

**Homily for the Diamond Jubilee of
Sisters M. Timothea Jansen & M. Alfrede Mann, FSGM
St. Francis Convent – Alton, Illinois
October 17, 2020**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here for this joyful celebration of the diamond jubilee of Sisters M. Timothea Jansen and M. Alfrede Mann. I spoke of the radical nature of *permanent* commitment and *permanent* love to your six sisters who made their final profession two months ago, but today we celebrate permanence not in the moment of commitment, but in the light of your 60 years of fidelity to your vows.

Today, we celebrate and recall those many decades of your spousal-love for Christ, and you renew that relationship in the presence of all of your sisters, and the rest of us gathered here for this beautiful occasion. I thank you, above all, for that witness, for your commitment, and for the joy and inspiration it offers all of us as we also seek to follow the Lord. Today's Mass though, does not simply remain a *reminder* of that commitment, nor is it simply your chance to renew and re-affirm those vows, for it also invites *all* of us to recommit ourselves to the way that Christ has called us to follow after Him.

The first reading you have chosen to mark this day is from Isaiah, the great Old Testament prophet of *hope*, promising the Israelites the continuing care of the Lord in the midst of all the afflictions and disasters they faced in the Babylonian exile. His words from the Lord, promising blessings to His beloved bride, Israel, remind us today to recognize in our own lives all those concrete moments for which we too can exult in the Lord.

“He has clothed me with garments of salvation” (Isaiah 61:10).

Every day, my dear sisters, you put on your religious habit, and every day the Lord smiles because that is His chosen means to bring His salvation into your life for those sometimes-long hours to come.

“Like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem” (Isaiah 61:10) continues the prophet.

I suppose, dear sisters, that you did not often recognize the gleaming jewels your heavenly Groom saw you adorned with, yet His vision is far greater, and more merciful, than ours, and just like His own wounds and cross, the burdens and temptations you have carried through the years, He knows will one day gleam with the glory of His redemption.

“As the earth brings forth its shoots” (Isaiah 61:11).

Jesus gently reminds us that no matter how rocky the soil of our hearts, or apparently barren the ground of our ministry, His grace, sometimes invisibly, still bears fruit through and in us.

My sisters, you know so well, that it is sometimes hard to see God at work in our lives, yet you stand before all of us today as witnesses that the hope you placed in him 60 years ago, is, and will still be, fulfilled one-hundred fold.

Isaiah speaks of *hope* in God's *providence* in our lives, but St. Paul's words offer us a different facet to this Christian virtue: *hope as endurance*. "Just one thing" must consume us, he writes to the Philippians, "forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14).

Today we celebrate the 60 years that God has continued His good work in your hearts, through your hands, in this community, and marvelously through the many crosses and toils of your consecrated life, but St. Paul certainly faced his own fair-share of work and worry and weariness, but to the Philippians, *while Paul is in prison*, he makes almost no mention of his crosses, but rather keeps his attention entirely fixed on the power of God in

Christ Jesus. He invites the Philippians to do the same, and he exhorts us to do so as well.

My dear sisters, you have been blessed with many years in the Lord's vineyard, but the last hours of the day are the ones when the master finally rewards his faithful workers. You have kept your lamps lit in readiness all this time, but the Bridegroom's coming is still not complete. Let your renewal of vows today be just as joyous as your first taking them 60 years ago, as well as all the opportunities you have had since to recommit to them. Endure in your pursuit of that goal, which is Jesus Himself!

Finally, we turn to Our Lord's words in the Gospel, and I find that they too offer us a reflection on *hope*, but *hope within sacrifice*. Hope, we have seen, entails looking for God's redemption through the thick and thin of life ... that is, *hope placed in God's providence*. It also means every day continuing to strain for union with Christ ... *hope expressed in endurance*. But Jesus reminds us of a third facet of this theological virtue, *hope is a gift and can only be received by the heart that is open*. Jesus tells His apostles that those with worldly riches will not easily enter the Kingdom, and promises that those who have left behind "house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands

for my sake" (Mark 10:29) will receive "one hundred times more now in this present age ... and eternal life in the age to come" (Mark 10:30).

The only way to be filled one-hundred times more without bursting, and in the end to be filled with God Himself, is to be radically empty for the Lord and available to Him. Of course, my dear sisters, the particular vows you have made – poverty, chastity, and obedience – are part of God's salvific plan for your life. However, those vows, without love, are useless. These vows, without self-emptying and self-sacrificial love, cannot bear fruit. Just as toils and crosses alone do not produce hope, only engaging them with the certainty that God is at work therein – hence, *hope as perseverance*.

Just as we have seen that striving, and wishing, and seeking do not on their own express hope, only the yearning that knows that nothing less than God will ever fill you – hence, *hope as endurance*. So also, there is not something magical about those vows on their own, only those sacrifices and commitments engaged with love, that is, having received the supernatural hope they offer *with an open heart*.

Today, of course, it is with hope that you approach this altar to renew your consecration to God. I ask myself, and all of us here, how might we do the same?

At every Mass, the part of the liturgy that bridges us from the Liturgy of the Word into the Liturgy of the Eucharist, is the Prayer of the Faithful. Often, we rather quickly rattle off a set of general prayers for the world, the church, and issues close to our own hearts, but every once in a while, we are reminded to dwell on this part of the Mass.

Today's Mass forces us to pause at this moment – and rejoice in the fidelity given by you to the Lord, and from the Lord to you – but every Mass offers us the chance to renew in our own hearts our own commitment to God.

Do we take this petitionary prayer seriously and surrender the concerns, crosses, sins, and sorrows of our heart to God? Do we place *all our hope* in Him and on His altar at this time, relying on His providence to persevere in our walk of faith? Do we empty our hearts, and open our hearts, before Christ pours Himself out on the altar, ready and willing to receive Him totally?

My dear Sisters M. Timothea Jansen and M. Alfrede Mann, *thank you* for your witness today of your hope in the Lord. I ask for your continued prayers that we may all see this, and every Mass, as a chance to place our hope in Him as well.

With our theme of *hope* at this Mass, I think it is fitting that I close with the hymn, "Lord of All Hopefulness," a traditional Irish melody with lyrics by Jan Struther, and which I offer now as a prayer expressing our heartfelt hopes for you:

*Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever child-like, no cares can destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.*

*Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labors, and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.*

*Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.*

*Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.*

May God give us this grace. Amen.