

## Homily on the Solemn Profession of Sister Mary Jordan of the Holy Family, O.P.

Saturday, August 18, 2012

Dominican Monastery of St. Jude, Marbury, Alabama

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We had a party last night, a very nice time with friends and family, delicious food, lovely wine; the only thing missing was the guest of honor. She was not there, nor did anyone want her to be there; and, no one felt she should be there. That's *weird*. And yet everybody was happy: happy with each other, but above all happy with her and for her, even though she was not there.

This I put it to you is a palpable effect of the grace of God working in the body of Christ, that a whole group of people, the guest of honor and all her friends and family could be on the same page. So, why is that? Why are we all so happy that one person is living a hidden life? Perhaps it is that we are grateful to her. She, the cloistered nun, is after all living a life of great sacrifice. If you will, living in "confinement" behind a grille, behind a big white enclosure wall so that she can pray for us, forgoing so many pleasures that are important to us in order to live close to God. So we are grateful and perhaps we feel a little sorry for her. And yet, anyone who has met cloistered Dominican nuns knows that they are among the most carefree, joyful, "unconfined" spirits that there are.

So perhaps that is the clue, perhaps we are envious of Sister Mary Jordan and her Sisters because they are getting away from it all, they are escaping the noise, the technology, the chatter. Sister and her companions are safe within this beautiful rural enclave where they can sit and listen to the music of the crickets and think about God. Isn't that lovely, isn't that enviable: it's like a life-long retreat. And of course, this also misses the mark, because monastic life is challenging, it's hard, it's constant. It demands that those who live it deal with a lot.

Perhaps it is that we are edified by what Sister is doing because it is so ancient. She is wearing ancient garb and persevering in this very old form of life, very medieval; all kinds of saints did it; isn't it *awesome*. But let's face it. There is no amount of loyalty to tradition, even Catholic tradition, that would give anybody the wherewithal to live such a life for a lifetime.

No, I think it is that our happiness today, one we share with Sister, is based on a deeper mystery that includes everything else I've already suggested. And it is this: Sister Mary Jordan and her companions have befriended the solitary nature of the soul. They have befriended the solitary nature of the soul. I put it to you that each of us is, at the deepest level, alone. And that *aloneness* manifests itself to us most immediately as *loneliness*. And this is a surprising and disturbing thing, because it never goes away. Even in intimacies such as marriage and family, close friendship and religious life, we are aware, deeply, that we are not ever completely understood, nor do we understand our companions. And somehow in most cases this loneliness offends. We face the fact that no matter how hard we try, no matter how hard we open ourselves to others, our connection with them is never complete. And this bothers. My own experience is that the majority of sins I hear confessed stem from the fact that people cannot bear their loneliness. They cannot bear their loneliness. And here is where we meet the mystery of the life of the Sisters, because in fact they are not locked away from us nor have they escaped from us, they are in fact ahead of us, because what they have discovered by God's grace is that this *solitude*, this

*aloneness*, inscribed deeply in the soul, is in fact a gift of God. That the Creator of the human person has built that in as part of us, and for a reason. For it is there, in the incompleteness of human life, that He desires to meet us. And so that monastic person who discovers this and accepts it, takes this solitude of the soul and dedicates it, and God consecrates it in Profession so that what is loneliness in human life becomes that solitude which is the foundation of the mystical life and is the promise in this life of heaven.

This is a gift in the middle of the whole Church, to tell us all what is possible for all of us. Today is continued that mystery of solitude with God which we saw in Moses on the mountain, which we saw in David before Goliath, which we saw in the prophets in the desert up to John the Baptist, which we see in the Blessed Virgin before the angel, and which reaches its visible and palpable apogee in Christ on His Cross. In each case we see a human being caught up in a realm that no one else can enter, no one else can fully comprehend, a place that is frightening, but which is also immediate to God, which is as immediate to God as this human existence will permit. And each of these icons of solitude shows us something: that when a human being accepts this, when a human being accepts that inner solitude, that person not only acquires intimacy with God for himself or herself, but that solitude becomes productive for multitudes. As the righteous solitude of the Cross brings forth the Resurrection of Jesus, and the [sending of the] Holy Spirit, and the life of grace for the whole Church.

So it is that the solitude of monastics bears fruit way beyond the enclosure. For the Sister, for the monk, there is inner joy, there is inner striving, there is inner challenge, there is all the tumult of spousal union. But for the rest of us, there is that fruit of prayer which is palpable. And so this monastery, in the country, hidden as well as it can be, is a beacon of prayer for this archdiocese of Mobile, for its clergy and people. It takes a place in the mystical life of the Dominican Order, the Friars, the Nuns, the Sisters and the Laity. And it overflows for the whole world in the life of intercession and the work of compassion and always, with the nuns, in the gift of welcome. We are here because we are delighted that Sister Mary Jordan has received this tradition into herself, and takes it up for herself, for her own salvation, but also for all of us, that we, who are separated from her by the grille—she is hidden by a veil—nevertheless will benefit for the rest of our lives from the generosity of her heart.

But we're also here because the life of the nuns is a promise to us that within our own state of life we also may befriend the solitude of the soul. We may get over our anger and resistance to being lonely, and find intimacy with God, to find that inner productivity which can make us happy and actually *connect* us. The life of the nuns is a promise that the homesickness inscribed into each of us is there to be faced, like the serpent raised in the desert, like the Cross raised on Golgotha. Once befriended, it becomes the source of peace, because in embracing the incompleteness of this life, we are equipped to long for that life which God intends to give. This is it. This life, at which we gaze through the grille, is a promise of our own resurrection and a pledge of heaven. And so on this day, we are grateful, we are challenged, and we are promised by what Sister Mary Jordan does. She does it for all of us, and by her doing it, she, and we, will discover that the promise of heaven is for real. We may all advance in faith, hope, and love, in confidence of the promises of God Who will not fail.