

Jubilee Reflection

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Reflections for Jubilee

Our Jubilarians have chosen for this day the very fitting theme “Rejoice in Abundance.” I asked myself, when I learned of their focus, and I ask you, “What comes to mind when you think of abundance?” I had a delightful experience of it Friday evening when two young girls I had never met hopped out of the family car and handed me a loaf of zucchini bread, saying, “We had so many zucchini, we decided to make bread and give it to everyone we saw!” With that sharing of their abundance, they were back in the car and on their way to another home.

As with this family, in both the story of Elisha and that of Jesus, the central theme is not only that of receiving abundantly, but of participating in abundance. Elisha receives the generous offering of 20 barley loaves, and insists that it be given to the people to eat. His servant hesitates, because he is sure there will not be enough. Similarly, in the gospel, there is resistance to Jesus’ suggestion that he try to feed the crowd gathered around him. Philip remarks that the cost would be too great. Andrew, who spots a boy with 5 barley loaves and 2 fish, quickly backpedals with his own question, “What good are these for so many?” How many times in life do we not do the same, when we are called to participate in abundance? A need or a new type of ministry is put before us, and we think to ourselves, “I can’t do that. I don’t have enough. I don’t have enough talent. I don’t have enough experience, or creativity or education. I don’t have enough wisdom.” But Elisha and Jesus both trust that the abundance is in the Giver of gifts, and all they need to do is step out in trust. As we know, both Biblical stories end in abundance – baskets of leftovers!

In these past few days, I have had the delightful gift of speaking with our Jubilarians about their experiences of abundance – moments and seasons in life in which they were amazed at how grace was able to work in them and through them in ways they could not have anticipated. They shared about the surprising ways their lives have unfolded — being called to become a principal, a hospital chaplain, a parish minister, or to assume prison ministry. Several of them said that when they first became teachers, they thought they would spend all their active years in a classroom. But over time, they took the gifts and abundance gleaned from teaching and found themselves using those same gifts in response to new needs. They moved into youth ministry or counseling, or Community leadership. They went to the orphanage in Vincennes, to reservations in Montana, parishes in OK, and to missions in Papua New Guinea, each time amazed at how abundantly grace flowed, and how they were changed in the process.

A particular type of abundance some of our Jubilarians described was a widening of vision or understanding. One person commented that working with those who lived in poverty deepened her compassion. Another shared that time spent with Native Americans gifted her with a new, more spacious understanding of time. One Sister spoke of happy years of ministry at a *nursing home*, where she was abundantly blessed by the stories and wisdom of the elderly people who lived there. Some Jubilarians recalled the delight of gifts that awakened in them over time that they still enjoy using – the gifts of music, of prayer, of encouraging others. And some named yet another type of abundance – graces and gifts and strengths gleaned from the most painful and challenging moments of life – eventually gifting them with deepened empathy and a listening ear for others.

As I pondered their stories and the surprising ways in which life turns us toward new realities, I recalled an image of abundance I happened upon last summer in Ireland. While hiking one day, I took a mountain path that would wind gradually down a hillside. At the top I came upon a beautiful waterfall. I could see from above that it dropped down into a lovely pool below. But as I hiked down to the pool, I discovered that this pool then spilled out into yet another waterfall. Eventually I realized that there was a whole series of pools and falls. Such a potent image of a life of abundance! We receive from the Source a wealth of grace, gifts, and opportunities. If we choose to participate, those graces spill out in generous sharing. And there is this lovely pool of new experiences and blessing, which one day spills out into another opportunity to risk letting go into abundance. Nature itself was mirroring the words of Jesus: “I have come that [you] may have life and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

As we celebrate Jubilee today, that is our prayer for you. We thank each of you, our Jubilarians, for the multiple times in life when you have let go into the flow of abundance; when you have moved beyond the initial hesitations and fears at the point of risk and change, and discovered new life and possibility within it. We thank you for your generosity; your courage and your willingness to trust grace again and again after times of confusion, rejection or pain. We join you in your gratitude for abundance, and we share in your rejoicing. May you continue to open yourselves to the grace of the moment and the joy of God’s great work continuing to flow through you.