

What a glorious day to thank God for blessings: the feast of Saint Benedict ... the Jubilee of Sister Kathleen's 75 years since her first profession ... so many treasured friends and relatives who have come to celebrate this momentous day with her. God is surely smiling.

A few weeks ago I asked Sister Kathleen what she would like me to say today. She said she would leave that up to me. Later she told me she had one reservation ... she didn't want me to say that she is cute. So I won't.

I told both the Sisters Mack what I had in mind. I said that first I was going to ask if there happened to be anyone at this celebration who does not know the Sister of the hour ... Sister Kathleen Mack. And of course, there would be no hands in the air because all of you are here today precisely because you know and love her.

Then I would tell you that because you all know and love her, you know how very special she is as a faithful Benedictine, loving relative, dedicated community member, inspiring teacher, collaborative co-worker and cherished friend ... and all of you - with enthusiastic smiling faces - would readily nod in agreement.

Finally, I would tell you that Sister Kathleen's 75 years of Benedictine life have been spent faithfully serving others with love day after day after day. I would tell you that her life of dedication speaks for itself. Therefore, my job here is finished. Thank you very much for listening.

Well, Mack the younger was a little underwhelmed by this and thought that since some of you traveled great distances to be here today, I needed to give you a little more for your money.

The truth is, I feel honored and privileged to be standing here before you today to speak about this beautiful, grace-filled woman whose very being brims over with God-love as she carries her holiness with unassuming naturalness and shares her Benedictine heart with gentle simplicity and welcoming peace.

One of my favorite books is Wisdom Distilled from the Daily by Benedictine author, Joan Chittister. In it she wrote that this kind of peace *“comes from living a measured life ... from attending to every part of our world in a sacramental way.”* Sister Kathleen has certainly lived a *“measured life”* with reverence, mindfulness, respect and great care through all her years in Benedictine Community.

I didn't know “Rosemary Mack” in her very young days, but I think it is safe to say that she did not choose God. No, long, long ago, God dreamed her into being, loved her, chose her, planted and cultivated a kernel of spirit-thought that grew unnoticed in her subconscious mind until, when she was of age, she heard the whispers and felt the stirring of God's music in the deepest part of her being inviting her to respond ... and now, more than 75 years later, we know the rest of the story.

I think - I don't know for sure, but knowing Sister Kathleen as we all do, it would be an easy assumption to think - that early in her life, during pre-convent days, she already, imperceptibly, began to develop monastic contemplative qualities, which according to Joan Chittister, *“call us to learn to live easily with ourselves”* (I think she probably did that at an early age) ... *“and to learn to step quietly and consciously into the presence of God, listening and waiting and trusting.”* We all know that Sister Kathleen listened well ... and this day attests to the fact that she trusted, responded, and found Benedictine life to be a very good fit for her

On this feast of Saint Benedict, I'd like to share a short summary of my understanding of Benedictine spirituality. Close your eyes, listen and see if any of what you hear resonates with what you know of Sister Kathleen.

Benedictines take pride in doing ordinary, daily things extraordinarily well. They live with gratitude for their talents and the graces which enable them to use their creative gifts for the good of all. They strive for excellence and live with integrity.

Benedictines live simply, caring for the things entrusted to them, sharing their resources - because all is gift. They recognize that the earth is theirs to borrow,

therefore they need to be responsible care-takers so that others may benefit from its bounty after them.

Benedictines live and pray in Community, where they experience support, encouragement, challenges, affirmation, bonding and friendships; where they share celebrations, family responsibility, leisure and prayer; where the joys and sorrows of one become felt and acknowledged by all; where patience, understanding, forgiveness, non-judgment, generosity and helpfulness are important tools for daily living, where the good of all becomes more important than the good of self.

Benedictines reach out to give service, responding in ministry to the needs of others. With openness they welcome others, sharing their resources, their home, their Benedictine charism of prayer and peace. They live as peaceable people: promoting good, living so as not to harm others, advocating justice. They show reverence and compassion, recognizing that all people are gifts from God, that all people deserve respect and dignity.

Benedictines make a commitment to live with one group of people, remaining steadfast and rooted during hard times. They resist impulses to run away from problems. They rely on faith and trust in God rather than self.

According to Joan Chittister: *“The ones who touch God are those who live well with those around them ... after the person with a Benedictine soul has been there, the world ought to be a little closer to the way the kingdom will look.”*

So, do you recognize characteristics of Sister Kathleen in any of what you just heard?

Here is what I know: 75 years in God's service is an amazing, awesome, marvelous event to celebrate. This day speaks of rootedness, stability, covenant, faithfulness and love. I know - we all know - that Sister Kathleen is very close to God. Through the years she has opened herself to God's voice, making room for God to touch her spirit, germinate and expand in her. She has listened with an open heart, enabling God to shape her, to become part of her very being and deepen in her heart and soul. Over the long years of living Benedictine life, God has been with her every step of the way, rejoicing with her

in good times, giving her strength and wisdom to rise above the difficult times. And along the way, Benedictine values rooted more deeply within her; they can no longer be separated from her; they flow out of her as steadily as the rising of the sun. She is Benedictine through and through.

Her years in Benedictine Community have brought her to be a true “Senpecte,” an “Amma,” a wisdom figure for all who know her, someone who listens with all her being and imparts knowledge and wisdom without judgement. She is someone who has aged gracefully, someone who has weathered changes well, who has adapted with responsive flexibility to community life which looks different in many ways today than it did when she first entered.

She lives now with acceptance of physical limitations, and always with appreciation for all that others do to help her. She is at peace with herself and open and interested in others. Though she is getting quieter these days, more reflective, her inner spirit deepening, she is still very much engaged in the daily happenings of Community life - in chapel, at meals, taking walks through the monastery halls every day, stopping on the way at each door to say a prayer for the person who lives there. She is still open to learning new things, still playful, able to tease and make quick, witty responses in table conversation. She still has “the look!” She has always been, from the time of her “white-gloved” days, and still is a woman who bears a sense of dignity and refinement. Soft-spoken, modest, even-tempered, self-assured, serene, and warm-hearted, she loves to be with people, enjoys playing games, laughs at good jokes (the clean ones), greets all with sincere friendliness. She also appreciates times of quiet reflection and meditation, spending time in the presence of her God. She lives with gratitude. She lives a normal life. She lives a well-balanced life *“attending to every part of her world, as Joan says, “in a sacramental way.”*

I think of Sister Kathleen when I play the piano. As many of you know, the piano has 3 foot pedals: 2 of them are dull and tarnished because they aren’t used very much, but the one that is used all the time is bright and shiny. Sister Kathleen is like that.

She has allowed herself to be used in service all these years. She has poured herself out willingly for the good of Community life and her ministries. And through the years her inner beauty, her faith, her Benedictine spirit and her love of God have been polished and buffed and have grown brighter and shinier from daily, purposeful use.

When I look at Sister Kathleen, and all our elder Sisters in chapel, I see holy women who have lost the busyness and worries of earlier life. They have settled

into quiet, prayerful understanding of what really matters. As they sit with closed eyes, a stillness of purpose about them, they are more focused than the younger members who still have activities to plan and work to attend to. As they commune with their God, oblivious of distractions, they are beautiful reminders of God's love at work within them.

When Sister Kathleen celebrated her 50th Jubilee, she chose a quote from Mechtilde as her cover, the same cover you see as she celebrates today. I am not going to read that to you, but I point it out because she has always lived with creativity and a poetic, musical heart. So, at this point, if the rest of you can bear with me, I would like to speak directly to Sister Kathleen's poetic soul. (The rest of you may eavesdrop if you wish.)

Kathleen, for thousands of years the idea of your being rested in the stars. One day the maker caressed the idea, and gently building, skillfully smoothing, formed you out of love and sang you into being. God delighted in you, spoke to you, chose you - and, with great joy and eagerness, out of love you responded and thrived. For every day of your life, you and your maker have been creating beautiful harmonies together.

God is not finished with you yet. You and God together have more of a story to write, more music to create for the world. God has chosen you to spread joy and peace, hope, love and wisdom - to continue being GIFT to all who know you - just by being you - until the end of your days.

Joan Chittister wrote: *"The message of Benedictine spirituality is a consistent one: live life normally ... live life thoughtfully ... live life profoundly ... live life well."*

Kathleen, you have certainly done this with ease and grace - with great love through all your life. Benedict would be very proud of you today. You have taken to heart his plan for living well with others and growing in the ways of God and have lived his values, with no holding back, for a long, long time. Your life of dedication truly does speak for itself. The world already is a *"little closer to the way the kingdom will look"* because you have lived well with a Benedictine soul.

Today we thank you for all you have been and continue to be. We are truly enriched and blessed by knowing you. We offer you heartfelt congratulations

and blessings and pray that God may continue to embrace you with love and delight. May your love-songs – yours and God's together – continue to make new melodies each day to touch the hearts of those around you as long as you walk the face of the earth. Kathleen, because of you, God is surely smiling.

Sister Barbara Helder