

## **HOMILY FOR THE GOLDEN JUBILEE**

**OF SR. BARBARA HARRIS**

**NAZARETH HOUSE CARDIFF – 14 MAY 2016**

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When I was young I was taught that you should learn to pray with the bible in one hand and the newspaper, or perhaps today the internet, in the other. The point being that one purpose of prayer is to bring together the many different worlds we inhabit in one life, not least the inner landscape of our hopes and aspirations, our joys and our sadnesses, with the outer world of action and appearance and relationships. In engaging in that process of prayerful reflection and meaningful action, we are opening ourselves up to the integrity, the wholeness, the holiness, which lies at the heart of a life of faith. In that we learn that the His-story of God's salvific action becomes my story too, so that the history of salvation is written in the unique book of my life.

A religious has another book, which she metaphorically holds in her hand in this process of listening and discerning God's will and carrying it out. And that book is the Rule of Life, the charism of the Congregation, the witness of the life of holiness of the foundress, Victoire Larmenier. All religious know that the Rule is not the last word in their lives, but the

first word brought to life by the insight, wisdom, witness and example of service, which we are all called to offer. We know that the Bible, the great insights of the saints and spiritual writers, the life of the foundress are not just documents to be read as other books are. These give us lessons for life as a religious. Heard in obedience, these words do not restrict or inhibit freedom. Being “new every morning” the dialogue we have with God in prayer, the reflection on the Rule and charism of the Order, these ‘first words’ are the springboard in a living communication with God and the people we serve. The core values of the Sisters of Nazareth say it all: Love, Justice, Hospitality, Respect, Compassion, Patience. These values brought to life enable the sisters to fulfil the Mission Statement of the Congregation”... to share the love of God through our ministries of care and education and openness to the needs of the time”

The other great symbol of the religious life is, of course, the cross we wear. The cross lies at the crossroads of human history and the life and death of each one of us. Where is God in the midst of human need and suffering? “Here”, says Jesus with arms outstretched on the cross. I always think of the motto of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Carthusian martyrs of Charterhouse when I put on a cross or see a religious wearing the cross. “Stat crux dum volvitur orbis”. The cross stands still while the world turns. There is no escaping the cross, no

avoidance of it. We have to grow into and through the cross, thereby learning the meaning of the cross in each circumstance of life. “Only then” said Cardinal Hume “will the cross yield up its meaning”. The Sisters of Nazareth have a particular privilege in their service of the young and old in exploring and educating and witnessing to the place of the cross in every person’s life – including their own. We have a perfect example of that openness to people young and old in the partnership, which is taking place here, at Nazareth House in Cardiff.

The third great pillar of religious life is community and the witness of charity which lies at the heart of “bearing one another’s burdens” as we read in the Paul’s letter to the Galatians (Gal 6:2)

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” says Jesus (Matt 18:20). Is not a religious community a microcosm of the Body of Christ, expressing the evangelical witness of the early Christians “sharing everything in common” (Acts 2:44-45) as we heard in today’s reading? That sharing is not limited to merely is not limited to just material things.

Let me finish with a few lines from T.S. Eliot’s “Choruses from the Rock” when he writes:

What life have you, if you have not life together?

There is no life that is not community.

And no community not lived in praise of God.

Even the anchorite who meditates alone,

For whom days and nights repeat the praise of God,

Prays for the Church, the Body of Christ Incarnate.

Thank you, Sr Barbara, for "...repeating the praise of God and praying for the Church" in word and in action over these last these last fifty years and in the years to come. This is indeed a Golden Day.