Celebrations of Consecrated Life

For the past six months, Sisters of the Holy Spirit have been celebrating consecrated life in special ways. One Sister has pronounced her final vows, another has celebrated her silver jubilee, and two Sisters reached their 75th anniversaries.

Each of these events entailed the professing or renewing of vows. All Christians, by virtue of their baptism, are called to imitate Christ according to their state in life. For Sisters who pledge themselves by their vows to live as the poor, chaste, and obedient Christ, they become consecrated for mission. They are to serve God’s people according to the charism or spirit of their congregation.

They find in Our Blessed Mother the perfect model for all who seek to discover the will of God for them.

“Let what you have said, be done to me.”

(LK 1:38)
To Spend One’s Life for Others

This year the Sisters of the Holy Spirit celebrate our centennial anniversary as a Pittsburgh Diocesan Congregation. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that a book I recently read made such a deep and thought-provoking impression on me. The theme of the book is there is another side to change found only after having gone through it. Change occurs. Then there is the necessity to acknowledge the past; to choose the freedom to move forward in the present; to receive the future as gift. Allow me to share with you some of my reflections of both our history and the book.

Our past is already a part of us; it is ours to keep or to let go. We fantasize about the greener fields of days gone by. The desire to look back, to experience again the cherished moments of the past cannot take us forward. This longing becomes a dead weight keeping us from being the person God intends us to be.

Time only moves forward. We can internalize what we want to keep from the past; we can even revisit those memories with gratitude, learning from them, viewing them from our current vantage point. That which no longer matters from the past we can let go.

To find oneself on the other side of transition, of change, of loss is to find the mind awake, opened to things previously not imagined. First, however, we must cross the bridge from what was in order to reach the other side and discover new possibilities and grow to new life. Jesus had to die before the Holy Spirit would come to renew the earth, before the life-enriching power of the Spirit would pour forth and flow through open minds bringing transformation to any situation if we allow it to happen.

To pass through life’s phases head on and willingly enter the bigger picture of life, to throw ourselves fully into the moment in which we are living is our daily challenge. It is to approach that which until this time was undreamed of, to choose better things, to give ourselves to others, to spend ourselves for good.

That is what the Sisters of the Holy Spirit have done over the past one hundred years. That is just what our Sisters who celebrated their jubilees this year have done with their lives for twenty-five, sixty, seventy-five or more years of religious life.

We take inspiration from their having had to live through change, to honor their past while moving ahead to what is yet to come, to live in the now.

Their past remains a sacred part of our lives. Our future is uncertain, our now is sure. It is with deepest gratitude and respect that we extend our congratulations to them for all they have spent of themselves for us and for others.

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Sister Professes Final Vows

“Sister Sunshine” is what she’s called at her new assignment in Butler, PA.

The feast of St. Clare, August 11, marked the final profession of vows for Sister Teresa Baldi, SHS. Her journey to this day began on August 22, 2004, when she entered the community, the daughter of Paul and the late Celestine McGuire Baldi and the youngest of their five daughters.

Sister Teresa said that she was drawn to the Sisters of the Holy Spirit because of the community’s “strong relationship to the Holy Spirit. I also wanted to stay in Pittsburgh, and we are a diocesan community.” She said that her formation in community “was different than I expected, but my canonical year, although extremely difficult, was one of the best years of my life.”

Since that time, Sister Teresa’s Masters in Education degree from Duquesne University has served her well as a teacher in the former Immaculate Conception School in Bloomfield, a ministry she said that she loved and where the people “are great!” This year she began her ministry in Butler, PA, at St. Paul Parish as Religious Education Coordinator.

Sister Teresa’s lovely personality is depicted in the traits that Father Robert Guay put forth in his homily at the Eucharistic Liturgy celebrated for her profession. Reflecting on the Gospel passage where, in (Matt.5:13-16) the importance of our being “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” is proclaimed, Father Guay said, “As you bring Christ’s flavor of faith, hope, love, goodness and mercy to those around you always remember you are to be a light for Christ by showing others the way to Christ and by bringing His warmth to others by your own openness and kindness, your devotion and commitment to the Gospel message.”

Father Guay reminded Sister Teresa that she is “to bring Christ’s flavor and light to our world.” He said, “May you be Christ’s heart, full of love and compassion. May you be Christ’s hands to stretch out to our world and give it the comfort it needs. May you be Christ’s feet, so that you may walk with him in search of souls. May you be Christ’s eyes, always looking for those in need in order to bring them God’s love and mercy and joy.”

For Sister Teresa, she agrees that she loves to laugh but states that she can also be serious. Sister Teresa lights up the lives of many. Among the things that hold special meaning for her, she says, “I love First Sunday prayers.” (These are devoted to the Holy Spirit.) “I love all community gatherings, local feast day and birthday celebrations, our remembrance of our foundress and all the Sisters who have gone before us. I think the Sisters of the Holy Spirit are growing by leaps and bounds into the future and I am excited!”

To you, Sister Teresa, we are truly happy that you are now a fully professed member of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit. May God continue to surround you with His love and guidance.

“May your profession of vows assist you in always welcoming others for Christ. Be hospitable to all. Be a living reminder that there are no castoff people, no disposable souls, no throw-away communities.

“And, finally, may your profession of vows help you to bring a little humor to our world and especially to those you minister to.”

In his very rich and inspiring homily, Father provided many good words of advice:

“May you humbly profess your vows understanding you are at another step in the life-long process to grow in holiness. The beginning point for holiness is humility and that deep, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Always foster that relationship.

“May your profession of vows bring you life-giving and long-lasting happiness. Be joyful for joy definitely can lead others to Christ.

“May your profession of vows be a visible sign of hope for others and our hope has a name, Jesus Christ, for he is the definitive answer to the question of the meaning of life.

“May your profession of vows promote healing in our world. In your own ministry of faith formation be an agent of healing, provide a listening ear and be a means for the healing of the Holy Spirit.”

Sister Donna Smith, Formation Director, witnesses Sister Teresa’s signing the vow book.
Surrounded by her family and friends, Sister Donna Smith renewed her vows in celebration of her 25th jubilee on August 12.

In the homily given by Rev. Robert Guay during the Eucharistic Liturgy, he spoke about commitment, “a commitment Sr. Donna was willing to make some 25 years ago when she entered the novitiate of the Holy Spirit Sisters.”

He went on to say, “Later in her journey in consecrated life, she would profess her perpetual vows—the commitment would become final—and by that commitment she would place her hand, her heart and her life into the hand and heart and life of Jesus as a fully professed Sister of the Holy Spirit. By doing so it was as if Jesus’ heartbeat, so to speak, became present in her through the faithful living of her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and her faithful living and sharing of the Gospel message.”

In 1985, Donna, the second of the six children of Stella and the late Paul Smith, left her lovely family to enter the Sisters of the Holy Spirit. The loss of her home parish of St. Wendelin in Butler, PA, was the gain of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout these past years, Sister Donna has shared her many gifts in a variety of ministries. She graduated from Duquesne University with a B.S. in Secondary Education and an M.S. in Administration.

Sister became a teacher at North Catholic High School and at the former Immaculate Conception School (now St. Maria Goretti School) in the Bloomfield section of Pittsburgh. In fact, one of her favorite memories is having been nominated by her students at Immaculate Conception for the Golden Apple Award which she received. She was also the recipient of the A+ Teacher Award from the University of Pittsburgh, the PA Student Teacher of the Year, and Science teacher Awards from PJAS (Pennsylvania Junior Achievement in Science).

Later on, Sister was asked to assume the role of Director of the Formation Program for the Sisters of the Holy Spirit. (This program prepares a woman to become a Sister of the Holy Spirit.) It was during this time that Sister graduated from the Epiphany Certification Program (a Spiritual Formation Program) begun by Rev. Adrian Van Kaam, C.S.Sp. and Dr. Susan Muto at Duquesne University.

Following her graduation from that program, Sister was asked to direct some of the Epiphany programs. Her acquaintance with a number of the institute’s graduates enabled her to invite some of them to present programs at the Martina Spiritual Renewal Center where she had been assigned as Director.

For eight years, Sister Donna served as Assistant General Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit. Today she ministers as co-director of the retreat center and maintains her position as Director of Formation.

In reflecting on the charism of the community, Sister Donna said that being a Sister of the Holy Spirit “is all about being open to the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit, the ever-abiding Presence of God’s love. It is in this openness that the Holy Spirit reveals to us the mind and heart of God. This gives direction to our lives, to our community.”

We join Father Guay in his closing words to Sister when he stated “Sister Donna, we thank God for you, the gift of your vocation, and your desire to be an imitator of God through consecrated life. May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to completion.”

“She would place her hand, her heart and her life into the hand and heart and life of Jesus.”
Seventy-five years as a Sister of the Holy Spirit have provided Sister M. Bernardine Golonka, SHS, many opportunities to use her many gifts in a wide variety of ministries in service to God’s people.

Baptized Stanislawa (Stella) Golonka, she was the second of the five children of Peter and Rosalia Janiszewska Golonka. Sister Bernardine is the only surviving member of her immediate family. Sister stated, “My parents were very prayerful people. Prayer was primary in our home. I experienced the good example of my parents and of my sister, Sister Annunciata.” She went on to say, “My parents taught and exemplified for me the value of keeping close to God and relying on divine inspiration to guide my choices and actions.”

Having entered the congregation from Madonna of Czestochowa Parish in New Castle, PA, following graduation from Union High School in that city, she was sent to Mt. Mercy College (now Carlow University) to obtain a degree in secondary education. Following four years of teaching upper grades in parish schools, she earned a diploma in nursing from St. Francis Hospital and became a registered nurse in Pennsylvania. Sister later continued her education at Duquesne University, earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing Degree, graduating Magna Cum Laude. She later earned an M.Ed. degree from Duquesne University, and an M.N. degree (Medical-Surgical Nursing) with a clinical specialty in cardiovascular nursing from the University of Pittsburgh.

When the congregation took over King’s Daughters Hospital in Martinsburg, WV, she was appointed its first Director of Nursing Service and of the associated School of Nursing, reorganizing those departments after the new hospital building was completed.

A long career as nurse educator in institutions of higher learning followed at the University of Southern Mississippi, at Edinboro University, at Duquesne University, and at La Roche College.

Just as Sister had desired to instill the role of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the children she taught, in her role as a nurse, she attempted to understand the needs of her patients and to help them to accept their sufferings.

“Being a Sister of the Holy Spirit opened for me opportunities for spiritual and intellectual growth”, she said, further stating, “I credit my successes to the power of the Holy Spirit whose direction and guidance led me to places and apostolates that helped me utilize well my gifts of mind and heart for service to this Community and to the Catholic Church. All my perceived aptitudes and faculties as well as my acquired knowledge and inclinations of my heart found expression in serving God and God’s people wherever I was led and inspired by His Spirit.”

Sister Bernardine’s life was punctuated with many other duties and responsibilities. She served as a member of the General Council of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit as the Director of Ministries. Sister founded and published “Spirit Echoings”, the community’s newsletter and took over publication of “The Caring Touch” for Marian Manor Nursing Home in Green Tree. She was also the first Director of Communications for the Sisters of the Holy Spirit.

One can only look in amazement at Sister’s contributions over the years. She once said, “My constant prayer in every task I undertake is “Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind, fill me with your holy love!”

Today we depend on the prayers of Sister Bernardine as she continues the mission of Jesus through her prayer ministry in her retirement at Marian Manor.

Thank you, Sister, for all you have done and meant to so many people. May God continue to bless and be with you!
It was as beautiful a day as one might wish for in April. The 29th of that month was a celebration of 150 years of religious life of two of our Sisters. Sister M. Berchmans Siglow and Sister M. Bernardine Golonka had each professed their vows in 1937 and seventy-five years later had them renewing those same vows which they had lived so very faithfully for such a long period of time. This time, however, their vows were witnessed by their Sisters and families in the Assumption Chapel at Marian Manor.

The afternoon Eucharistic Liturgy was celebrated by Very Rev. Robert F. Guay, V.E., Episcopal Vicar of Region One of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Father Guay is also the Chaplain of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit at their Motherhouse. The Concelebrant of the Mass was Rev. John F. Walsh, Chaplain of Marian Manor.

On this fourth Sunday of Easter, the gospel spoke of the Good Shepherd. In his homily, Father Guay spoke of God’s protecting and providing for his flock. He went on to say:

“When we cry out—he comes to us. When we look for him—he is there to assist us not just in the usual ways but at times in most unusual ways. When we are in danger—he rescues us. But the most marvelous thing of all is this: when we stray away from him, he seeks us out and calls us to himself for he loves us, wants to nourish us and bring us back to the safety and comfort of his fold.

“Jesus our Good Shepherd Cares for us as individuals. No one is insignificant to him. There is nothing about our lives, no situation, no event, no concern, no fear, no joy that the Lord does not want to embrace.”

As Father Guay continued to speak of the Good Shepherd’s life of service, he reminded his listeners that service is also expected of those “who are the sheep of his fold who hear, believe, respond, live and share his word.”

The lives of service of Sisters Bernardine and Berchmans were well attested to as Father recalled their lives of faith and committed service to others.

Following the Eucharistic celebration, the jubilarians and their families and friends joined the Sisters for a lovely dinner and lively conversation.

Sister Loretta Shelby celebrated her 100th birthday with a cake and ice cream social on February 19 at Marian Manor. Friends and family came from far and near to honor Sister Loretta who, as most will agree, doesn’t look anywhere near 100!

Sister Loretta Reaches 100 Years

Sister Loretta Shelby celebrated her 100th birthday with a cake and ice cream social on February 19 at Marian Manor. Friends and family came from far and near to honor Sister Loretta who, as most will agree, doesn’t look anywhere near 100!

Sister Loretta was featured in the Fall 2011 edition of Spirit Echoings celebrating her 80th anniversary as a Sister of the Holy Spirit.

We wish Sister many more years. May God continue to bless her!
Mission Statement

We, the Sisters of the Holy Spirit of Pittsburgh, declare our mission is to be joy-filled disciples of Jesus, prophetically witnessing to the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, aware of our call to work for the transformation of society into a Gospel community, reconciled with God and with one another.

Is God calling you to religious life?
Would you like to join us in our work of Love and Joy?

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