

**Jubilee Celebration, Sisters of Mercy, Grafton
September 24, 2009**

Reflection by Barbara Bolster RSM (Congregation Leader)

*"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
for the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,
to bind up hearts that are broken;

to proclaim liberty to captives,
freedom to those in prison;
to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord." (Isaiah 61:1-2)*

In this passage Luke introduces us to Jesus' ministry statement. It echoes the Book of Leviticus with its insistence that the Year of Jubilee is a year of liberation "for all the inhabitants of the land". Jesus thus proclaims that henceforth, those who follow Him are to live as Jubilee people. No longer can the 50th year be unique in its emphasis on justice and compassion; now the whole of life is to be devoted to carrying out the jubilee mandate. For the followers of Jesus, their entire ministry is about proclaiming the year of favour from the Lord.

As we gather to celebrate Clare's Golden Jubilee, we are challenged to reflect on how we go about the work of bringing good news to the poor, binding up hearts that are broken, proclaiming freedom to those bound by the restrictive and sometimes dehumanising conditions of life in today's world. Just as the jubilee prescribed in Leviticus was meant to bring relief, new hope, and a new start, particularly for the poorest and the least well adapted in society, so we are called to offer something new and renewing in our world.

Catherine McAuley understood this. Her simple assertion that "Mercy is the principal path marked out by Jesus Christ for those who follow Him" captures the essence of Jesus' proclamation in Luke's Gospel. To live Mercy is to bring the spirit of jubilee to all we meet.

Those, who like Clare, reach the jubilee milestone, have been on a journey that takes them into the heart of Jesus and into the compassion of God. Compassion asks us to enter into the experience of another. God did that in Jesus, but Jesus, who spoke of freeing prisoners, learned through experience what being prisoner meant. In becoming the manifestation of God's compassion, Jesus entered into the Paschal Mystery of dying and rising.

Jubilee is a shout of joy but we remember it is very much part of a cycle of dying and rising. When Jesus announced a year of favour (or jubilee), he committed himself to entering fully into the cycle of life, of knowing the joys and the sorrows, the "bitter in the cup" that Catherine reminds us is part of our lives.

Today is a time for us to celebrate with Clare; we remember the commitment she made 50 years ago and are reminded that we, too, have chosen to be jubilee people all the days of our lives. Freedom and forgiveness are to be our gifts to those in need. If we have taken Jesus' ministry statement as our own, then we, too, can celebrate today.

As Sisters of Mercy we have a particular call to live in the spirit of Jubilee. We congratulate Clare on her 50 years and pray that each of us might grow in love of Jesus whose challenge still sounds through the ages. With her we celebrate the life she has lived and give thanks to God for what her life as a Sister of Mercy has contributed to God's mission. We rejoice with Clare and pray that her Jubilee might give her the rest and new hope that were intrinsic to the Jubilee proclaimed in Leviticus. A very Happy Jubilee to you, Clare!