

Jubilee Homily  
*presented by Sister Joanne St. Hilaire, CSJ, March 17, 2012*

*“Together, we sing of the promises of the Lord,  
 For these many generations we proclaim your faithfulness.”*

Thank you for asking me to reflect with you on this liturgy of celebration—a celebration of the faithfulness of God through these many generations. This is a day of rejoicing for all of us--sisters and Associates. It is a day to rejoice and celebrate our heritage which has shaped our lives and has given meaning to all these years of service.

We celebrate the first women who, in 1650, wanted not only to serve, but to commit themselves to God as vowed religious. We celebrate those courageous women who gave up their lives for their faith in martyrdom, those who courageously left their own land to come to mission territory in North America, and those whose courage led them to leave St. Louis to bring the Good News to such faraway places as Oswego and Cohoes. We celebrate and thank those whose efforts, over the years, created the Albany Province, making it possible for us to have the joy we have today. Finally, we celebrate and thank those commemorating their special anniversaries today—50 years, 60, 70, and 75 years, whose accumulated faithful service totals a staggering number of years. We are grateful to those women whom we remembered today for journeying with us for a time.

We thank the first women in the 1600s for selecting St. Joseph for their patron saint. Because, at that time, there was no official Feast Day for St Joseph on the Liturgical Calendar, the Daughters of Joseph made their vows on the feast of Teresa of Avila who had such great devotion to him. She wrote, “I wish I could persuade everyone to be devoted to this glorious saint, for I have great experience of the blessings which he can obtain from God.” And, indeed, to this day, we have continued to enjoy the many blessings he has sent to us. During those foundational years of our Community, Father Medaille encouraged the sisters to model their lives after St. Joseph’s interior and hidden life.

Like St. Teresa, many of our sisters are devoted to St. Joseph because he not only obtains favors for them, he seems to give them everything they ask, especially property and buildings. Think about all the medals buried on these grounds. Joseph has been very good to us. We know that we can go to Joseph, just as the Israelites went to the former Joseph in Egypt, and he will intercede for us, but even more than that, Joseph within the Communion of Saints is our special companion. Among this “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1), he walks with us on our journey, communicating his unique spirit, a spirit of righteousness for which he is known. The spirit that evolved in him throughout his life as he contemplated models of faithfulness and righteousness from his own tradition.

Two among them are featured in today’s liturgy: Abraham and Joseph, son of Jacob. Abraham, as St. Paul mentions to the Romans, “should inherit the world [not because of the law] but through righteousness that comes from faith,” a faith which is a consciousness steeped in deep trust. Abraham “believed, (according to St. Paul), hoping against hope, that he would

become the father of many nations, according to what was said. That is why the promise was fulfilled in him because of his right relationships with God and his people.”

A second model for our patron, St. Joseph, was Joseph, youngest son of Jacob who was captured and brought into Egypt, where, like Abraham, Joseph hoped against hope, trusting in God, remaining a faithful Israelite all those years in captivity and exile; he never forgot his people, and he forgave his brothers. He reconciled the family and held the nation together. True to his name, which means “God will increase,” Joseph of Egypt witnessed to the Israelites the fidelity, protection, and providence of their God. He manifested the graciousness of God before the whole world that came to him.

Likewise, Joseph of Nazareth revealed the ever constant, faithful God of the Israelites-- to Jesus and Mary and to those in the village. In this way Our Saint Joseph lived up to his name -- “God will increase.” And Joseph decreased, remaining unnoticed, in the background, faithfully carrying out his duties to his family and to God without fanfare. Little attention was paid to this saint until the sixteenth century when, somehow, devotion to him arose out of the collective consciousness of the faithful. The Holy Spirit moved people to recognize Joseph for his propensity to remain quietly attentive to the daily routines of everyday life, always conscious of God who silently spoke to him, even in his dreams.

Joseph was for Jesus a model of God the Father whom Jesus loved and adored, calling him Abba. What Joseph does for us is to image God by his very life, by so losing himself that the focus will be on God whom he revealed. This is what is meant by the “hidden life” of Joseph; he shows us that we must put aside our self-centeredness, our false selves, so that the “light of God can shine through,” so that God will increase.

Throughout the centuries, the spirit of Joseph has walked with us. We experience his protection and providence, his faithfulness, and his loving care. As Elizabeth Johnson says, “When we celebrate [the] memory (of those in the Communion of Saints), the effect is like opening a fragrant flagon of perfume in a small room. [The witness of Joseph] pervades our community with reassurance and deep hope.” As Joseph walks with us, we are enveloped in his faithful attentiveness to God in whom we live and move and have our being. His life was a model of that deep hope which, in the words of Karl Rahner, is the challenge . . . of letting go [our] securities as we learn to live in the darkness of God.” With Joseph, who courageously lived his in insecurity, we can “sing of the promises of the Lord and proclaim God’s faithfulness” as we walk together to repair the world.