

Today's scripture texts give us a glimpse of the mystery of God's love for each of us. Over the last few months, as we Jubilarians have been sharing memories, we wondered how to summarize lives that in 1932, 1942, and 1947-48 seemed set on a straight and narrow path but in retrospect reflect both the mystery of God's grace in our lives and the radical changes that have taken place in our world during the last eighty-five years. And behold, the answer, as usual, is in God's word.

Today's scripture readings capture the God of the Old Testament – in a loving moment! – and the God of the New Testament at His most loving. And they capture the sweep, the arc of our lives – from the 1930's and the 1940's of our youth to our joyful astonishment at today's jubilee celebration.

Listen to the words of the first reading again, slightly rearranged, and think back with us to the day we entered. Yahweh, speaking through Jeremiah: "They shall be my people and I will be their God. I will give them a different heart and different behavior."

Stepping into the novitiate in the 1930's and 40's was literally stepping into a different world, exclusively God's world, and it called for a different heart and most certainly for different behavior. The customs seemed to go back to 1856. How precise everything had to be: the formality of prayer and prayer days; the many possibilities for not getting things right – whether serving the Academy girls, with the risk of dropping plates, or in the academy dorms or in the laundry or preparing the vegetables. But in 1947-48, we were truly blessed with our Mistress of Novices, S. Antonella, a woman of Irish wit and holy wisdom. One morning at Resolution, she told us of some complaints that had come in – again – and then she added, in her Irish brogue: "And I said to them, 'Well, what happened to them then, because they were all right when they came to us from their mothers.'" Rousing cheers, quickly hushed.

Recreation was always a happy time. The party of 1947 was graced with musicians: flute player, violinists, pianist, and a resident song writer. And we loved to laugh.

One particular event stood out for us – our first Christmas – walking over to Sacred Heart Chapel through a magical snowfall, the beauty of the liturgy, and the joyous singing of the choir. But the snow that Christmas also set a record and caused untold difficulties for our families, who struggled to get to Brentwood for our Christmas visit – never to be forgotten.

With Reception and the habit came a new understanding of the words of Isaiah (43:1): "I have called you by name. You are mine."

From all of these experiences, shared together in the new world of the Novitiate, came a special bond among us that has lasted through the 70, 75, and 85 years of lives filled with a variety of other experiences. Over the years we have come to understand that it was in the ordinary day-to-day living that God's grace was binding us to Himself. God truly spoke through Jeremiah: "I will not cease in my efforts for their

good.... I will plant them firmly in this land, with all my heart and soul.” And here we are.

In the second reading, St. Paul literally sums up the first part of our lives in ministry. “I thank God that you have been enriched in so many ways, especially in your teachers ...” In the years that followed the novitiate, the Congregation educated us from normal school to college to graduate school; we taught at every grade level from kindergarten through college and university, and some became compassionate nurses. We carried forward the mission of the Congregation on the mainland and in Puerto Rico.

Then came the tumultuous 1960’s with political assassinations, racial riots, militant resistance to the war in Vietnam. Against this background, for Catholics, there was the revolution of Vatican Council II, from 1962-65.

For the 1947 party, our Renovation summer in 1963 featured an elderly Jesuit who emphasized that we shouldn’t retreat to our convents every day after class, but be the “light of the world” to others. The reading materials stemmed from Vatican II and prepared us for the Chapter of Renewal in 1968. St. Paul promised: “God will keep you steady,” and steady He kept us through the controversial, conflicting, exhilarating, challenging changes in our lives – so that we could better serve God and neighbor. As St. Paul expresses it: “God by calling you has joined you to his Son, Jesus Christ; and God is faithful.” We hope that, as St. Paul says, “the witness of Christ has indeed been strong among us.”

And finally, the Gospel passage from St. John. “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love...I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete.” On a day like this, in this beautiful chapel, with loved ones and friends here with us, -- and in the sheer astonishment of being here ourselves – we rejoice that God has loved us as He loved unto the end those who have gone before us. We will go on trying to love him in return.

In the 1930’s and 40’s, to be a Sister of St. Joseph meant, like Joseph, to pray, to study, to work in a very well defined traditional pattern. In 1968, it meant, like Joseph, to leave the pattern, to return to our roots, and then as we expressed it in The Word is Seed, to set forth into the unknown “in faith and joy...trusting that the Spirit who has guided us in the past...will remain always with us.” In 2017, in the words of our Vision statement, it means, like Joseph, “living a life that is simple, prayerful, courageous and compassionate; believing that we create the future” --- however unclear it is now – “as we move with the Spirit.” [Vision Statement 1982] Like Joseph, we continue to dream and pray for a world where, indeed, all is one. [Community Day Letter, May 2017]

God’s call was mysterious all those years ago; it is no less mysterious today. At the now quiet center within is still God’s grace, the mystery of God’s love embracing us from the beginning, holding us steady through the years, and calling us now to rejoice in His love. All thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

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