

If you would have told me on July 4, 1965, the date of my first profession, that I would be standing before this illustrious group, I would have found that somewhat unbelievable.

If you would have told me that in the course of fifty years of Benedictine living I would be invited to listen for the gentle whisper of God's voice, I would have wondered.

If you would have told me that I, actually WE, were chosen in Christ, I would have said, "How?"

If you would have told me that I would be blessed with a hundred times as many homes, children, brothers and sisters, I probably would have said, "Impossible!"

And yet, here we are today because all of that is true.

For some reason, understood only by God, the gentle whispers of God's voice have spoken to me in so many ways, through prayer, through events, through you, and in so many other ways, I have been quite surprised by God's selection of me to life in this Benedictine community.

My sisters, Janet and Gail, would probably tell you that the Karen they knew growing up was a most unlikely candidate for such a vocation. Locking one sister in a closet and knocking out the tooth of the other, are not on the top ten reasons for entering Benedictine life...you can get details of the above and my other escapades later in the day.

And yet, here I am and here we are, all because, I followed the path marked out by Saint Benedict. And it is because of Jesus' remark to my favorite apostle, the impetuous, impulsive, and impatient Peter, that I am happy to be sharing with you today.

Jesus promised a hundred times as many... I counted the number of homes I've lived in during the past fifty years and came up with eighteen places I've lived in this half century...Perhaps Jesus meant "on average" because when I began to count the brothers and sisters and children, well, God has not been outdone in generosity.

Being the middle sister in a family of three girls, I always wanted a big brother...and I never got him either, but sisters, oh yes...not only sisters who shared my last name, but also sisters who shared my last initials, OSB. In the course of these fifty years, I have been blessed with about 250 Benedictine sisters, forty-six of whom are here today! These Benedictine women have shaped and formed me, challenged me and encouraged me, and even, asked me to lead them in our community...now, Jesus never mentioned that when he made his promise to Peter! I have also been blessed with sisters from other religious communities and other co-workers, several of whom are with us today.

The promise of children is where my average of a hundredfold soars...I did a quick calculation, and over the course of fifty years in ministry, forty-eight of which were in some form of education and over half in administration, I was privileged to work with about 10,000 children! Now that is truly amazing, to say nothing of a blessing! One of those 10,000 is here today! And while I won't point him out publicly, and I can't believe he told me recently of his plans for retirement, I do thank him, his family, and the wonderful little town of Donora, PA, for welcoming me...when I would rather not have gone there! Recently I spoke to the community about the blessing of obedience and being sent to Donora was a blessing, as was each and every place that I was privileged to serve during the past fifty years. And many of you are here today because I was sent to where you were!

Jesus did not specifically say anything about co-workers, but he did talk about the harvest being great. Many of my co-workers are in this chapel today, women and men with whom I have been privileged to serve both from our religious community as well as from the broader church community. The dedication to ministry, the commitment to the people we have been blessed to serve together, have always been an inspiration to me, and for that I thank you.

The many guests who are here today as well as those who are not able to be with us, and each community member are a true blessing in my life. And it is through you and because of you that I have been able to hear God's still, quiet voice speaking words of challenge and encouragement. The memories of these past fifty years have been touching my heart and overwhelming me and they are also part of the hundred fold blessings that I deeply cherish.

The Rule of Benedict begins with the simple word, "Listen", and while that was sometimes challenging, and I tried to cover my ears so that I would not hear, I know that my life would not have been the same.

I am grateful to God for the many blessings in my life, and now I see, that the hundred or so chairs in this chapel, filled with each of you, even 10 day old Veronica Ann, are the most important of all of the hundredfold.

And so, Peter asked a good question...and Jesus gave an even better answer...a hundred times as much...and so I say, in the words of our recently deceased Sister Wilfrid Palladino, "tante grazie!" ... "A thousand thanks!" ...I love you all very much!