

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we see a profound transformation in the zeal and mission of the early companions of Jesus. The disciples, amid hostile attempts to silence them for proclaiming the Gospel, stood at a crucible. They could naturally and understandably capitulate in fear of the authorities or they could stand up for the truth, a truth for which Jesus Christ gave his life and death. His resurrection inexorably transformed them. They now possessed an authority which came from the Lord himself. Once, they had been afraid and cowardly, now they are emboldened not by their own power but that of the Holy Spirit. Through the power of grace, their discernment about which direction to take led them to discover what our Lord already knew about them when calling them to be his disciples: despite trials and weaknesses, they would come to discover what the suffering and passion of Jesus would ultimately yield in his resurrection. They came to understand that the things of the material yield to the divine, the things of God. Within that discovery they were able to leave the Sanhedrin rejoicing; “they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name (of Jesus).”

This theme of surrendering to the divine is expressed again in the second reading from Revelation. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing.” Again, true power doesn’t come from the accumulation of material things or humanly-constructed means of authority but rather surrendering oneself to the will of the Father. Glory derives ultimately from decreasing one’s sense of ego and self and giving all to God, as Jesus the Lamb of God willingly gave of himself for the glory of the One who sent him among us to be the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. It is difficult sometimes to comprehend this dichotomy between worldly and divine power and yet we find examples all around us. I had the grace-filled opportunity to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of entrance into religious life of four remarkable women.

Last Sunday, I celebrated the Jubilarians’ Mass for Sisters of the Presentation Sister Mary Christina Pizzorno, P.B.V.M., Sister Mary Jane Floyd, P.B.V.M.(who worked alongside Larry Purcell at the Catholic Worker House in Redwood City for many years), Sister Merie Louise Sandstrom, P.B.V.M. and Sister Michele O’Connell, P.B.V.M. at the Presentation Motherhouse in San Francisco. These Sisters entered religious life in 1949. Together, these Sisters have ministered a total of over 200 years (!!!) to the people of God. They educated thousands of children and adults; they have worked with migrant workers in the fields of the Central Valley; they have worked in inner city schools from the Haight-Ashbury of San Francisco to East Los Angeles. In selfless ways, they have encouraged and counseled those who had lost their way. These very bright women could have pursued any worldly career path; yet, they surrendered themselves to what God was asking of them and they have changed the world in ways too many to count or quantify. When the Lord asked these Sisters if they loved him, they answered along with Peter: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” They demonstrated that affirmation of love by tending and feeding his sheep.

Let us pray for these heroic women and all the women and men religious who daily answer the call to feed the poor, mend the broken-hearted, tend to the needs of the poor and marginalized. They answer the Lord’s question, “Do you love me” by giving of themselves totally for service in His Kingdom.

Fr. Tom