

This has always been an interesting gospel selection for me. Each time we encounter it, whether at Eucharist or quiet lectio, while most of the main characters, Herod, his wife, her daughter, and the guests at the birthday party are interesting, I always seem much more taken with the figure of John the Baptist. I wonder if this feast of the Beheading of John was specifically chosen as the date when three brave women walked out of the St. Joseph Monastery in St. Mary's, PA, climbed into the carriage, and left for their trek to Johnstown to begin what was to become the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh.

With this gospel I often ask myself, "what am I willing to give up my head for?"

Did those three women "give up their heads" to start something new...did any of the 489 women who crossed the thresholds of our various monasteries, some of us in this chapel today, "give up their heads," to become something so much bigger than any of them or us could be?

What we celebrate today is a community that has responded to the gospel and the Rule of Benedict in an outstanding number of ways, and through faithfulness and commitment to our three basic values, prayer, community and ministry, have made us who we are today.

No longer trekking through the mud of roads unpaved, we now walk and ride through roads both familiar and new, each day bringing each of us a new opportunity to "prefer nothing whatever to Christ."

Giving up our heads may be easier than giving up our wills...of doing something totally new, different from what was in our original plan...often the surprise of divinity inviting us to a new moment, a new presence for ourselves and someone or something else.

The muddy, unpaved roads to Johnstown, then to Carrolltown, to Pittsburgh and finally to Bakerstown provided our community with opportunities none of us could have imagined. We each had our own answer as to what was the right road and the right place and the right way of doing things...and just as Herod also knew the best way to please his guests and his wife and her daughter, which ended in the beheading of John, we have actually found that the best answers ultimately come from the wisdom of the community. No one person has all the wisdom. It has been in sharing the wisdom that we find ourselves at this moment, on this day as we celebrate 147 years of Benedictine Life and presence with and for each other and for all those we serve.

Prompted by the opening words of our Rule, may we continue to listen for the call of our God as we move into a future full of the divine presence, May each of us be willing to “give up our heads” to each new day.

Let us, with confidence and peace face the future that God has planned for each of us and all of us!