

Final Profession Vigil Reflection of Sister Sarah Kohles, OSF

Reflection by Sr. Nancy Miller, OSF July 8, 2011

Let us rejoice that “You are the God of my heart forever and there is my treasure” and let the people say, AMEN. Again, “You are the God of my heart forever and there is my treasure and let the people say: AMEN.

Wow- what a great evening to gather to proclaim the fidelity and goodness of a passionate heartfelt God. A God, who from before the beginning of time, poured out Goodness and love which could not be contained and continues to birth creation and all new life.

We are so grateful to have Sarah’s family with us (as Carol said) and others who have come to celebrate Sarah’s call and response to this “Franciscan Way of Life”, and to the overflowing Goodness of God poured out to us in this time and place.

The first reading is taken from Bonaventure’s, *The Soul’s Journey Into God*, and reflects his own journey as a young Minister General of the Franciscan Order which was in turbulence in the mid-1200’s. At that time, he went to Mount LaVerna, as had Francis, and sought and yearned for God’s guidance and Goodness. There, he experienced the overflowing heartfelt Goodness of God and wrote about how it was embodied in the depths of all living things, in creation, and even imprinted into the very core and heart of nature. One example of this is found in the trunk of this red cedar tree. It has a heart imprinted at its core beautifully expressing that creation intuitively knows that God is at the heart of its center (show the hearts).

Years earlier, Francis of Assisi, in *Chapter 22* of the *Early Rule*- intuitively knew this, for he used the word “heart” 11 x’s and begged,

“that in the holy love of God,” that the brothers and others, “would serve, love, honor and adore God with **a clean heart** and a pure mind in whatever they were best able to do so, for that is what God wanted above all else.”

Clare of Assisi – co-founder of the Franciscan movement - also knew this and used the words heart and love 11 x’s in her 3rd Letter to Agnes. She wrote,

“Place you **heart** in the figure of the divine Substance and, through contemplation transform your entire being *into the image* of the Godhead Itself”.

This turning and placing ourselves into the heart of God to be transformed, we call conversion and this is at the core of those who seek God.

There have been many other faith journeys of people throughout history that have sought the God of their hearts that have turned their hearts to God, often times when their own hearts has grown weak.

One example is in ancient times, there was a woman also named Sarah, who was married to Abraham. In this story from the book of Genesis, Sarah, was a wise, old woman, whose heart had grown faint. She was then told by God that she was pregnant – and of course – she laughed! Wouldn't you?! Well – in the short version, Sarah was pregnant and she did give birth. She and Abraham had many children, and were called by God to leave their homeland and sojourned into a new, unknown land. They prospered and as the story goes, “Is anything to marvelous for God to do?”

In more modern times, in 1875, Mother Xavier Termehr, our foundress, and 28 other Sisters were exiled from their homeland of Germany to the foreign land of the United States and eventually landed in Dubuque, Iowa. Even in the midst of great adversity and challenges, they sought the God of their hearts, they had each other - and trusted that God's Goodness would provide for them, and as Mother Xavier wrote, “that they would put forth their best efforts to provide for God's children,”

There is a contemporary song, entitled, **“Side by Side”** sung by a Christian artist, Rebecca St. James, that expresses this journey of faith, dependency on God and others, and seeking God's heart when our hearts have grown weak, and the refrain goes something like this,

Side by side, by side, by side,

Walking together is the way it should be.

Side by side, by side, by side,

when you're needing somebody, depend upon me.

We'll travel on this journey of life – side by side. (Try it with me)

Now, there are many others who felt similarly. More recently, in the late 1970's over 400 Franciscan Congregations from 36 countries gathered together to describe their common Franciscan "Way or Form of Life", and they called it, The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis and this document was formally adopted in December 1982. This "Form of Life" begins that all are called "to love **God with their whole heart**, with their whole soul and mind, and with their whole strength, and love their neighbor as themselves..." and that "we should pray always **and not lose heart.**" The word heart is found 7 x's in the document – do you hear a theme?

In the year 2000, Sr. Jordan Dahm, a wise, gentle, Dubuque Franciscan Sister, completed a history of the later years our Sisters' life together and entitled it, A Common Heart. Sr. Jordan, as noted the worship aide, reflects that the title of the book, -a common heart - "celebrated our Franciscan call to evangelical life - a call to live the gospel," as following in the footsteps of Jesus "not through a common work or in a common place but with a "**common heart.**" Jordan named it well!!

Once again, this "common heart" is expressed in the song, "Side by Side," please join with me,

Side by side, by side by side,

walking together is the way it should be.

Side by side, by side, by side,

when you're needing somebody, depend upon me.

We'll travel on this journey of life – side by side.

Now, let's shift for a moment for there some important things happening during a similar time in the early 1980's, in another place called Baytown, Texas. There were some other folks in their own journey of faith -Eve and Roger Kohles, whose hearts were filled with love, and they gave birth to Sarah- their first born who was a "special unique, daughter". They provided well for their daughter and brought her up in the ways of the Catholic faith.

This Sarah, a gifted, energetic, young, passionate eldest daughter grew up and graduated from high school and her heart yearned for a greater relationship with her God. So she left the family homeland and sojourned to Briar Cliff College in Sioux City, Iowa, “secretly” knowing that she was checking out “religious life”. She sought the God of her heart’s longing and God’s call in her life and found it witnessed in the life of the Sisters at Briar Cliff and others she met along the way.

She then left her Briar Cliff homeland to sojourn to another foreign land to Dubuque, Iowa and to the “Dubuque Franciscans” and others laughed!!! often asking, “Why would a gifted young woman” join an “old group of women?” - I can say this because I am of them -- **It’s the “common heart!”**

Well –years later – Sister Sarah and our Franciscan Community is laughing and rejoicing together. After all - is anything too marvelous for God to do? We have both found a treasure in the heart of God and in one another.

Just 3 weeks ago 32 of our Sisters celebrated their jubilees in religious life. These faith-filled women have loved God and have experienced countless changes and unknown journeys in their own religious lives – and continue to give witness to a faithful God.

And as with the previous Sarah, with Francis, Clare, Bonaventure, and Mother Xavier and as earlier generations have stepped out in faith trusting the God of their hearts, we are grateful that you Sarah too, join with us into an unknown future participating in the mission of Jesus – furthering the reign of God.

Now – looking ahead for a moment - perhaps, Sarah - in 30 years when you are the President of the Congregation, and it is facing challenging times, you may need to visit Mount La Verna like Francis and Bonaventure. But remember to call upon those who have gone before you and that others from “all walks of life” walk with you seeking the heart of God.

We are filled with hope and trust that with a common heart, united with God’s self-diffusive overflowing fountain of Goodness that we will move into the future together.

We envision great things to unfold as we walk together – side by side - with a common heart united into the heart of God, for we believe, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be.”