

# **CELEBRATION OF GOLDEN JUBILEES OF RELIGIOUS PROFESSION AT LLANTARNAM ABBEY**

**14 JUNE 2014**

When I was in London, I was involved in publicising a marvellous film called "No Greater Love". It was a fly on the wall documentary of the life of the Carmelite nuns in St. Charles Square Notting Hill. There is very little talking in the film. The camera just followed the rhythm and pattern of their daily life of meditation, worship, work and recreation. There were some interviews. My favourite was of the Mother Prioress who had been a Carmelite for fifty years. "When I entered" she said, "I had a nice experience of prayer which is very common. That soon goes, and you are left in the darkness thinking you are talking to yourself". "How long did that last?" said the interviewer. "About eighteen years" said Mother Prioress!

Many of us would say "Well, that's the contemplative life for you". But those who committed themselves to the active apostolate in the religious sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy fifty years ago will know that they, too, must have a contemplative heart. They will have taken to heart the words of St. Francis de Sales: "Never be in a hurry; do everything quietly. Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset". Working in schools and hospitals and parishes and retreats and administration, our jubilarians will know that perhaps increasingly "our whole world seems upset". They might even agree with Captain Boyce in Juno and the Paycock when he says "The whole world's in a terrible state of chassis". They will know that they are called to be "the still point in a turning world" (T.S.Eliot). The cross of their religious profession will remind them that "the cross stands still whilst the world turns".

The reason the cross stands still is that it the definitive sign of the healing love of God plunged into the heart of a broken world and broken lives. So many messages are conveyed to us through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, not least his arms outstretched, the link between heaven and earth, the sign of God's all embracing love. The religious is one who personifies that unconditional love because she has experienced glimpses of it in her own life and has responded to it in the only way she can. By loving as she has been loved. Whether in teaching, or caring for the sick, or in administration or in spiritual direction, she tries to hear God speak his word of healing and forgiveness often in the most complex circumstances of human lives. She is the one who listens rather than speaks because "The Lord hears the cry of the poor, Blessed be the Lord".

Listening, of course, goes beyond words, goes deeper than words. We talk about "body language" and know that more can be communicated through the language of tears – whether of joy or sadness- than through words. The words of the prophet Jeremiah are a reminder that words simply fail us when we are engaged in the great undertakings of praying or caring or teaching. "Do not be afraid...say whatever I command you" Even if that command is being rather than doing because your presence is a sign of God's loving presence to those who look to you for any reason whatsoever. All of us who commit ourselves to this life of service and love will be aware of our limitations and our failings. But we take courage from the priestly prayer of Jesus to those whom he has called "You did not choose me. No, I chose you and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit".

The presence of so many friends and relatives of our jubilarians testify to enormous fruitfulness in the variety of service you have offered to God and His people in your lives of religious dedication. All of us will want to share a memory, give thanks for a listening ear, a kind word, a hidden action of love. Put all those memories together and they would be a torrent rather like the outpouring of the gifts of love which Paul describes to the Christians at

Ephesus: "...so that planted in love and built on love, you will have strength to grasp the breadth and length, the height and depth; until knowing the love of God which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God".

Is there anything better we could all pray for as we give thanks to God whose power has worked in our jubilarians over these last fifty years and whose power, working in them, has done infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Amen.