

***Founder's Day Liturgy
Coordinating Council Weekend
November 6, 2021***

Jane Herb, IHM

Greetings as we celebrate 176 years since the founding of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on the banks of the River Raisin! The readings for this Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary time are rich as we recall the humble beginnings of our community.

In the first reading from the Book of Kings we hear of a widow who heeds the words of Elijah. Elijah makes a request of this woman and is a bit persistent in that request. The woman is clear with him - she is down to her last handful of flour and a little oil. That doesn't deter Elijah and, like other encounters with him, people come to believe in the Word of God as spoken by Elijah. Trusting in his words, the widow prepared bread for his journey and, from that day forward, both the woman and her son were able to have food every day. God's words, "The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when Yahweh makes it rain on the land."

The Gospel of Mark brings to our attention another widow. After warning the people about the scribes who have seats of honor in the synagogues, at banquets and put in large sums of money into the treasury, we meet a woman of modest means. She puts two small coins, the

equivalent of a penny, into the treasury. Knowing that 64 pennies equal one denarius, a day's wages, this small amount was a great sacrifice for the woman. This widow, like other widows, had no protection and, at times, they were economically threatened by religious leaders. Often these leaders offered to manage the affairs of the widows, becoming richer in the process. Yet this woman gave what she had. This widow trusted that her needs would be met as she sacrificed from her meager resources.

Cardinal Joe Tobin, C.S.s.R, in his homily on July 11, said, "Sometimes grace is most evident in the rearview mirror." Such is true for us today as we glance in the rearview mirror and see the gift of our founders. Theresa Maxis might have been like that first widow – perhaps she saw the last morsal of flour in the container. The Oblate Sisters of Providence lost their spiritual guide, and it was clear that the bishop was not supporting their life and mission. Like that widow, she heard God's voice when Louis Florent Gillet, C.S.s.R. invited her to leave Baltimore and come to Monroe. Perhaps, like the widow, she wondered how she and the other sisters would have food and lodging, and, perhaps, where the future of religious life was for her. Yet, she trusted. Theresa carried the Oblate belief that, "God has provided, does provide and will provide." Trusting in the providence of God, Theresa began her journey.

As I walked through the excellent display in C-unit put together by the Archives staff, I am reminded again and again of that element of trust throughout our history. Listening to Sr. Miriam talk about seeing the fire at the Academy, I can only imagine that she might have felt that we were down to our last morsel of flour in the jar. During this same time as the fire, the congregation had the debt of building Marygrove and re-building the Academy during the depression. Yet, there was trust. That same trust was evident as I listened to Mother Teresa McGivney describe the beginnings of our mission in Puerto Rico.

In the display, our *action for justice* was evident throughout our history. As early as the 1920s, when the congregation organized to ensure that all students did not need to attend public schools. Our voices continued to be heard protesting against the School of the Americas, against Fermi, participating in the march in Selma and today we continue today taking a stand for voter's rights, immigration reform and equality for all our brothers and sisters.

As I walked through the display, I was touched by the untiring commitment of the IHMs in their various ministries that was evident in the display. This is particularly true for our nurses who have served the congregation tirelessly for a number of years in so many ways.

As I viewed the blueprint for the chapel, I found myself pondering what is our blueprint for the future? And, I must admit, it is not clearly defined. We are living into our evolving future as we concern ourselves with the future stewardship of our buildings and grounds into the future. We are becoming a smaller community and the frailty of our women is apparent. Yet, as one sister mentioned our identity is not about buildings but rather the mission. That continues with each one of us and our associates.

One of the gifts of my role as president is that I sign each of the commitment forms. As I read each one, I realize that the mission of the congregation is alive and lived out in each of us. Pondering the question posed this year, “In what ways are you working to bring about racial justice in your life and ministry?” sisters and associates responded with openness and honesty as they committed to making all feel welcome, to educate oneself regarding white privilege and an ongoing commitment to prayer.

The words of the psalmist echo true for us as we strive to live the IHM mission now and into the future, “Yahweh, you keep faith forever; you secure justice for the oppressed; ... you raise up those who were bowed down; you love those who do justice.” What remains key for us is how we live the mission into the future. This is the ground of our being. As I reviewed the display of the beginning of Visitation the call was “to

[experiment] in contemplation and to welcome all seekers.” Today we ground ourselves in contemplation and we are finding ways to reach out to those who are seekers.

We are not down to our last morsel, and we continue to live the IHM mission, giving from all we have in whatever way we can. The lesson from the widows continued with Theresa and we are called to learn from them. Let us build our future with trust and take to heart the words of our Oblate sisters, “God has provided, does provide and will provide.”