60th Jubilee - Sister Benita Peters and Sister Mary McGehee

Readings
Song of Songs 2:10-14; Psalm 84; Romans 11:33-36; Luke 1:46-55

Sr. Benita… Sr. Mary…

Ten years ago, the two of you chose these particular scripture readings for your 50th Jubilee. Now, at the time of your 60th, you have chosen these readings again. Each reading is filled with abundance - turtle doves, fig trees, flowers, fragrance, God's riches and wisdom, ways of God that are so deep they are unsearchable… And of course the abundance of praise that Mary sings from her heart, and that you all have echoed for over 60 years.

But while the abundance in these readings is compelling, I really want to talk about the abundance that has poured forth from each of you in six decades of fidelity to your monastic call.

Sr. Benita - You poured out abundant love for the children that you served as an educator, a CCD instructor, a librarian. Untold is the impact you had on child after child who came under your tutelage and influence. And how abundant your impact on the Church through the children that you helped prepare to receive the Sacraments of Holy Communion, Confirmation, and Reconciliation.

Abundant, too, has been your ministry here in Cullman. Your loving ways of quietly and faithfully tending to needs within the monastery have born much fruit in our community life. You have cared for the sick in the infirmary. You have served in the sacristy. You have offered hospitality in the Retreat Center. In 1997, Sr. Treva asked you to serve on the Peace and Justice Committee, and for years you served faithfully, and you continue to keep the needs of the world before us and before God.

A special form of abundance that you have offered each of us over the years is your praying of the rosary. I can't even imagine how many rosaries you have prayed for various ones of us over the years. All I know is that when you come up to me and say, "I'm praying a rosary for you today," it is received as gift. It is received as an abundance of care for your sisters. The images in the readings are good images for the fruitfulness of your monastic life - the song of a turtledove, the fragrance of a flower. If abundance could be imaged in an icon, your life monastic fidelity would be a fitting image of abundant fruit.

Sr. Mary - You, too, are an icon of abundance. Your early years as an educator were lived in the light of the sunrise that was the 2nd Vatican Council, a Council that called forth in you an abundant response spiritually, theologically, and communally. The Council was, perhaps, like the voice of a turtledove, the voice of your God calling you to new depths and new ways of being and new curiosities about the ways of the Spirit.

Responding to the Spirit, you reached and sought and grew… And you shared. You have directed peace and justice efforts for the diocese, you have witnessed to peace, you have held signs and held space for the Spirit to move. You have created community. Abundant are the number of communities that have benefited from your response to the song of the turtledove - Greater Birmingham Ministries, Catholic Committee of the South, spiritual directees, yoga students, retreatants, refugees…and of course centering prayer and the untold numbers whom you have taught to seek God through silence and stillness.

Fruitful abundance also describes your life within community, not only committee work and leadership, but especially your work in Initial Formation, guiding the next generation in the ways of Benedict. Again, like Sr. Benita, an icon of abundance.

With such an abundance, your reprise of readings of abundance is so fitting - turtle doves, fig trees, flowers, fragrance, God's riches and wisdom, ways of God that are so deep they are unsearchable… And of course, the abundance of praise that Mary sings from her heart, and that you also sing. We - and others - continue to be enriched by your song.

And Sisters… we who just renewed our monastic profession. We have been led on an extraordinary journey this week through the life of St. Benedict. It was a life in which he continued to grow and deepen throughout his journey. We who walk in his footsteps and look to him for inspiration must make the same commitment to continual growth and conversion of heart, while singing songs of praise to the God of abundance.