



RELIGIOUS OF THE ASSUMPTION

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF SISTER MARIE ASTERIE R.A.

5th May 2019, Our Lady of Victories, High Street Kensington, London

Homily of Fr Robin Gibbons

As we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Sister Asterie as a Religious of the Assumption, I first of all want to ask each of you this question: What is a vocation? Instinctively those of us of a certain age, brought up in a Catholic setting reach for images of priest and religious sister and brother and only after that think of marriage and the single ones, but I feel that by being so narrow in our definition we get the meaning muddled.

No for me vocation isn't a way of life, it's a continual relationship to the call of God in the situation we find ourselves. It's there in these words of St Marie Eugenie: *"I do not believe that this earth is a land of exile. I consider it a place of glory for God. • I believe that each of us has a mission on earth. It is simply a question of seeking how God can use us to make his Gospel known and lived. (her Credo).* I pick up three words of hers to explore with you what we celebrate today, three words I can easily associate with Sr Asterie!: glory, mission, seeking!

So firstly glory, what does that little word conjure up? Maybe it's my own instinct, but I am going straight to a prayer at the end of the Great Thanksgiving, the Eucharistic Prayer, which today is sung in French, *"Par Lui et en Lui et avec Lui, à toi, Dieu le Père tout-puissant, dans l'unité du Saint-Esprit, tout honneur et toute gloire, pour les siècles des siècles. Amen"* *"By him, with him and in him, to you, God the Father almighty, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory be yours, for ever and ever, Amen"*. This my friends, is perhaps the most solemn message in our Eucharistic Liturgy, but often passed by.

Here we sing 'Amen' to praise God's glory and perfection found in Jesus. So that's one meaning for glory, praise and honour, but it doesn't fully capture a deeper meaning hinted at those words, "through, with, and in HIM", or as in a phrase from Matthew 5 which tells us that our glory is that lamp actively lit and shining: *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"*(Mt 5:16). Isn't that part of the living out of God's glory, being touched by that light and presence of Christ so that we become His glory.

But there is a little more, the Transfiguration, the Miracle at Cana the Theophany in the Jordan, the Epiphany and the Resurrection talk about a presence, something real and tangible, though difficult to catch fully, John says it: *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth"*.(Jn 1:14) So vocation, to become people of glory, is to just let Christ shine in, through, and with us-it banishes negativity: *"It pains me to hear this earth called a land of exile. I consider it a place of glory for God"*. (ME Credo)

However we cannot shine by ourselves, we have to connect, link, be part of that great company of witnesses called the family of God to shine forth in our world, and so called by Christ, we like the disciples are called to mission: here is John again," *(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")*(Jn 1:15)

Can you see where we are going: *"I believe that each of us has a mission on earth. It is simply a question of seeking how God can use us to make his Gospel known and lived".(her Credo)* So Marie Eugenie gives us again her perception that each one of us has a ministry and mission precisely because through Baptism , Confirmation and the Eucharist we become the disciples of the Lord today, all of us have a mission, all! But we are touching on thanksgiving for one sister's experience of that call in many ways, not just one, from being made in the image of God, to glorify God in her life, then to find a call to ministry and mission in one particular religious family, all that is wonderful and great, but it is also a celebration of surprises and joyful expectation, we celebrate with Sr Asterie -partly to remind ourselves that a vocation is firstly to be ourselves in Christ, then to discover that route and way where we first hear the daily call of God, and so d go on in mission, looking out , reaching out, praying out.

Lastly, seeking! Marie Eugenie stated that her aim and vocation was literally:

"To extend throughout my whole life the Kingdom of Jesus Christ... ". This can only be done if we truly search and seek each and everyday, for the signs of the Kingdom, in good times and in bad, in dark and light, in the open and in those secret places of our hearts, but it is done in a two-fold way as Marie Eugenie again reminds us :for we *"work for the coming of the Kingdom of God in ourselves and in others"*. That also means we must know how to search and then to discern, it places a loving burden on our vocation, we pray as Augustine prayed: *"Do not abandon what You have begun in me, but go on to perfect all that remains unfinished."* (Confessions)

What about poor Sister Asterie who has had to listen to these thoughts, who is wiser than I am in the road of the Lord? Only this, like Sir Christopher Wren, her monument, the fruits of all her calling to the way of life in the Assumption are here, there, and everywhere, seen wherever she has been in this fruitful life, and so on a Jubilee, we take time to rejoice for the Lord's grace and favour in her life and for others! A jubilee is a time of redemption, when the Lord glorifies us in our rejoicing. So thank you Sister Asterie, may your sisters and brothers, your many friends and neighbours from across the world rejoice on this shore at your special moment, for in celebrating your vocation we also strengthen our own, and lastly we ask the prayers of the `Mother of God for the next stage of your calling.

She our sister stands with us, I end with words of Paul Claudel: *"What, then, of the Blessed Virgin, who does not need to learn the Bible since she herself is a living Bible? She is the support of the Word, the stem of that sun which illuminates the world with the radiance of words that do not pass away. She stands singing the Magnificat and telling God of the wondrous work he chose her to perform. She is the voice of the whole universe, which encircles her like a crown and which she eases of that great burden of glorification and thanksgiving with which it swells."* (j'aime 117).

*Sainte Marie,
Mère de Dieu,
priez pour nous,
pauvres pécheurs maintenant
et à l'heure de notre mort.
Amen*