

First Profession of Sister Elizabeth McGill, IHM

September 26, 2021

What a joy it is to be together this day to celebrate the First Profession of Sister Elizabeth Ann McGill, IHM. As I was preparing for this day and praying with the readings Liz selected for today's liturgy, the gift that the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary are to the world became so evident. That gift is articulated in a few well- chosen words. The sisters say:

We joyfully participate in the redeeming love of Jesus which impels us to proclaim the Good News of God's unconditional love for all.

In every age, each sister has done this through a variety of ministries – but mostly by being faithful to who she is called to be by grace. This is reflected in the works that they do, from exquisite service in the fields of education, healthcare, social service, spirituality, and the arts to helping to form the current President of the United States. Now, really, few communities can boast that claim.

What we celebrate today, though, gives us a peek into WHY they do what they do and HOW they do it. It is all about WHO they love.

Commitment demands love – whether you love a spouse or a family or a profession or a community of people. It is what you are willing to risk for love that makes the difference in your life. As today's theme states, these women are risking everything for God's dream. The Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary profess that God and the People of God are at the Center of their lives. So what does incarnating the redeeming love of God look like? In some ways, it takes on the persona of every IHM sister in this community – and collectively, it reflects the person of Jesus, the Christ and his love poured out for all of creation.

To celebrate this event, Liz has chosen several beautiful Scripture readings which we just heard proclaimed. I would like to focus on the Gospel and draw on the wisdom in the other two readings to develop the Gospel message.

In today's Gospel, we see Jesus at dinner with friends and also with a group who were not too sure about this Jesus of Nazareth who had a unique interpretation of the Jewish law and seemed to be gathering a following. Suddenly, a woman enters the room, uninvited, and clearly with a purpose. Risking the shock and disapproval of those present, she ignores the host and everyone else and walks straight to Jesus. She takes out an alabaster jar filled with fragrant oil, breaks it open, and generously

pours the ointment on the head of Jesus, anointing him – a gesture reserved for Kings. And Jesus allows her this act of anointing and, in fact is comforted by this demonstration of great love as he takes her side and publicly rebukes those in the room for their judgments of her. Some say: “Why this waste? This ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor.” There is an understanding between this woman and Jesus, however. They have met before. She knows something about Jesus that no one else in that room seems to understand. Jesus picks it up as he continues: “Why are you upsetting her? What she has done for me is a good work. ... She has done what she could. She has anointed my body before-hand for my burial.” This woman knew Jesus was in trouble and was concerned about him. She comforted the Son of God in a moment of need.

Perhaps some people see what Liz is doing with her life as a waste. She could have excelled in a very successful professional career; she could be a wife, a mother. She has the talent and ability to inspire others and lead a very comfortable life. Why this waste? The story we heard in the Gospel is two thousand years old and at the same time, it is very current. Liz’s choice is all about an encounter with God. It is all about falling in love with God and with God’s people. It is all about falling in love with the mission of this congregation – to make visible the redeeming love of Christ in the world today.

In a recent conversation with Liz, she was telling me about an experience she had that surprised her. She said that she was helping out in one of the sisters’ ministries and became aware that often someone would sit down in the chair beside her, and after a few moments of conversation, the person suddenly began to tell Liz important things about his or her own life’s story. At first taken aback with this opening up to her, she soon realized that she stands on the shoulders of hundreds of IHM sisters who have gone before her and have built decades of trust so that simply because she has the word “sister” in front of her name, people feel safe to open up to her and tell her things that are close to their hearts. The reading from Wisdom in today’s liturgy supports this experience.

Wisdom is bright, and does not grow dim. By those who love her, she is readily seen. This gift of wisdom IS the gift of the Spirit of God, the spark of the Divine that lies within the heart of every one of us - and in a special way, for Liz, that spark of the Divine abides within her communion with her sisters.

Liz is choosing to live a life style where this gift guides everything she does, a way of life where, rooted and grounded in love, she will be able to grasp the breadth, the

length, the height and depth of Christ's love and let herself be motivated by this great love, so that she may be filled with the utter fullness of God and pour out all she has been generously given for the good of others.

John O'Donohue, Irish priest, poet, writer says:

One of the wisdoms of living a full life is to try and sense what it is you were sent here for and to try and let the hindrances that block you from that fall away so that you can claim completely the life that was so generously offered to you. . . . There are limitless possibilities within each one of us and, if we give ourselves any chance at all, it is unknown what we are capable of. So on this special day, let us look again at the lives we have been so generously given and let us let fall away the useless baggage that we carry – old pains, old habits, old ways of seeing and feeling, old ways of doing things, and let us have the courage to begin again. Life is very short, and we are no sooner here than it is time to depart again, and we should use to the full the time that we still have.

In a few moments, we will witness Sister Liz McGill profess the way she is called to use the great love she possesses to live the Redeeming Love of God in the world.

In this sacred moment, may we all recommit our capacity for love that it may be poured out for healing in our blessed and wounded world.