

Homily for Perpetual Profession of Lynne Moledenbauer  
Dec. 6, 2020  
Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM

Let me begin by expressing in the name of all of us here, especially your IHM Sisters, our congratulations to you, Lynne, on this joyful occasion of your perpetual profession as a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. You are, as you have been for all your years among us in community, and as you will be into the indefinite future, a very special gift to us, as well as to the Church and to our world. And today we celebrate most especially your gift of yourself, in perpetuity, to God in Jesus.

We have two texts this morning on this Second Sunday of Advent — deriving from two events — to ground and stimulate our reflection. The first text, from Scripture, is actually three passages, one from the First Testament prophet, Isaiah, predicting the historical coming of the saving God in the person of the Messiah, whom Christians recognize in Jesus; one from Peter urging the first Christians to take seriously the call to be prepared for the second coming of Jesus at the end of time; and the third, the opening of Mark's Gospel, in which we are told that the mystery predicted in Isaiah has been accomplished in our midst. The Messiah has, indeed, come in the person of Jesus.

And shortly we will hear the second text: Lynne's response to the Good News of *God's* definitive coming to us in Jesus with *her* definitive profession of lifelong commitment to Jesus as a religious in our congregation.

When I began some months ago to ruminate on these two texts: the Advent Gospel and the Profession formula, I wondered which to emphasize today. And slowly it dawned on me that they have a very profound connection to each other. Indeed, in a sense, they are one reflection, offering a single insight, by each revealing the inner meaning of the other. Both texts, the tripartite one from Scripture concerning the Incarnation of the Word of God in human history, and the one Lynne is enacting in our midst this morning by her perpetual commitment, are about, indeed are an acted out meditation on, the reality and gravity of the mystery of TIME. In the Incarnation, TIME was taken up into God's own inner experience in the human Jesus; and in Lynne's perpetual profession "for the rest of my life," the ETERNITY of God is brought into human experience in the person of Lynne.

Eternity is not just a very long time but something qualitatively different from time. In Jesus, something — finitude or limitation — quintessentially experienced as time, entered God's inner life for the first time. And in Jesus, something — the eternal life of God — entered human life as an experience for the first time. Christmas, the Nativity of God as a human being, the human and temporal birth of God in time, brings together the realities of time and eternity in a deeply mysterious way. And Perpetual Profession brings together the temporal limitation of human life and the human capacity for limitless self-gift to God in a similarly mysterious way. In our deepest meditations and most profound desires we could never have come up with this one. Revelation is precisely our receiving from the freedom of God what we could never have come up with on our own.

The Incarnation, which John the Baptist is heralding in today's Gospel, is the entrance into time, into history, into the human experience of limitation, change, development, and temporality of the eternal Son of God; the making temporal, if you will, of God's eternal love. This divine choice opened God to the possibility and the reality of what we call human experience. And perpetual profession is the symbolic — that is, real — making definitive of a kind of human entrance into eternity. Eternity is not just a very long time, a freezing in place of the *status quo*, an abolition of options. For a creature to say "forever" is to activate the remarkable and extraordinary capacity, itself a gift of God, to freely give what God will not demand nor take, namely, oneself — to give oneself to God entirely, exclusively, without reserve or time limit. In Jesus, the eternal God entered existentially into human time. In profession, the entire time of a human life, enters into God's eternity. It is indeed a particular instantiation of the mysterious exchange that our earliest Christian writers celebrated in their reflections on the Incarnation, which they pondered as a "marvelous exchange," how God became human so that humans might become divine. How the eternal God undertook time so that we might experience eternity.

But it is difficult, I think, for some of us really to take the Incarnation seriously, that God did not just pay a brief visit to Earth in human disguise, did not just play an exemplary role for a few years and then go back to being divine full time. God really *became* human, for the rest of God's life. In Jesus, God really experienced the frantic terror of an infant whose momentarily unsatisfied hunger is an experience of looming non-existence; the despairing loneliness of a young boy whose frantic parents mistook his soaring devotion to God for inconsiderateness at best, if not a bout of adolescent rebellion; the profound betrayal of an heroic leader whose closest companions in their shared project disappeared when the going got tough; the anguish of the prophet whose whole life's work was repudiated and condemned by the highest authorities of the religious tradition that he had lived heroically and served without stint; and even of one whose death, at the hands not just of ignorant strangers but at the instigation of the leaders of his own tradition, was not the heroic martyrdom of one who has given his all for their shared cause, but the shameful repudiation, by Temple and Empire alike, reserved for the worthless criminals despised by both.

In Jesus, God experienced personally what it means to be encompassed by time, to be limited in what one can do, bring about, or enable others to understand/or accept. It is an experience we know well. Our whole life, taken in our hands and handed over to the will and work of God in this world, is not, will not, be enough to succeed where Jesus couldn't. And yet, some people are called, and some, like Lynne, say yes, to putting all of the time of their human life into the project of Jesus in this world, to the exclusion of any other life commitment. For most, if not all of them, there are other things they could do with their lives — valuable things, noble things, worthwhile things. But they choose to respond to a mysterious invitation from the depths of God's eternity to freely pour the whole of their human lives, all the time they have been given by God, exclusively into Jesus' project which must continue to the end of time.

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In perpetual profession, in the commitment “for the rest of my life,” we hear the echo, the continuation in a human being of the Incarnation, of the mission of God into time in the person of Jesus, which did not end with his death on the Cross. Christmas is oriented from the outset to Easter. Without the Resurrection, the bodily return of the crucified Jesus to his own for all of time and into eternity, the Incarnation that John the Baptist proclaimed would have fizzled out on the Cross. We would have been left with a noble and ennobling memory but not the reality of eternal life infused into time, the transmutation of time into eternity. And there would be nothing for perpetual profession to witness to, to incarnate, to continue in this world. The living presence of Jesus, the presence of the living Jesus, in the world and in humanity throughout all time, begun in the Incarnation to which John the Baptist bears witness in today’s Gospel and made an integral part of world history forever by the Resurrection, is made real and operative in our midst, today, in the perpetual commitment Lynne ratifies in our presence. The meaning of Religious Life in the Church and in the world is revealed again and again as we celebrate God’s entrance into time in the Incarnation and God’s presence in time through the Resurrection.