

Witnesses of divine love in the world

The history of the Catholic Church in Washington is filled with many inspiring chapters, chief among them the pioneer courage and faith of consecrated women and men.

Catholic explorers, immigrants, settlers, converts, sisters, brothers and priests faced daunting challenges in the early days: few resources, primitive



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transportation, disease, extreme weather, racism and language barriers. I am amazed when reading about the establishment of hospitals, schools, orphanages and monasteries in our area. For the most part, these institutions were the inspiration and work of religious women and men, who responded to God's call to serve the people of Washington, beloved to the Lord no matter their religion, culture or language.

Quite simply, these religious men and women evangelized. They lived the life of Jesus Christ; they taught the truth; they loved; they healed; they cared for the outcast; and most importantly, they prayed. The mission of the church is to witness to Christ, to make him present and known in every possible way — especially through the Eucharist — and to form lives devoted to him.

Witnessing to Christ is possible only when we exhibit humble openness and docility to conversion and the

inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is possible only when at the heart of the Church there abides a profound life of prayer.

Active communities

If we do not listen to Christ, cling to him, and come to know him in our heart of hearts, we will not be the testimony of grace the people of our state need us to be. When I read the stories of our early days and the sacrifice offered by many religious to build the foundation of the church, I am struck by the prayer that formed the foundation.

If prayer is at the heart of every Christian life and at the heart of the Church, then contemplative prayer is the "heart of hearts" of the church. Monasteries of contemplative women and men are communities of those called to give their entire lives to contemplative prayer for their own spiritual well-being and that of the entire church.

Some of those communities are cloistered, such as the Carmelites in Shoreline and the Benedictines on Shaw Island; others, like the Benedictine women and men in Lacey, live in community and often serve the mission of the church outside the monastery. Most religious are members of active communities whose prayer frames and feeds their daily apostolate.

The superior of a monastery

of cloistered nuns in Veracruz, Mexico, once told me something that particularly impressed me. I will repeat it here in Spanish, because she chose her words carefully:

"La vida contemplativa es nuestro modo *d'estar en* la iglesia, *con* la iglesia y *para* la iglesia." "The contemplative life is our way of *being in* the church, *with* the church and *for* the church."

By the way Madre used the verb "estar" (to be, to stay, to abide), she was indicating that the contemplative life is the means God uses to make them who they are *in, with* and *for* the church. It is how they give themselves in sacrifice to him for the good of the church.

Their prayer and apostolates feed and strengthen us all.

Grounded in prayer

By extension, we could say that all men and women in consecrated life have been called by God to a vocation which is their way of being *in* the church, *with* the church and *for* the church. Their ministries span the wide spectrum of the mission Christ has given us, for they have given themselves to Christ for our sakes. Given to him, they are consecrated by him as unique and indispensable witnesses of divine love in the world. Their prayer and apostolates feed and strengthen us all.

One of the great Catholic pioneers of the northwest was Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart, a Sister of Providence. After a 6,000-mile journey from Montreal, she arrived in Fort Vancouver with four other sisters on Dec. 8, 1856.

DO YOU HAVE AN INTENTION FOR ARCHBISHOP SARTAIN'S PRAYER LIST?

You may send it to him at Archbishop Sartain's Prayer List, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.

Under her leadership more than 30 hospitals, schools and homes were opened for the people the Lord loves. She was one of the Northwest's first architects! Her religious consecration defined her; her prayer grounded her and gave her hope in the face of countless obstacles.

As she neared death, she wrote to her superior:

"Please tell our worthy Father Superior that his wish for the union of my soul with Our Lord is being accomplished. Now more than ever I enjoy that total abandonment of my interests into His loving hands ...

"You know that I made my retreat. At the outset, scarcely was I in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament when, without expecting it, I was drawn into one of those heart to heart embraces, and was so submerged that I thought I would melt with love ...

"I must avow, Mother, that ever since my entry into religious life, I have made it a habit to pause before the chapel door whenever I pass it, and beg our Lord to hide me in His Divine Heart, and send a ray of light into mine. He has given me more than a ray; He has given me a flame, and made fruitful my striving for union."

The same flame lit by God in Mother Joseph's heart continues to warm and illumine us through the more than 500 women and men of many religious congregations who reside at the heart of the church in our midst. We are blessed to have them in the archdiocese.