

Talk for Sisters' Jubilee – January 31, 2015

When the Sisters asked me to give this talk, it came unexpectedly so I asked Sr. Mary Ann “What am I supposed to talk about?” She said “Talk about what you know best.” Well, Madonna House is what I know best. Now, I’ve been a member of Madonna House Lay Apostolate for 60 years, and I lived with our Russian foundress, Baroness Catherine De Hueck Doherty, for 30 years.

In the first days of Madonna House most of us who joined had been taught by Sisters. We had absorbed their love of God, their zeal, their fire, the hospitality of their hearts. So we were ready to absorb the radical teachings of Catherine’s Mandate which was given to her by God.

This is the first line of the Mandate: “Arise, go, sell all you possess. Give it directly, personally to the Poor. Take up my cross, their cross, and follow Me, going to the poor, being poor, being one with them, one with Me.”

“Arise and go”, many times she said that to me. “Arise and go”, first to establish Madonna House in Arizona, Texas, Bangladesh, Israel and France. While I was in France, she again said “Arise, go,” this time to Raleigh. I said to myself “Raleigh, where is it even, and why Raleigh?”

Well, as it turns out, Bishop Waters had asked Catherine to come to Raleigh, as he knew about her apostolate in Harlem. Catherine, or B as we called her, had agreed to send a team but didn’t during Bishop Waters’ time. Instead she sent a team to Washington DC. The bishop there persuaded her that the seat of the Government is the poorest and needs the most prayer.

So later when Bishop Gossman read the files, he visited B and reminded her of her promise to Bishop Waters. Bishop Gossman wanted a community to pray for his diocese and his priests. Because of her background, Catherine had always loved priests. She had witnessed one of the last priests shot at the altar during he Communist takeover.

Russia had become a desert—no priests, no liturgy, no Eucharist. She foresaw that this could happen in America, so praying for priests became part of our Mandate, one of our spiritual treasures.

She also brought the inspiration of Poustinia (Russian word for desert) where God and man encounter one another through the Bible, fasting and silence, either in a special room set aside, or in the poustinia of your heart. Hence she answered Bishop Gossman's invitation to pray for the diocese and priests with a poustinia and prayer-listening house team.

Madonna House is the oldest Ecclesial Community in North America: an apostolate of laymen, women and priests, all with promises of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Our promise of poverty has a special charism: we are to be beggars, Catherine insisted so that we can be bridges between the halves and have-nots, not to become self-reliant to allow others to be generous, and to be good stewards of what people give us.

WE ARE ANOTHER VISION OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND ANOTHER WAY OF LIVING THE GOSPEL. Not a better way, another way. In B's words "we are a new breed of contemplatives who must learn repose and rest on the breast of God, listening to the perfect music of his heartbeats while we go about His business and that of His Father in the marketplace."

Pope Pius XII laid the foundation for these lay communities when he wrote "Provida Mater Ecclesia." In 1951 the first Lay Congress was held in Rome. In a private audience, Pope Pius XII asked b to have her loosely-knit followers and volunteers take promises of poverty, chastity and obedience, and to take special care of families, as they were quickly deteriorating.

Catherine always felt called to live among the poor and to restore all people and institutions to Christ. She knew the basis for all this was prayer which would have to spill over into the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

For instance, in Canada we have houses that feed and clothe those in need. In the Yukon we live among the First Nation people. In Arizona we live among the Latinos. In Siberia we live with people who have witnessed and lived through the cruelest gulag in Russia. In Raleigh Bishop Gossman wanted us to be a presence of Gospel. For us that meant being a prayer-listening house and an open house.

The chit-chat apostolate, centered around the dining room table, opens our life to everyone. We try to listen with a quiet, prayerful heart, and strangers become friends, wounds are healed, and hearts are strengthened.

B gave us a simple formula for how to become holy while living in this broken down, discordant, out of pitch world. The formula is really a distillation of East and West spirituality.

- Do God's will by living the Gospel without compromise.
- Do everything with love.
- Do the duty of the moment.
- Live a life of simplicity according to your state.

Of course, this will require that sometimes we hang on the other side of the Cross, but our Lord is always there, holding us up.

When all is said and done, **WHAT WE DO MATTERS BUT NOT MUCH. WHO WE ARE IS WHAT COUNTS.** So when we are too old or too sick or for whatever reason we can no longer live the Gospel in the way we used to, we really have to believe in the spiritual truth of **THE USEFULNESS OF USELESSNESS.** No one was more useless than Our Lord on the Cross. He didn't do anything but hang there and suffer...and saved the world.

I know I'm talking to the choir, FACTUALLY, as we all know, every Christian is called to participate in Christ's salvation of the world, to be a light to our neighbors' feet, to go into the hearts of men without fear. In other words we are all called to be holy and to love, no matter what vocation we have: married life, single life in the world, witnesses in corporate America or in the market place.

WHEREVER . Many people are already living this but haven't given it a name. :
Gospel living.

So, together, lay ,those called to be consecrated, all the baptized, we are all
building a civilization of love by our very lives.