

Give thanks to the Lord for He is good



Our dear friends,

As the year draws once more to its close we look back with gratitude. On two joyful Saturdays we celebrated our 25th anniversary. In the first we had a formal Thanksgiving Service with the Eucharist. As this was held in our chapel we were limited in who could come and we would have liked you all! So we had an Open Day the next Saturday as many of you know because you came.

We held our first celebration in warm sunshine despite the late date in the year. It was as if the heavenly Father was smiling upon us. The following Saturday the psalmist describes very well, “Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.”¹ The rain never stopped! But it was still a wonderful day. Every hour some of the sisters and friends gathered in the chapel to give thanks to God, in the dining room there were non-stop refreshments and our guests gathered around old photographs in the lounge. We could not have managed either celebration without the help of friends and we send our special thanks to them.

Now we share with you our sevenfold thanksgiving around which we wove our celebration. For those of you who were unable to join us, perhaps this will enable you to share our heartfelt gratitude to the Three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit for our twenty five years.

We began at the beginning, which seems long ago now, as much has happened in the intervening years but in other ways it is as clear in our minds as yesterday!

*We praise and give thanks to you Lord God,
everlasting Father, incarnate Son and life-giving Spirit.
You gave the vision,
nebulous, uncertain, dream-like, scattered thoughts.
Then to our amazement,
slowly, with great care and purpose
you brought into being what you had planned,
touching lives far beyond our imagining.*

And that is how it was. We would have hesitated to use the word “vision” in those days, for years it was more like vague thoughts flitting across the mind, a community of sisters living together and a house of the love of God. Suddenly it sharpened, came into focus. One sister recalls sitting with the church steward of the Methodist Church where she worked describing a large house and a community. His face was a mixture of concern and disbelief. Many of you know the story and this newsletter would not be long enough to recount it again in detail. But suffice it to say that what God purposes he brings about. He did that with us. We were poor by worldly standards, had no influential friends and did not seek them but such things matter little to the One we love and serve.

*We praise and give thanks to you Lord God,
Everlasting Father, incarnate Son and life-giving Spirit.
That your word came to us,
“Seek first my kingdom and I will take care of you.”
You are faithful!*

*From small beginnings, sheltered in your love,
you have led us into this beautiful land, sturdy houses
and provided for our every need.*

That sentence from St. Matthew's gospel paraphrased in our prayer stanza was pivotal for us. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."² Jesus had been speaking about food and clothing, the basics of life. He says that our heavenly Father will take care of us. There is also that little word, "righteousness", our side of the agreement or covenant so to speak. We interpreted that as trusting wholeheartedly in the Father making our needs known only to him in prayer. We knew this meant acting with integrity and honesty. For instance we have never gone into debt. Every area of our life was to be lived in obedience to the Holy Spirit and his leadings. Let us hasten to say that there were many times that we failed in this but the Lord can see us through "honest" failure.

Before we embarked on this way we had a word given to us, it was "learn to love the days of small beginnings". This is taken from the book of Zechariah when the second temple was being built. We began in a small hidden way, without any fanfare or trumpets! Jesus lived a hidden life and that is also our desire, a hidden life of love. The heavenly Father led us, covering us with his love. Sometimes we stand in the garden and look at our sturdy houses and our hearts overflow with thankfulness. "The Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes".³

*We praise and give thanks to you Lord God,
Everlasting Father, incarnate Son and life-giving Spirit.
You humbled us and chastened us
and led us along pathways of repentance.
You set us free
from the destructive forces of disintegrating relationships
and taught us your way of love and forgiveness.
Pardoned sinners, we rejoice in our salvation.*

As many of you will know who have heard us speak we often share that relationships have been a struggle! Where are they not a struggle if we are honest? The reason is that we are all sinners, we are, you are and so is every man, woman and child on this planet! There is a big "I" at the heart of our being and sooner or later when we are living together as we do all day and every day, the hidden ego bursts into life! Humiliations come and so does repentance. It is the way of the cross, dying to self. It is also, the way to life. We cannot sufficiently thank the Lord that he has saved us from falling apart as a community and that we are here together, thanking him after 25years! Yes, it is often tough but we love one another in Christ. This is his gift.

*We praise and give thanks to you Lord God,
Everlasting Father, incarnate Son and life-giving Spirit.
That you gave us friends
who have cherished us and prayed for us,
sisters from other communities who encouraged and taught us.
You sent guests from the far corners of the world
and helpers from many lands.*

We have not been alone, the Lord has given us wonderful friends and we thank God for each one, for the prayers and the love. They have strengthened us over the years. We never felt that it was God's will to advertise our presence. Yet in amazing ways over the years thousands have found their way here. Many meet with the Lord Jesus and their lives are transformed. Over twenty years ago we met a Methodist minister from Switzerland whose daughter became our first helper. Through the years we have had helpers from many nations.

Not only that but he led us to other communities who were able to teach and encourage us. We can safely say that when we began we hadn't a clue although we thought that we did! Moreover we belonged to a denomination that had had no emphasis on community living, so there was very little help or direction there. This did not hinder our heavenly Father. He watched over us in love not only materially but also

spiritually.

A sister from the Roman Catholic Order, Our Lady of Evron arrived one day at our front door. We ourselves arrived unexpectedly on the doorstep of the English branch of the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary. We did not know the sister who answered the door but she was to become a friend right up to this present day. We also had fleeting contact with an Anglican Franciscan brother. Where would we have been without them? The ways of the Lord are wonderful. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever"⁴

*We praise and give thanks to you Lord God,
Everlasting Father, incarnate Son and life-giving Spirit.
That you have strengthened us
in dark and suffering days, guided us on untrodden paths
and kept our feet from slipping.
When our hearts failed and anxiety overwhelmed us
you were there, our beloved God, wise and protecting,
you levelled mountains before us and built highways in the
deserts.*

Like you, we too, have had dark and suffering days. There have been problems where humanly speaking we could see no way through. Anxiety overwhelmed us. We have moved in blind faith or as Fenelon describes it "naked faith" where we are stripped of every aid and cling to God alone. At one point when we were building Bethany we had hardly enough for a loaf of bread! We have met misunderstanding and outright criticism. Unexpected events have shocked us to the core. Our weakness and need moved the compassionate heart of our heavenly Father. "His grace is sufficient."⁵ We have grown through the very things that threatened to overwhelm us. "Whoever is wise let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord."⁶

*We praise and give thanks to you Lord God,
Everlasting Father, incarnate Son and life-giving Spirit.
That you called us to simplicity.
We delight in all lovely things, the starry heavens,
rose-tinted sunsets, brooding hills, the cry of the owl,
the first snowdrop, bluebell carpet and plump fruits in
autumn.
You gave us laughter and singing, festivals and joy
and pools of silence.*

We are committed to simplicity of life. Those of us who have been sisters longest have found that this wraps us around like a garment. The world no longer attracts. The pursuit of pleasure becomes meaningless. Instead we find happiness in the small delights of life. When we stand in our garden and see the estuary mirroring the setting sun with the sharp edged hills silhouetted against an orange sky, then we are rich indeed. We watch the morning mist over the sea and listen to the lonely cry of the seabirds. We sing together and make music and laugh as we share the small happenings of the day. Spaces are made for "pools of silence", trysting places with our Beloved. We are blessed beyond measure. "Great is his love towards us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever."⁷

Our Thanksgiving concludes,

*May the angels and all the hosts of heaven,
those who have loved us and whom we have loved dearly
who now dwell with you in your light-filled heaven,
join with us in our praise and thanksgiving
to our Lord God,*

everlasting Father, incarnate Son and life-giving Spirit.

We were conscious as we prepared for our Thanksgiving Days of those who had shared our pilgrimage and to whom we owed much but who now dwell in God's "light-filled" heaven. They felt very close, all around us. The years fell away and so did the barrier between earth and heaven. The church calls it the "communion of the saints".

May the joy of the Lord be with you this Advent, this blessed season of hope.

Sisters of Jesus Way.

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1. Psalm 148 v.4
 2. Matt 6 v.33
 3. Psalm 118 v.23
 4. Psalm 107 v.1
 5. 2 Cor.12 v.9
 6. Psalm 107 v.43
 7. Psalm 117 v.2