repeatedly insisted that “we need a Church that kindles hearts and warms them.”

Our wish as we embark on the journey of this Year of Consecrated Life is that the reflections in this issue of *Serenity* will warm your heart, give you hope and illustrate the grace and beauty of our vocation of Little Sisters of the Poor. And if you are young, may it inspire you to consider exploring whether you are called to join us as a Little Sister of the Poor! 



Finding Joy in God my Savior

In a meeting with seminarians and novices in Rome, Pope Francis spoke, as he so often does, of the joy of belonging to the Lord. His statement concerning this joy is cited in the document *Rejoice!* in the following manner (n. 4): “In calling you, God says to you: ‘you are important to me. I love you’... Joy is born from that! The joy of the moment in which Jesus looked at me. Understanding and hearing this is the secret of our joy.”

In our Rule of Life we are reminded that “a vocation is a call, which the Lord, always faithful, renews for us until the end of our life. We must remain attentive to this call. By his grace, we will always better understand its full significance and will respond to it with deeper maturity and greater love, for the greater glory of the one and undivided Trinity” (n. 20). I have always found these words of our Rule very beautiful and inspiring, but as I grow older, I experience more and more deeply their reality, hopefully because I am becoming a little wiser in his ways as time goes on!

Indeed, the joy that our Holy Father speaks of springs from the Hospitaller Heart of our God, who is full of mercy and love “from age to age.” In the course of one’s life, there are always challenges, joys, changes, etc. and this is no less true for the life of a Little Sister of the Poor. Through the years, we find ourselves in different homes, maybe a different country, sometimes facing unforeseen



**In calling you,
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Joy is born
from that!**

- Pope Francis

events which serve to strengthen our faith, and sometimes called to carry out tasks that we would never have thought of doing. Throughout all of this, the One who called us to follow him in our youth continues to call us and to prove his fidelity in each and every moment of joy and of challenge. It is truly awesome to understand ever more deeply the truth of St. Paul's words to the Thessalonians: “God has called you and he will not fail you” (1 Th. 5:24).

Relatively speaking, I would not be considered “old” by most standards. However, I am approaching mid-life, if not there already, and for some reason, in recent years, the beginning of this poem of Robert Browning has often come into my mind and heart as I grow in the sense of awe at my vocation: “Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be...”

Although God never “grows old,” we certainly do, and with each passing year, I find myself more and more grateful to him who

has called me. This vocation is the source of deep and lasting joy, a joy that transcends present challenges or sorrows that make up our fragile world, a joy that transcends the present circumstances of where we are assigned for the moment or the particular way we are called to live hospitality in our tasks of each day, a joy that transcends the understanding we had of religious life when we first entered the Congregation. I can honestly say — not without a bit of emotion — that our life truly becomes ever more beautiful over time, because it is directed by and spent with the One who has called us!

It has always sort of bothered me that, within the context of wedding ceremonies or religious professions, sometimes the parties involved are extended the wish by others that, in twenty-five or fifty years, the joy they are experiencing on this, their wedding or profession day, may remain the same. While I understand what is being said, I would certainly hope and pray that, as time passes, one's love and the joy born of this love would deepen and become ever stronger.

Speaking for myself, I know very well that when I left my parents' home nineteen years ago to follow Jesus as a Little Sister of the Poor, I had absolutely no idea at that time of the depth of the beauty of our vocation, and I have no doubt that, as the years pass, I will appreciate this beauty even more. These past years have been stamped with so much joy, because they have been spent with the source of all joy. Every day, he continues to call me in the quiet peace of the chapel, in the fraternal life shared with my Little Sisters in community, and in the beautiful faces of the elderly. Jesus said, "All this I tell you that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete" (Jn 15:11). Of course, only in heaven will we experience the absolute fullness of this joy, but there is no doubt that he has given us a foretaste of this endless bliss here and now, in our beautiful vocation of belonging to him, who is himself our Savior and our Joy. ✨

– Sr. M. G.

(Image, page 3: Vatican logo for the Year of Consecrated Life)

How did you know?

A vocation is the response to a call and to a call of love. I hear something within me which moves me and I answer “yes.” ... The laborers for the harvest are not chosen through advertising campaigns or appeals of service and generosity, but they are “chosen” and “sent” by God. - Pope Francis

I*n a society that places a premium on autonomy and personal choice, it surely is a temptation to think that a vocation is a matter of one's own decision. Shopping around for just the right religious community — the one with all of one's "must haves" and "non-negotiables" — is not uncommon, even among those who are sincere in their desire to serve the Lord and follow his will.*

"I do not trust that seminarian or that novice who says: 'I have chosen this path.' I do not like this! It won't do!" Pope Francis once said to a group of seminarians and novices. Rather, he said, a vocation "is the response to a call and

to a call of love. I hear something within me which moves me and I answer 'yes.'" ... "The laborers for the harvest are not chosen through advertising campaigns or appeals of service and generosity, but they are 'chosen' and 'sent' by God. It is he who chooses, it is he who sends..."

Young women discerning their vocation often ask us, "How did you know?" So we asked a group of our novices and newly professed Little Sisters to answer this all-important question based on their own very personal experiences of that "something within" that moved them and to which they answered "yes."

God has been so good to me in calling me to be a Little Sister of the Poor! When I look back at my vocational journey up until this point, I am filled with gratitude for the countless ways in which God has manifested his will for me. The first time I felt certain that I was called to be a Little Sister was when I was sixteen years old. From the moment I walked into the home, I truly felt like I was "at home." I remember anxiously sitting in the front lobby waiting for a Little Sister to meet me, wondering where this encounter would eventually lead. There was a striking picture of the face of Jesus on the wall. I looked at him and prayed in my heart, "Lord, if this is what you really want of me, then I give you everything. Take my whole life and lead me where you want me. I promise I won't hold anything back."

From that moment on, I just couldn't stay away from the home. I loved being with the Residents and the Sisters and I had an increasing desire to know Jesus and to deepen my prayer life. I first learned hospitality in my family, for which I am deeply grateful, and then I continued to learn from the countless Little Sisters who have accompanied me on my journey so patiently over these years. I am now in my second year as a professed Little Sister and could not be happier! Through the ups and downs of daily life in the home, God continues to deepen this certitude that I have been called to be a Little Sister and I continually ask for the grace to remain faithful to my first resolutions."

**In Jesus Christ
I encountered pure
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It was a touch that would
come and then leave me
with an insatiable hope
for its return.**

– a temporary professed Little Sister

In Jesus Christ I encountered pure and unconditional love for the first time. It was a touch that would come and then leave me with an insatiable hope for its return. This love was, and remains now, a reality more than anything I have ever experienced. Jesus prodded my heart with this hope. Then he asked me, "What else do you want except for my Love?" I said, "Nothing," and so I followed him.

– a Little Sister novice

I had moved back to my hometown and felt the need to find "my own" church. Every Sunday I went to a different parish to see if it would be "the one." Finally, in the last parish I visited, I was struck by the Holy Spirit and knew that this would be my new

home. I guess God wanted me to go back to my roots because this was the parish where I had been baptized. Something sparked inside me and I just could not get enough of the Eucharist. I started to go to daily Mass, but I was searching for more. The more I was in church, the more I wanted to help in the community. I helped with the youth group, prayed at local abortion clinics and worked at a homeless shelter, but I still felt that wasn't enough. Then I was invited to the Epiphany retreat at the Little Sisters' novitiate in New York. I had never met the Little Sisters, but I was asked to go as a chaperone for some younger girls. God works in mysterious ways, because the first day I was there I felt that my searching was over. A week later I visited the Little Sisters' home in Mobile, Alabama. I didn't want to leave, so I started volunteering on Saturdays. That turned into staying the whole weekend, every weekend. I was strongly drawn. I no longer felt the need for "more." I knew this was where God wanted me.

– a Little Sister novice



I entered the Little Sisters of the Poor a little over a year ago. Looking back at the time before I entered, I don't know if there was a specific moment that I knew I had a vocation to religious life or even to the Little Sisters of the Poor, but the Lord slowly revealed to me — and still is — why he has called me to this life of caring for his elderly poor.

There is one particular story on which I like to reflect because I remember that at that time I was really struggling with the call to religious life and I asked the Lord over and over to please show me where he needed me. This story is just a part of when I figured out the question, “How did I know?”

God kept repeating the same message: This is where I want you. Do you want to do my will or your own?

I was in college in a fairly poor town. I was returning to campus from a jog when I noticed a frail, old lady sitting outside on her porch enjoying the morning air. I waved to her from the street and she waved back, motioning for me to come over to her. Hesitatingly I walked over to her and sat down. I noticed her clothes were in rags and she had perhaps two or three teeth left. We talked about everything — her past life, where she grew up — and then she asked me about myself, where I was from, how I ended up in a tiny town for college and what I was planning to do after college.

After about an hour she said to me, “It was nice to have someone to talk to, because I have no one left.”

“Well, when I get the chance I'll stop over another time,” I replied.

As time went on I would pass by her house, but there was no sign of her. I never did see her again and eventually her house was put up for sale. That one experience gave me a change of heart and helped me to see my vocation in a different light. I pray that she knows the impression she left on me, how she helped me discover part of that ‘A-ha moment’ of my vocation journey.

– a Little Sister novice

Even as a little girl, I had a passion for making God known and loved. In elementary school I would share Bible stories with my classmates (at a public school) on the swing-sets during recess and by 4th grade I was even making up worksheets, using a children's Bible to teach a friend whose parents didn't bring her to church. When I was in 2nd grade I started feeling that God was calling me to be exclusively his. I felt drawn to anything that reminded me of God and was filled with a constant desire to learn more about him — even asking our parish priest if we could have church school during the summer too. The more I came to know God, the more my desire to give myself completely to him grew.

When I started looking at different religious communities, I had no interest in the Little Sisters of the Poor. I wanted to be a teacher, not a nurse. I wanted to live in the same convent, not move around; and I definitely did not want to wear a white habit. Nevertheless, I went to visit the Little Sisters just to write them off with a clear conscience. Immediately God gave me the feeling that this was home. I tried to convince myself that I was mistaken, but through all of my prayers, my conversations with my spiritual director and the Sisters, and by the fact that very quickly every obstacle to my entering was removed, God kept repeating the same message: This is where I want you. Do you want to do my will or your own?

It seemed crazy to me and I was afraid I wouldn't be able to persevere in this life, but I didn't feel at peace until I made the decision to enter the postulancy. In the postulancy and the novitiate as I began to learn more about the life of a Little Sister — not just the apostolate, but also the spirituality of the community, the fraternal life, and especially the charism of our Congregation — I began to find the missing pieces of my own heart and I realized that this was who God created me to be. My weaknesses were still there but I came to understand that all I do is not only for God, but through God. He asks for my yes and then accomplishes through me what he wishes of me. Since then, I've found such peace and joy in my vocation that I can no longer imagine not being a Little Sister of the Poor.

– a temporary professed Little Sister

It was not until college that I first felt God calling me to a vocation as a consecrated religious. This call eventually led me to the Jeanne Jugan Residence in the Bronx, where I participated in the summer service program with the Little Sisters. The live-in program allowed me to immediately experience the life of a Little Sister of the Poor. I witnessed the joy of fraternal life in a community of Little Sisters, a deep spirituality of prayer and solid attachment to the Church, and of course, the beautiful apostolate of serving the elderly poor. There were lots of other signs that this was my vocation, but the moment I KNEW that God was calling me to be a Little Sister of the Poor was when I was folding table napkins for the Residents' dining room.

I was visiting another home of the Little Sisters for the day, and after a busy morning, a Little Sister asked me to fold table napkins while she went to eat with the community. No problem, I felt confident that I could accomplish the task with ease. And then I was shown a very large closet filled to the brim. So I got to work. After about fifteen minutes, I was convinced that there must be a chute connecting the laundry room to this particular closet to ensure that I always had napkins to fold and organize! But I kept at it, trying not to be discouraged. And then, a thought popped into my head: If God asked me to fold table napkins for the rest of my life, would I still be happy as a Little Sister of the Poor? In that moment, I experienced what it really means to be a Little Sister — to truly live a life of humility, simplicity and hiddenness — and I knew in my heart that the answer to my question was yes. I learned then that true joy can be experienced on a daily basis by making simple sacrifices, putting others before yourself, bringing pleasure to those around you, and doing everything out of love for Christ Jesus. And most importantly, I realized that for the rest of my life — God willing and with his grace — I would have the privilege and joy of belonging totally to Christ as a Little Sister of the Poor! Blessed be God! ✨

— a Little Sister novice



Tying the knot

TJohn's joyful anticipation of his wedding brought a smile to the Residents and his co-workers at Holy Family Home. He went around asking everyone: "Wanna hear what I'm gonna say when I tie the knot with Lisa?" Of course we were all touched by his excitement to share his heartfelt, home-styled marriage vows. It made me think of my own elation when I made my first vows as a Little Sister of the Poor. I wanted to tell the world how wonderful it was to belong to the Lord! The Church is an understanding Mother in prescribing that religious consecration be sealed by public profession of vows of religion.

What is a vow of religion? A vow is a promise made to God. Religion comes from Latin, *re* (again) + *ligare* (to link or bond), meaning what re-links or bonds fast with God. So a vow of religion is a promise that joins one with God in a specific way. Traditionally, consecrated persons make three vows of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. These are promises to live according to Jesus' advice (counsels) found in the Gospel (evangelical). We Little Sisters of the Poor also make a fourth vow of hospitality by which we promise God to consecrate ourselves uniquely to the service of the aged poor.

Why make vows? John promised Lisa, in so many words, that he would love and cherish her "for better, for worse, for richer, for poor-

Little Sisters and all religious find the source of their own fidelity in the faithfulness of our Great God with whom we have “tied the knot” with our vows.

er, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.” He “tied the knot” with her so as to stabilize their relationship. The story is told of a young man who accompanied Isaac Jogues on his mission to the New World. Once in America, this young man experienced a deep-felt aversion towards the Indians. They were uncouth and repulsive!

He wanted to take the next ship back to Europe!

Saint Isaac advised him to make a vow to stay for just a short time. The fact of having given his word gave courage to the wavering youth. He ended up sticking it out for good. So too, John, like other husbands, can draw strength from his marriage vows to be “a man of his word.” Little Sisters and all religious find the source of their own fidelity in the faithfulness of our Great God with whom we have “tied the knot” with our vows.

John told us that when he made arrangements for his marriage, his minister asked him about being saved. “I told Reverend that I practically work in a church and I try my best to make the old folks happy, so I do believe I have one foot in heaven.” Love is like that! Loving and being loved by Lisa, John was empowered to be good to others. That made me remember that religious consecration, like marriage, is a vocation for the good of the whole Church. Love gives. Love is fruitful. My love as a consecrated virgin must be as giving and fruitful as John’s. Consecration means “set aside with the Holy.” My vow of chastity is my vow of consecrated loving.

The word “sharing” sums up married love. It’s a résumé of the evangelical counsel of poverty as well. Following the example of Jesus who emptied himself to enrich us by his poverty, Little Sisters, like all religious, do not cling to their time, treasures, or talents, but give of themselves and all they have and are. My vow of poverty is my vow of consecrated sharing.

Saint Thomas Aquinas defines love as “willing the will of another.” When John says to Lisa: “I want whatever you want,” he must

listen to both verbal and non-verbal clues of what she wants. I too prove my love for my God by being attentive to his will expressed or implied in our Constitutions and the desires of my superiors. The word obedience comes from Latin, ob-audire: ob (to) + audire (listen, hear). My vow of obedience is my vow of consecrated listening.



John has no fourth vow of hospitality but, by working at Holy Family Residence, he certainly participates in the spirit of hospitality. John's words, "I try to make the old folks happy," are a spin-off of the saying of Saint Jeanne Jugan, "Making the elderly happy, that's everything!" I conclude: My vow of hospitality is my vow of consecrated caring.

Being committed by having "tied the knot" with such an awesome Spouse makes me say with Saint Jeanne Jugan: "What happiness to be a Little Sister of the Poor!" ❧

– Sr. K.

God wants me for himself ... and for those he loves



Not long after I arrived in France to prepare for my perpetual vows I heard a hymn that made a big impression on me. “Tout homme est une histoire sacrée” (“each person is a sacred story”), I sang with all my heart in my heavy American accent. Those words recently came to mind as I read a book entitled *Jesus the Bridegroom*. “All of human history is a story of divine love — given, betrayed, forgiven and renewed because of the mercy and compassion of God,” I read. Just like that hymn twenty years ago, these words touched me deeply.

“The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church,” the book continued, quoting the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n. 1617). Baptism is the “nuptial bath” which precedes the wedding feast of the Eucharist. Christian marriage also bears the mark of Christ’s spousal love, for it is the sacrament, or “efficacious sign” of his union with his bride the Church. And consecrated life, which might seem to deny the beauty and value of marriage, is actually very closely aligned to it since virginity for the sake of the Kingdom brings to fulfillment what marriage signifies — the spousal love between Christ and his Church.

Although I learned these truths during my novitiate, they didn’t penetrate very deeply into my heart. Though I heard others talk about “being married to Jesus,” I couldn’t quite think in those terms myself. I was sincere about wanting to consecrate myself to Christ,

but I thought of my vocation more in terms of giving myself totally to God's work — than of giving myself to him as his bride — as if religious consecration were some kind of spiritualized uber career.

Looking back, I realize how much I was a product of the era in which I grew up. I came of age at the height of the secular feminist movement — in the days of Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman," the campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment, Title IX and the establishment of the National Organization for Women. My friends and I did not admire our homemaking mothers so much as the women who put their careers first, who were out there blazing trails and shattering glass ceilings — or so we thought.

In college we snickered at girls whose primary ambition seemed to be gaining an "Mrs." degree. Even as we graduated marriage and children were not immediate priorities for any of my closest friends. After all, we had worked hard and we were set on establishing our careers, even if that meant an "alternative" profession for me!

But then Saint John Paul II changed my thinking. Shortly after I made my first profession he penned *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*. From John Paul II I learned that motherhood and virginity are two complimentary dimensions of the unique female personality — what he would later call the feminine genius. In this letter I found a compelling definition of what it means to be a human person and a woman. To be a person in the image and likeness of God who is Trinity — God who is Love — means to be a sincere gift to another. Woman receives love in order to give love in return. In *Mulieris Dignitatem* John Paul applied these ideals to both motherhood and virginity. Of the latter he wrote, "virginity is not restricted to a mere 'no', but contains a profound 'yes' in the spousal order: the gift of self [to God alone] for love in a total and undivided manner" (n. 20).

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A consecrated woman finds her Spouse, different and the same in each and every person, according to his very words: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

– St. John Paul II


The words of Saint Jeanne Jugan then took on new meaning for me: “God wants me for himself, for a work which is not yet founded ... My Jesus, I have only you.” Jeanne Jugan realized that God was calling her to himself long before she discovered the specific mission for which he had destined her. God did not want her merely to do a job for him, as worthwhile as her apostolic vocation would prove to be. He wanted her for himself! In calling me he said the same thing: “I want you! ... I want you for myself! ... You are beautiful to me! ... Arise, my beloved, follow me ... I will espouse you to myself forever!”

Nothing else in life really matters. No matter what I accomplish or what happens, that conviction rests deep in my heart. Yes, GOD WANTS ME FOR HIMSELF! Each time I go to Confession I am washed anew in the nuptial bath. Every day when I open the Scriptures the Bridegroom leaps off the page with a new word of love.

And each time I receive Holy Communion I receive a kiss from my divine Spouse. But that is not all — spousal intimacy is not merely a matter of my Beloved and me.

Spiritual motherhood flows from this nuptial union. If we are bound to Christ as his spouse — if we ask him to set us like a seal on his heart — then we will go wherever he goes; his concerns will be our concerns and we will love those whom he loves. Unlike physical motherhood, spiritual maternity is not limited to children. As Saint John Paul II wrote, “A consecrated woman finds her Spouse, different and the same in each and every person, according to his very words: ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (Mt 25:40).” As Little Sisters we are called to be spiritual midwives, helping to bring the souls of the elderly to birth in eternal life. This maternity does not mean treating the elderly like children, but helping them to see themselves as beloved children of God, who waits for them with open arms. What a beautiful vocation!

In his own way, Pope Francis also speaks of spiritual motherhood, entrusting to consecrated persons the mission of discovering the Lord “who comforts us like a mother,” and of comforting the people of God (cf. *Rejoice!*, n. 8). “We are called to bring to everyone the embrace of God, who bends with a mother’s tenderness over us,” our Holy Father wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 47), to stoop “down in a gesture of consolation.”

As the years pass and I advance in my vocation as a Little Sister of the Poor, the conviction that I am the bride of Christ gives me an ever-deepening sense of peace and joy. And the closer I draw to my divine Spouse, the more I want to love those whom he loves, especially the poor and the weak. Although giving up the possibility of physical motherhood was never a big sacrifice for me, today I am deeply happy to envision myself a mother to the elderly. God wants me for himself ... and for those he loves. 

– Sr. C.

Living the *Gospel of Encounter*



(Icon: anonymous)


On September 28, 2014 Pope Francis gathered the elderly around him in large numbers for the first time. Our Little Sisters and Residents in Rome attended the event, during which our Holy Father spoke about Mary's Visitation to her cousin Elizabeth. Excerpts of his homily follow. The Pope's words give us a new impetus to promote the value and dignity of the elderly in society and in the Church.

Today we accept the Gospel we have just heard as a Gospel of encounter: the encounter between young and old, an encounter full of joy, full of faith, and full of hope.

Mary is young, very young. Elizabeth is elderly, yet God's mercy was manifested in her and for six months now, with her husband Zechariah, she has been expecting a child.

Here too, Mary shows us the way: she set out to visit her elderly kinswoman, to stay with her, to help her, of course, but also and above all to learn from her — an elderly person — a wisdom of life....

We can imagine that the Virgin Mary, visiting the home of Elizabeth, would have heard her and her husband Zechariah praying in the words of today's responsorial psalm: "You, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth... Do not cast me off in the time of old age, do not forsake me when my strength is spent... Even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come" (Ps 71:5,9,18). The young Mary listened, and she kept all these things in her heart. The wisdom of Elizabeth and Zechariah enriched her young spirit. They were no experts in parenthood; for them too it was the first pregnancy. But they were experts in faith, experts in God, experts in the hope that comes from him: and this is what the world needs in every age. Mary was able to listen to those elderly and amazed parents; she treasured their wisdom, and it proved precious for her in her journey as a woman, as a wife and as a mother.

The Virgin Mary likewise shows us the way: the way of encounter between the young and the elderly. The future of a people necessarily supposes this encounter: the young give the strength which enable a people to move forward, while the elderly consolidate this strength by their memory and their traditional wisdom. 



The three loves of our vocation

A poor person is not happy just because he is given shelter, fed and cared for, but also — and most importantly — because he feels loved and given consideration.


In our life, everything revolves around the Residents. We used to call them “les bonnes vieillards,” French for “the good old people.” When you come into our home, you might not think they are poor. They don’t walk around in rags, their hair is fixed, they are shaved, they look happy. And still they are poor materially, and often spiritually and emotionally. But we don’t want them to feel it. They should feel like kings and queens.

We serve Jesus Christ in them; and we wouldn’t want Jesus to walk around unshaven in his old age! To shave them, to feed and shelter them, does not require a Little Sister. But to make them happy, it certainly does! Just ask one of our em-



ployees how the Residents are different when they see a Little Sister, or how they miss her when she is gone for a few days!

True happiness lies in coming to peace with oneself, and especially with God. And so we provide the spiritual help they need to find God. Some have lost him among the worries of raising a family, providing for oneself, even for ambitions, or because of sufferings. And now they have a chapel, with our Lord present, open twenty-four hours a day, a chaplain, daily Mass, Confession, rosary and other devotions, companions on the journey, an atmosphere where everything is directed towards God.

We can only serve them in this manner because our life hinges on three aspects: love of God, love in our communities and love of neighbor. Our former superior general, Mother Marie Antoinette, used to say that in order to live in the realism of the mission and of daily life lived in community, it is necessary to deepen the contemplative spirit of our vocation, to experience God encountered in prayer and served with love in our neighbor. We receive our love from God in our prayer life, the human support we need in our communities, and together we serve God in our Residents. And then we can echo the words of our foundress Saint Jeanne Jugan: “What happiness for us to be a Little Sister of the Poor!” 

– Sr. C. M.

Pope Francis asks us to re-read our own personal vocation story and to scrutinise it in the light of God's loving gaze, because even if a vocation is always his initiative, it is up to us to freely accept the path of discipleship. "This path has a name and a face," Pope Francis has said, "the face of Jesus Christ. He teaches us to become holy. In the Gospel he shows us the way, the way of the Beatitudes" (cf. Mt 5:1-12).

Blessed are the poor in spirit

When studying the Beatitudes in religion class as a young sixth-grader, I remember being struck by the words of Christ in the first Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit ..." "What does Jesus mean by that?" I wondered. As I grew up, graduated from high school and went on to college, those words would come back to me from time to time, but for the most part I was busy about many things. Strengthened by the example of my parents, I attended Sunday Mass, prayed and read the Word of God from time to time, but more or less lived on a superficial level. Like the "part-time Christians" that Pope Francis talks about, I didn't really give my faith my whole heart, relying more on myself than the Holy Spirit.

Then, during my last year of college, God in his everlasting goodness helped me to sense that he was calling me to something more. I was happy, it was true, but I knew that I wasn't really living life in its fullness. As I began to plan the path I would follow post-graduation, I began to pray, "Lord, show me what you want me to do with my life, for you." A few months later, when I was looking for a part-time job, I saw an employment ad in the Catholic newspaper looking for dining aids at the nearby home of the Little Sisters of the Poor. Having always enjoyed being with the elderly, I was inspired to respond to the ad right away.

The Lord had led me there in answer to my prayer, and it was through my experience working in the home that he opened my eyes to the joy of life lived for the Kingdom of God. By helping

the Little Sisters to serve the elderly in the dining rooms and attending Mass with them, I began to understand that their happiness was ultimately rooted in the Beatitudes. Through the example of the Little Sisters, those mysterious words, “How blessed are the poor in spirit,” began to make a little sense to me. Centered on God and a trusting relationship with him, it was a way of living so different from what I’d experienced in the world.

The first thing that struck me about the Little Sisters was their reliance on Divine Providence. I learned that, following in the footsteps of their mother foundress, Saint Jeanne Jugan, the Little Sisters rely on God’s fatherly care to provide for the needs of the Residents. When I first heard that the Little Sisters turned to Saint Joseph when they needed food or items for the Residents and that the Lord never let them down, this was a revelation to me. The more I came to know the Little Sisters, I could see that Divine Providence was not and could not be limited to material needs only, but is




(Sculpture: Rosanne Monna)



The way is narrow because it calls for the complete gift of self — something the world has trouble seeing as positive — and yet this way paradoxically opens up to the fullness of life in Christ.

waiting to provide for us in all of our spiritual and temporal needs. I desired more and more to live not by human wisdom but to embrace the logic of the Gospel, a way of life rooted in poverty of spirit and a heart that is open to God's plans.

After working at the home for a little over a year, I had the happiness of entering as a postulant. As a Little Sister now for ten years, the Lord has helped me to grow little by little in my understanding of his call to follow the “narrow way” of the Beatitudes as a Little Sister of the Poor. The way is narrow because it calls for the complete gift of self — something the world has trouble seeing as positive — and yet this way paradoxically opens up to the fullness of life in Christ. He has taught me that when we seek him with a poor heart, relying on him, we are able to realize how great is his merciful love. As we experience the joys and sorrows of life, we know that he is with us when we mourn or are persecuted. When we seek to bring peace and mercy to others, he sustains us by his grace. When we long for what is pure and good in his eyes, he can transform us for his glory. In our life lived with the Residents, he has shown me the joy of serving others with a meek and humble heart, a joy that is a sharing in the love of Jesus for us all.

I am only beginning on the way of the Beatitudes and often fall short. Fortunately for us, so great is the abundance of life and love in Christ, that it can only be received and bear fruit in one who is poor in spirit, awaiting all from him. 

— Sr. M. G.

Found, touched, *transformed*

V

When I told my parents that I wanted to become a Little Sister, my mother was quite surprised. She said that of all her children, I was the one she would least expect to enter religious life. She added, “You were the most headstrong, independent child I could ever imagine having.” On another occasion she was talking about my younger sister, Lisa. She said that Lisa had gone through a brief rebellious phase when she was a teenager. Mom then commented on my rebellious phase, which started somewhat earlier (in my crib) and lasted somewhat longer (until I left home to go to college)!

Pope Francis has encouraged religious to be “guided by the humble yet joyful certainty of those who have been found, touched and transformed by the Truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed.” Being found, touched, and transformed by Jesus is the story of my life.

Found. My mother's headstrong, independent child was "found" by Jesus at a young age. When I was in the eighth grade I began to realize that God was someone with whom I could enter into a relationship. This happened just before my Confirmation. A desire to pray and to live my faith more deeply started to grow within me. Volunteering at the home of the Little Sisters of the Poor was among the service opportunities presented to my class as we prepared to receive the Holy Spirit. I had not been around elderly or sick people very much up to that point, and the idea of helping them was scary to me. Still, I saw this as an opportunity to grow closer to God through service, so I agreed to go along. Little by little I became captivated by the experience. My fear of being around the elderly turned into eagerness to be more involved in the life of the home. I experienced the family spirit that reigned among the Little Sisters and the Residents, and I was thrilled to be a part of it. I shared in their deep life of faith. Most of all I came to know the joy that characterized the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Touched. Being "touched...by the Truth who is Christ" also happened to me at an early age. On the night of my Confirmation, right after having been sacramentally anointed by the Holy Spirit, I participated in the offertory procession. I was carrying a basket containing the letters we had written to our pastor asking to be confirmed. I remember looking down at the letters and spotting the one I had written. At that moment I felt impelled to give everything to God, and I prayed, "Lord, I offer you much more than what is in this basket. I offer you my life." I did not know what this offering would involve, but I made it sincerely and wholeheartedly. The thought of belonging entirely to Jesus filled my heart with joy and delight. Little by little it became clear to me that God's will was that I become a Little Sister of the Poor.

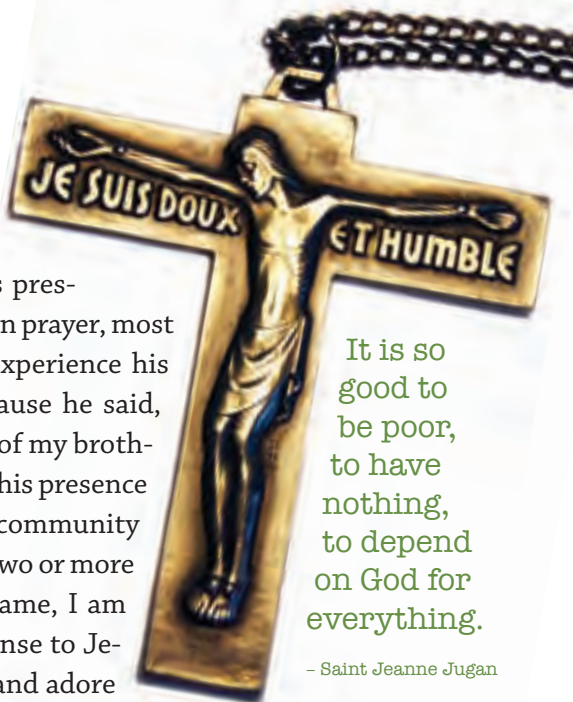
Transformed. My transformation "by the Truth who is Christ" is a gradual process. I know that I am still headstrong

and independent. Despite my faults and weaknesses, Jesus loves me and fills me with his grace. He enables me to live my life as an experience of his presence: I experience his presence in prayer, most especially in the Eucharist. I experience his presence in the Residents because he said, “Whatever you do for the least of my brothers you do for me.” I experience his presence in my Little Sisters as we share community life because he told us, “Where two or more are gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst.” My response to Jesus’ presence is to love, serve, and adore him. His presence is transforming. It

draws me out of myself, gives me the strength to leave my comfort zone, and helps me to strive to surpass my own abilities. It causes me to change my plans, leads me to expand my heart, and helps me to curb my pride. Saint Jeanne Jugan said, “It is so good to be poor, to have nothing, to depend on God for everything.” Learning to depend on God is not easy for me, but it truly is “so good”!

In a certain sense Jesus finds me, touches me, and transforms me anew each day. His merciful love allows me to begin again when my headstrong, independent nature resurfaces. Adoring him in prayer, in the Residents and in community is the source of an indescribable happiness. Despite my tendency to be proud and rebellious, my life is filled with the incomparable joy of belonging to Jesus alone and of depending on God for everything. ✨

– Sr. C. P.



It is so good to be poor, to have nothing, to depend on God for everything.

– Saint Jeanne Jugan

(Image: crucifix worn by each professed Little Sister of the Poor. The words read “I am meek and humble” (cf. Matthew 11:29 in French.)

Comfort, comfort my people

(Isaiah 40:1)

I felt it the first time I set foot in a home of the Little Sisters of the Poor as a teenager: that sense of true comfort and deep peace underlying the joy that I saw on each Resident's beautiful, wrinkled face, and on the faces of the Little Sisters who were quietly serving in the background. I felt it, too, during that same visit, when I was invited into the room of a dying woman — a sacred space where I witnessed the prayerful presence of a Little Sister kneeling at the Resident's bedside and holding a lit candle in the dying lady's hand, bringing her deep peace and comfort in her final moments.

All through my years as a Little Sister, I have witnessed that same profound mystery of peace truly present in both the joy and the suffering of our aged poor. I have reflected much on the seemingly contradictory coexistence of joy and pain in our sacred apostolate. It is a reality that today's society tells us cannot be, and yet I know it to be true. It is the paschal mystery continually unfolding in this blest place where, each day, time touches eternity right in our very presence.

"What a joy it is," Pope Francis says in his document *Rejoice!*, "to bring God's consolation to others!" In my personal experience, I have found that to be so true. How often has it happened that a call during the night to the bedside of a sick, suffering, or frightened Resident has invited me to overcome personal fatigue and to go out of myself — only to discover in overflowing measure the deep joy that comes from being an instrument of God's peace for others. "We are called," says our Holy Father to religious men and women, "to bring to everyone the embrace of God, who bends with a mother's tenderness over us, consecrated women and men, signs of the full-



(Icon copyright George & Sergio Pinecross)

ness of humanity, facilitators and not controllers of grace, stooped down in a gesture of consolation.” That gesture brings to my mind and heart the example of Saint Jeanne Jugan, who made herself

little in the eyes of the world, embracing the elderly poor in deep humility and with the tenderness of God himself ... and I am privileged to do the same through the daily living out of my vow of hospitality.

We are called to bring to everyone the embrace of God, who bends with a mother’s tenderness over us, consecrated women and men, signs of the fullness of humanity.

– Pope Francis

Just recently my Little Sisters and I welcomed a group of vibrant young college women who were visiting us on a “nun run.” Shouts of joy and laughter filled the auditorium as our Residents — many of them in wheelchairs, but with amazing reflexes and incredible determination — challenged them to a spirited volleyball game.

Under the same roof, in another room, our Resident Madeleine — who loved young people and was a huge proponent of Little Sister vocations — lay quietly approaching her eternity.

As nightfall settled and most everyone was tucked into bed, several of the “nun runners” joined me at Madeleine’s bedside, keeping vigil as she continued to grow weaker. I felt deep comfort in my heart that night as I contemplated the precious gift that is mine in my vow of hospitality. I sensed deep peace in the hearts of these young people — busy college students who had put their hectic lives on “pause” and were thus able to savor the sacredness of this moment. I witnessed, too, the deep comfort and peace that Madeleine experienced, just as the young women finished quietly singing the Divine Mercy chaplet, when she gently breathed forth her beautiful soul to God.

“Comfort, comfort my people” (Isaiah 40:1). 🌿

– Sr. C.



The Lord looks tenderly on those who are poor

The Lord looks tenderly on those who are poor.” These words are taken from Monday’s evening prayer in the liturgy of the hours. They have always struck me as being lived out by our holy Mother Foundress, Saint Jeanne Jugan, especially at the moment when she “looked tenderly” on Anne Chauvin, her first Resident, back in 1839. That look and the gesture of literally carrying Anne on her back and placing her in her own bed engaged Jeanne for the rest of her life in serving the needs of the elderly poor. It is also a call to me to discover the implications of this tenderness in living our vow of hospitality more authentically.

“A tender look” and “the tender compassion of our God” are expressions presented in Sacred Scripture and an invitation to me to discover what tenderness really means in my life. For as one author states, “Without tenderness of spirit the most intensely righteous religious life is like the image of God without his beauty and attractiveness” (G. D. Watson).

Tenderness must be prayed for as a most necessary gift of the Holy Spirit, for it teaches us to understand and experience the

needs of another from God's perspective, and allows us to offer to them not only the compassion of Christ but his very affection. How awesome is that!

As a Little Sister of the Poor there are immense opportunities of applying this God-like and much-to-be-desired gift within the context of our everyday life. From the time we wake up until we go to bed the services we render, the various relationships involved in our practice of hospitality, the way we listen without interrupting — even if the same story has been repeated again and again — all of these acts must be sprinkled with the tenderness God desires of us. We truly must be his very eyes and ears looking upon and listening tenderly to the poor.

But who are the poor? We often hear this question and a variety of answers are postulated. In reality *we are the poor* — all of us, without exception. And so we must be attuned to each and every encounter, each and every task. And we must be attuned to each and every time we have in some way failed, in faith remembering that God even looks tenderly on our own poverty and gives us the needed insight and grace to do better.

But there are other encounters and other opportunities of witnessing to the tenderness of God. This happens in our dealings with our close collaborators: our Little Sisters, who share our very life; employees; volunteers and Association members; family members and benefactors who all need to experience and receive from us this same delicate, respectful attention and interested listening. Our smile then becomes an invitation to an encounter characterized by welcome and acceptance.

We speak much about the “New Evangelization” and rightly so, for the world needs to hear the message of the “tender compassion” of our God. Our elderly Residents need and love to be reminded that God is a loving God. Our readiness to listen and tenderly encourage them is often an important means of enabling them to approach the Sacraments after years of estrangement from God. At the very least it opens for them the possibility of beginning to accept that



“Tenderness of spirit makes its home in the bosom of Jesus. It feels all things from God’s standpoint, and lives to receive and transmit the spotless sympathies and affections of Jesus. It understands the words of the Holy Spirit. Tenderness must be in the very nature and forgiveness is but the behavior of that nature. ‘Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you’ (Ephesians 4:32).” – G. D. Watson

they are loved tenderly by God, since they come to understand through our ministry that they are loved by us.

Once we are truly convinced of the reality of God’s Love, our own love must become universal, excluding no one from experiencing God’s tender look in us. I find so often, even in my trips to the market, that our world is an immense field for evangelization. Calling those at the check-out by their name, engaging in conversation with

those waiting in line with us, and always thanking them and saying a simple “God bless you!” — so many are struck by that and almost always reply, “And may God bless you too, Sister!”

How truly blessed we are to be the object — or rather the subject — of God’s loving gaze and his tender compassion! Poor as we are, we are so very rich in what matters and want to convey this Good News to all we meet. 🌸

– Sr B. M.



Community: the first gospel we preach

I love community life, even with its inevitable challenges and occasional bumps. Pope Francis promotes a community that is rich in joy and tenderness. He asserts “... tenderness is good for us ... a Eucharistic tenderness that is a true sign of fraternity.”

We are “tenderized” by the marinade of the Spirit and the presence of the Eucharist in our midst. Our differences, which at times are numerous, mellow and blend when placed in God’s hands. We begin to reinforce and strengthen each other in our common vocation.

When hearts are made supple by the Spirit, and efforts are sincerely focused on Faith, Hope and Charity, the Gospel is made credible, and making the Gospel credible is the call and duty of every Christian. As Little Sisters, we are called to make it credible through our lives of humble service to the elderly.

Our homes throughout the world are to be havens for the elderly in need, homes where they can grow spiritually, where they can flourish in peace and security. Our Mother Foundress, Saint Jeanne Jugan counseled the novices: “Our elderly do not like long faces. Make them happy, this is what counts!” Without “preaching” the Gospel, Jeanne Jugan knew that the elderly would be immersed in Gospel charity if her Little Sisters were living it credibly. She kept it simple and she wanted her followers to do the same.

God has graciously given us the opportunity to share the Gospel in a unique way: through Hospitality. And when it is lived well, the atmosphere itself evangelizes.

The Constitutions of the Little Sisters of the Poor remind us that “Christ has chosen us and brought us together in the same profession of the evangelical counsels, in order that we may live in

fraternal communion and be witnesses in the midst of the world to his love, revealed in the mystery and unity of the Trinitarian life” (n. 61). Our Constitutions continue: “A community of Little Sisters, living in complementarity and unity, gives unassuming witness of the unselfish and joyous charity of Christ’s disciples” (n. 67).

Living the rhythm of our common life with balance, order, harmony and self-forgetfulness is a powerful witness. But where does the strength come from to bear this witness to the mercy and tenderness of God each day?

Our community life offers a multifaceted answer: A daily rhythm of prayer with the Eucharist at its center; a simple, common life with a shared desire to live the Gospel with unity of spirit and simplicity of heart; the many occasions that arise for service and self-forgetfulness; the reliance on the strength of the Spirit to cultivate charity among ourselves and to quell any dissension, self-interest or rivalry; a healthy dose of humor, which is an absolute essential; and a common commitment to living according to our Constitutions in the footsteps of our humble foundress, and in the heart of the Church.

In community I find the energy to serve well, to witness with constancy. I am the product of a Philadelphia row-house family who taught me the importance of creating “home” and the value of each one’s contribution. Each member’s gifts and talents were cultivated; laughter was encouraged, faith



was shared, and love was lavished upon us. Our family's spirit and spunk made all the difference in the way each of us faced the world outside. For me, this continues in communal life, and the quality of my encounters with my Little Sisters affects my ministry with the elderly. My family instilled in me a desire to let God build my life as a work of art; my community continues to encourage me to add the deep colors of a loving spirituality with the warm hues of compassion.

**The sign of
fraternity is
tenderness,
a “Eucharistic
tenderness”
because
“tenderness
is good for us.”**

As a Little Sister I have shared community life with Sisters from all over the United States and the world beyond. I have learned to delight in the Indian delicacies sent by a loving mother from Mumbai; and in learning about Tongan, Malaysian, European and Filipino customs, religious traditions and dishes. But most of all my spirit has feasted on the beautiful manifestations of Faith that I have witnessed in my Little Sisters from around the globe.

The pure glory of God dwells within each of us; when we recognize it in ourselves and reverence it in others we make spiritual progress. Only when we live humbly and prayerfully, only when we are immersed in the Heart of Christ, and believe the Gospel with every fiber of our being, will we be credible witnesses to that Gospel. ✨

– Sr. M. C.





Listening to the Master, walking by his side

Little Sisters are called by vocation to be contemplatives in action. Jeanne Jugan was often identified as one who continually lived in the presence of God and yet her “active” days — the years spent opening homes, rescuing those that were in financial difficulties, and establishing a strong system of collaboration and almsgiving among her “benefactors” — plunged her into almost continual work and journeying from place to place. So what does it really mean to be a contemplative in action? We identify “contemplation” with inactivity and for some reason conclude that only those of us who spend a good part of our day on our knees in the chapel can even think about striving to be a contemplative. The saints’ lives and counsels defy this stereotype. Some of the greatest saints were like Saint Jeanne Jugan. They spent most of their lives either traveling or working in the apostolate, sometimes both day and night, and yet ALL of them became contemplatives in action.

Jeanne Jugan’s life, and the few counsels she left behind, clearly define what is not only at the heart of the vocation of a Little Sister but at the very heart of religious life itself! The Holy Father puts it this way, “The first thing for a disciple is to be with the Master to listen to him and to learn from him. This is always true, and it is true at every moment of our lives. If the warmth of God, of his love, of his tenderness is not in our own hearts, then how can we, who are poor sinners, warm the heart of others?”



Jeanne Jugan understood that to be with the Master meant being with her Beloved, her best friend. All she wanted was to walk by his side, to listen to his words, to ponder them in her heart and to keep her gaze fixed on him. She didn't need to be in a "sacred place" to do this. She made everyplace she went sacred by living in his presence, bringing all her concerns to him, talking over everything she carried in her heart with him — her worries, her chal-

lenges, her fears, things she did not understand and the decisions that were waiting for an answer. All of them were placed before him as she traveled the road on her begging trips. In the late hours of the night when sleep refused to calm her mind and heart, she united it to all the Masses being offered throughout the world.

All those who knew her, and even those who met her for the first time, were struck by her radiance. There was something about her that was not of this world. This is the legacy she left to her daughters, a path that leads to the heart of God. She teaches that contemplation is discovered and lived by vigilant hearts, by those who continually strive to keep their minds and hearts turned towards Jesus. Contemplation is the fruit of a sincere heart ready to say "yes" to all the manifestations of God's Providence in the daily circumstances of one's life.


Those whose love grows each day slowly separate themselves from even the legitimate pleasures of life, "considering all as refuse for the sake of knowing Christ Jesus." Saint Jeanne Jugan called

poverty a “treasure” because she discovered that Jesus took over her life in the measure that she made room for him by separating herself from all that was not him. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” is a beatitude, a supreme blessedness because poverty is meant to teach us that “the contemplation of the Son of God, poor and annihilated, is LOVE before its renunciation.”

LOVE is a hard word to define. She would say, “Refuse God nothing. Do all through LOVE.” In other words, LOVE is active and expressed by self-sacrifice, putting ourselves aside for the good of our neighbor. She served the elderly day and night without sparing fatigue or labor because she saw the face of Jesus in every elderly person she cared for.

Our apostolic vocation offers every opportunity to imitate our Mother Jeanne Jugan and become contemplatives in action. Living our vow of hospitality authentically makes constant demands on our time, talents, generosity and spirit of sacrifice. To willingly serve the elderly 24/7, to do all through love, refusing God nothing, puts us on the path that leads to contemplation, because as Saint Gregory the Great once said, “Contemplation is the knowledge of God that is impregnated with love.”

Jeanne Jugan called Jesus her “Spouse.” She was convinced that God wanted her for himself. This conviction made her fearless in finding ways to help the elderly poor and audacious in establishing homes, even without any material means. She overcame ridicule, mistrust and humiliation because she knew that God wanted her for himself and he was her constant companion.

God’s call to become his spouse is unique for each person. Jesus claims us for his own by putting his “mark” on our hearts. We are chosen to walk more closely by his side each day, seeking him both in the silent moments set aside for prayer and in the activities of each day because all that we do “in union with him” becomes consecrated. This is what it means to be the “Spouse of Christ.” 

– Sr. G. M.

(Image, page 39: U.S. logo for the Year of Consecrated Life; image, page 40: artist unknown.)



Love is never finished

Rejoice! Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. The source of joy must be found in prayer, charity and unceasing thanksgiving. One of my favorite passages of *Rejoice!* is “Anyone who has met the Lord and follows him faithfully is a messenger of the joy of the Spirit.” Pope Francis has asked, “If the warmth of God, of his love, of his tenderness is not in our own hearts, then how can we, who are poor sinners, warm the heart of others?” I have been blessed to possess this warmth and joy throughout my entire religious life.

On reflecting on my past fifty years of consecrated life, I see how often minor fears and inward hurdles, when handled to the best of my ability, would somehow produce a positive outcome and were rewarded with a deepening of joy.

When I found myself, at a very young age, in charge of a community of eighteen Sisters, I overheard one of the more venerable Sisters utter: “How could they put HER in charge?” I knew I had to win her confidence so I went out of my way to ask her advice and to have her tell me how she would handle certain situations. I won her confidence and the two of us worked together joyfully for several years.

A few years later I was asked to obey in a situation in which I could not foresee a positive outcome. I prayed for the gift of obedience and after several weeks of suffering and doubts, the Lord flooded

my soul with peace and joy.

My life with the Lord has always brought me inner tranquility and joy. The greatest joy in my apostolic mission of serving the aged is experienced on a daily basis by so many simple ways of bringing joy into their lives. Sometimes a cheerful word when passing them in the hallway, at other times a compliment on how well they are dressed, a word of encouragement when they struggle with their physical therapy exercises — all of these simple encounters give me great joy and inner satisfaction.

An important aspect of community life lived joyfully is that we are called to support each other in our joyful “yes” to the Gospel. We all need a little extra dose of joy from time to time. In *Rejoice!* We read, “Since we are witnesses of a communion beyond our vision and our limits, we are called to wear God’s smile. Community is the first and most believable gospel that we can preach.” “Build friendship between yourselves, family life, love among you,” our Holy Father said to cloistered religious women in Assisi in 2013. “Build community life, because in the life of a community it is this way, like a family, and it is the very Holy Spirit who is in the middle of the community.... Let things go, do not brag, be patient with everything, smile from the heart. Joy is confirmed in the experience of community.”

Since we are witnesses of a communion beyond our vision and our limits, we are called to wear God’s smile.

– Pope Francis

I love our Holy Father’s encouragement by reminding us that loving activity is a continuous process: “The Pope invites us to renew our vocation and to fulfill it with joy and passion, so that the increase in loving activity is a continuous process — ‘it matures, matures, matures’ in a permanent development in which the ‘yes’ of our will to God’s will unites will, intellect and feeling. ‘Love is never finished and complete; throughout life it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself.’” I pray that God will continue to help me to mature in joy and grace! ✨

– Sr. C. M.



In the *joy* of the faithful yes

I“It seems like yesterday.” In 2012 I celebrated my golden jubilee of religious vows. For me this anniversary represented a sustained gift on the part of Christ, my divine Spouse. Again and again as others congratulated me, I declared with conviction to them and to myself that God had done it all. It seemed that it was he who should be the honoree. Truly, it was God who had brought me through five decades of a consecrated life filled, blessed and rich in joy and his surprises. This jubilee celebration affirmed anew God’s designs. He it was who out of love had chosen me from all eternity to be his own and enabled me day by day to persevere. John Paul II explained the reality: “This call is accompanied, moreover, by a specific gift of the Holy Spirit, so that consecrated persons can respond to their vocation and mission” (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 30).

Pope Francis speaks of this renewed encounter with God’s love “which blossoms into an enriching friendship,” but he indicates that the “interior pilgrimage begins with prayer. This is always true and it is true at every moment of our lives. [...] If the warmth of God, of his love, of his tenderness is not in our own hearts, then how can we, who are poor sinners, warm the hearts of others?” This is a life-long journey, as in the humility of prayer the Holy Spirit convinces us of the Lordship of Christ within us.

I believe that this progression of opening to God’s call in my life unfolded throughout my two and half years of beginning for-

mation. I experienced great happiness, periodically marked with some healthy homesickness. A kind counsel from an understanding mentor would dispel the pangs which gradually disappeared. I was becoming more aware of God and the immensity of his love that prompted and sustained his call. Throughout those years of novitiate, my longing for a deeply centered personal life with Christ grew stronger. I made my first temporary vows May 2, 1962, promising God my loving fidelity.

After four years of living the life of a professed Little Sister and tasting its beauty and richness, I was called to France and a year's preparation for final vows. On the day of perpetual profession, October 15, 1967, I felt an indescribable peace and security, knowing that henceforth and forever I would belong to Christ, the Faithful One, and bring his fidelity to others.

Many are the homes and areas where God has placed me, asking me to serve, to collaborate with my Little Sisters and others. In the past half century changes have required adaptations, more recourse to outside resources and sometimes the risk of distraction from prayer and community, but our superiors navigated that great ocean well and brought us unrelentingly back to the Source, to our mission and to our call to holiness as consecrated persons and daughters of Saint Jeanne Jugan. Her simple, profound faith always kept situations in perspective. Often, with that in mind, I heard my heart chanting, "I will ever sing in praise of your name and fulfill my vows day by day" (Ps. 61:8).


Although the years were not without difficult duties, dark moments, questions and sometimes humbling stupidity on my part, never once did I doubt God's call or go back on my "forever." In fact, I sincerely believe that each time the Holy Spirit pulled me through one or other of these moments, he also graced me with more insight, deeper joy and greater awareness of his divine "marriage bond" with me. Pope Francis confirms and assures us that faithfulness is the awareness of a love that points us towards the "Thou" of God and towards every other person, in a constant and dynamic way when



Truly, it was God who had brought me through five decades of a consecrated life filled, blessed and rich in joy and his surprises.

we experience within ourselves the life of the Risen One. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.

For me fidelity has been God's ever present action along with the experience of community, a theological reality in which we are called to support each other in our joyful "yes" to the Gospel. It is the Word of God that inspires faith and nourishes and revitalizes it. And it is the Word of God that touches hearts, converting them to God and to his logic, which is so different from our own.

The years have fled by and I haven't the words to express my unbounded gratitude for God's call. Yes, "it seems like yesterday" that I answered and set out on the journey, following Christ and serving his poor. As I continue journeying in my little bark, I strive to keep my eyes fixed on him, whose loving fidelity daily invites me to pursue the journey to another shore where fidelity will have achieved its goal. 

– Sr. M. B.

Spring into Service

echoes from our
summer service program participants

Interacting with the Residents has been a great blessing for me. From helping with meals, to assisting with activities, to making one-on-one visits, I have learned a lot about working with the elderly. This experience has helped me to become a better, more patient listener. I have learned just how



I will never forget what I have learned here at the Jeanne Jugan Residence. As I talked with the Residents and learned about their lives, I began to see that the world is a lot bigger than the small school I come from. The stories the Residents shared with me moved my heart and inspired me to be more deeply grateful for the sacrifices my own family has made for me. – Gabriella

important compassion and company are to the elderly. In simply listening and responding sensitively we recognize their dignity as individuals. – Elizabeth

I had been struggling within myself with the question, "How can I love my neighbor?" When I did the Spring into Service Program, the way to love my neighbor became clearer to me. At the end of the day I found myself wanting to give more, wanting to serve more, wanting to love more deeply than the day before.... It gave me peace to have a place where I didn't have to think about myself, didn't have to worry about trivial passing things, where I could just give my heart, and give myself completely to God in the poor. – Clare

In the summer of 2014, I spent six wonderful weeks at St. Joseph's Home in Waterford, Ireland. During my times with the Residents, I learned that if you greet every face with a smile you will almost certainly get a smile back. Bringing an uplifting mood to activities or even meal times can have a profound impact on the moods of the other people in the room, particularly the Residents who can often suffer from depression. I loved singing old Irish tunes during music hour, going on day trips, and just sitting and chatting with the Residents. The Sisters were extremely hospitable and friendly. Though I was thousands of miles from home, they made me comfortable and I realized that the church is really a second home wherever you go. Daily Mass and prayer in the evenings was an extra opportunity to nurture my faith, lay my troubles before the Lord and grow in grace. I would highly recommend this experience to anyone who wants to work with the elderly in a wonderful environment enriched with faith! – Sarah



Being at the Little Sisters of the Poor has taught me to live in the present; that we don't always need to have our lives mapped and planned out. I learned that we should always put everything into God's hands and he will lead and guides us as our lives go on. – Kambranique

"To teach me how to suffer, to help me develop a daily prayer schedule, and to give me confidence and no fear" – these were the three specific prayers I felt urged to ask Jesus to answer for me as I began my Spring into Service placement with the Little Sisters of the Poor. I have to admit that all of them were answered by the end of my summer service job! Jesus is so gentle with me! – Mary

My favorite part of the Summer Service Program was spending individual time with the Residents. They left me in awe of how grateful they were for the work I was doing, no matter how big or small my task was. They shared with me their wisdom and told me just what I needed to hear when I needed to hear it. I think Christ may have had a thing or two to do with that. – Hayley

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