

Transfer of Perpetual Vows of Sister Rosemary Casaleno, CSJ: Reflections, October 18, 2009

Sister Laura Bufano, CSJ delivered the following reflections at the Mass Celebrating the Transfer of Vows of Sister Rosemary Casaleno, CSJ, on October 18, 2009. Sister Laura is the CSJ Congregational Director.

**WE ARE CALLED TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER
TO WALK HUMBLLY WITH GOD (sung)**

A poem by Denise Levertov captures the essence of what the process was like for me as I prepared this reflection:

A Gift

Just when you seem to yourself
nothing but a flimsy web
of questions, you are given
the questions of others to hold
in the emptiness of your hands,
songbird eggs that can still hatch
if you keep them warm,
butterflies opening and closing themselves
in your cupped palms, trusting you not to injure
their scintillant fur, their dust.
You are given the questions of others
as if they were answers
to all you ask. Yes, perhaps
this gift is your answer.



Sister Laura Bufano, CSJ

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Early on in my preparation I was drawn to the question: “Can you drink the cup that I drink?” The question kept surfacing in my prayer and reflection. I avoided it, went in several other directions ... And then there it was again! The question: “Can you drink the cup that I drink?” You can imagine my surprise when I saw the question on the cover of the October issue of *Living with Christ!* I finally got the message and I had to pay attention!

The story we heard today is also found in chapter 20 of the Gospel of Matthew. In Matthew’s account, it is the mother of James and John who asks the favor of Jesus in behalf of her sons.

In today’s gospel we hear a question and a call. The question: “Can you drink the cup that I drink?” and the call: “to be servant to all.”

First, the question and its meaning. We get some clues from what is included, and what is excluded from today’s Scripture readings. Included is part of the fourth song of the Suffering Servant from the book of the prophet Isaiah. Excluded is the third prophecy of Jesus passion and resurrection which immediately precedes the story about James and John asking to sit at Jesus’ right and to his left.

“...The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him, spit upon him, scourge him, and put him to death, but after three days he will rise.” (Mark 10: 33-34)
The cup is the cup of suffering.

In a commentary on the spirituality of today's Gospel, John Foley, S.J. addresses the reality of suffering. He says that "loss, suffering and death are not the worst thing for us, even though they seem to be" and that "the worst would be the loss of love's groundwork, the loss of the never-ending love of God."

He continues: "Suffering may well stretch and widen the human soul, making it large enough to know God, to act on behalf of others, to let in that which is greater than death or life: love. Love stays even when life does not."

I believe suffering creates space in us, makes room for us to be compassion, to be bread for others...to be love. Suffering creates a spaciousness in us that enables us to respond to the call to be servant.

Jesus question to James and John is also a question for us – for you and for me. Can we drink the cup? The cup of frustrations and failures? The cup of confusion and rejection? The cup of disappointment and misunderstanding? The cup of discouragement and suffering? With God's grace we can.

Yes, with God's grace and with the strength that comes from our life together we can indeed drink the cup and turn beyond ourselves to serve a world in need.

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"Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant." Can we/are we willing to be servants to one another?

Humanly, we all wish to be great, to be good persons, to do our best, to be good at what we do. but to be servants? Isn't there another way to follow Jesus?

The concept of being servant flies in the face of what advertising and our culture tell us. "I am the center of the universe!" "What's in it for me?" "Get ahead, no matter who is hurt along the way." "Look out for Number 1!" "Know the right people, be seen with the right people, be in the right places and look just right at just the right time."

Aren't these the things that advertising and most media tell us?

Being servant to all is not about using our gifts and talents for our own glory for our own self-importance. It is not so much about what we do as it is about how we do what we do. Being servant to all is about who we are and how we are who we say we are. For Sisters of St. Joseph, associates and our partners in ministry, being servant to all is about mission; it is about our attitude and attentiveness to others, our presence to the dear neighbor without distinction, anticipating their needs and excluding no one. It is about the quality of our presence.

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Jesus' teaching about being servant to all was not frozen in time. It was not simply for his apostles and disciples. It is for all of us gathered here today. We, like Jesus disciples, need to hear this teaching over and over again: "Whoever wishes to be great will be your servant" Whoever wishes to be first must be the servant of all." (Probably not exactly what James and John had in mind.)

To be servant is to put our gifts and talents, our very selves at the service of others: wherever we are: in our neighborhood, at home, in our local communities with our families, at work, in our ministries, with colleagues and clients, in our parishes, among our friends and neighbors.

I'd like to share a story with you. Bishop Joseph T. O'Keefe was the bishop of Syracuse from 1987-1995. When he died in 1997, I was in the Office of Liturgy and had the privilege of coordinating and preparing the liturgies for his funeral. After the funeral I was in Homer setting up for class when I received a phone call from the secretary in the Liturgy Office. A bouquet of flowers had been delivered to the office and the gift card had my name on it. She and other members of the Chancery staff wondered what to do with the flowers since I was not returning to the office that day AND they were dying

to know who had sent me the flowers. Receiving flowers was so unexpected. I, too, was curious and asked them to open the card and read it to me over the phone.

Well, where do you think the flowers came from? Who do you think sent them? The secretaries were surprised and so was I. The flowers were sent to me by the maintenance staff at the Cathedral. It was I who ought to have sent them flowers. They had truly been servants to all – generous and attentive to everyone throughout those days. Bishop O’Keefe’s family, friends and all involved in the funeral. In a personal way they were particularly patient with me. On the morning of the funeral they noticed I was getting nervous and tense, and knew just what to say or do to make me laugh and lighten up. They made sure I knew exactly where they would be in case I, or anyone else, needed them. We had all worked together noting every detail.

(To think that after endless hours of work, someone from the maintenance staff took the time to go to a nearby florist and personally deliver a bouquet of beautiful red carnations with a card that each of the maintenance staff had signed.) I was surprised and humbled by their thoughtful gesture. It was clear to me then, as it is now, that the maintenance staff, who may have been beneath the notice of many and considered last in the minds of some people, were first that day and every day, behind the scenes, enabling things to go smoothly. I’ve never forgotten their generous gesture. In fact I saved the gift card and took a picture of the bouquet of red carnations. It will always be a wonderful reminder for me of what it means to be servant to all.

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Jesus came as servant and calls us to be servants. Jesus gave his life for us and calls us to give our lives for others. It is in that spirit that we celebrate today. We rejoice with Rose in her ever-deepening response to God’s call, as she makes her profession of vows as a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet. Little did she know where her initial response to God’s call would lead her. It has led her to us and we are grateful for her response to grace, to the promptings of the Spirit. Her resilience in spite of obstacles, her perseverance, and her patience with the transfer process give witness to the way sacred mystery embraces us in unifying love and how we participate in the mystery of transformation.

The question and the call: Can we drink this cup? Can we be servant to all? We can, with God’s grace? Yes!

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