

Reflection for Sister Kate's Final Vows: July 25, 2020

For this Profession Liturgy, Sister Kate appropriately chose readings with the theme of hope and future.

The reading from Jeremiah tells us "I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for...You will seek me, and you will find me because you will seek me with all your heart." We have read these words many times. We like to think that God has spoken these words directly to us, but this is not the case. Jeremiah wrote these words to the Hebrews who had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon; he addressed their leaders: the elders, the priests, and the prophets.

So, the very first thing we understand about Jer. 29 is context: it wasn't meant for any one individual. When God said, I know the plans I have for you, he wasn't speaking to you or me or any individual.

God spoke those words to a nation that had been around for hundreds of years. They had made every mistake a people can make, in spite of all the love, grace, mercy and blessings God had given them. Finally, God did what he'd repeatedly warned he would do-- let the Babylonians invade their nation and seize them as prisoners of war.

God didn't say these words to a people standing on the brink of happily-ever-after. He spoke these words to a people whose world had just been shattered. He spoke to a people who had lost nearly everything and were about to lose even more. So, there they were--strangers in a strange land. No way to get back home, and no homes to return to even if they could get back.

When God spoke through Jeremiah of his plans to give the Hebrews hope and a future, he was talking to a people who had already squandered their future. The only hope they had was that God would rescue them from the hopeless times they were living in.

Along the way, the exiles had become indifferent to God; indifferent to the needs of their neighbors; to the cries of the poor. This is how they ended up in exile. But, God wanted them to know that even in exile, he would not abandon them. He would transform them. They were to rebuild and prepare themselves for God's future plans for them, right where they were.

God's plan when he sent his people into exile in Babylon—to give them a hope and a future—was that they would revisit what they knew. They wouldn't be indifferent to God, to their neighbors, to the poor, and to the work God wanted to do through them in the world.

The exile was the place where God sent them to rebuild their faith, renew their vision, and restore their love for God. And so, God sends his message. "I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

With Kate, like the Hebrews, sometimes we have felt like we have been in exile in Babylon. We have often lost our way. At times our world has been totally shattered, especially in recent days. But on this day of celebration of Kate's profession and commitment to our Provident God,

we recall the prophet's words—we have a hope and a future. We will live in the midst of our Congregation evidencing hope and a future of service.

Kate, as you come through the desert we are with you. Together with Jeremiah we remind you and ourselves—I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU. PLANS TO PROSPER YOU AND NOT TO HARM YOU. PLANS TO GIVE YOU HOPE AND A FUTURE.

This day you will move with renewed energy into living in our midst and working with this community and God's people into REBUILDING--Preparing for God's future plans for you and this community. You will not be a stranger in a strange land.

Your profession today will be greater in the days and years to come because our Provident God will daily transform you, rebuild your faith, renew your vision and continually deepen your love of Him and the Community of faith.

And so, the prayer you prayed in 2014 reverberates even more today. And I quote: "In the spring of 2014, I neared the end of my apostolic year of Novitiate. As I prepared for First Vows, I struggled to see what lay beyond them, and as a path began to unfold before me leaning towards Midland and the West Texan desert, I encountered anxiety and dismay within me at the prospect. My soul thrives on greens of every shade and moisture and cool weather. I never had the slightest desire to live in a desert; however, I have always deeply desired to do God's will and serve others before myself. As I prayed about this one day, I heard the words, 'In the desert a place is prepared for her.'

The assurance I received from God that in the desert there is a place prepared specifically for me encouraged me to thank and praise God for all the blessings in my life and to look forward to the future without fear, knowing God will be with me when I get there and, indeed, has already made all the necessary preparations.

Through this understanding, joy fills my being and causes my heart to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving!

Finally, these words have never left my heart or weakened over time. The words repeated within me throughout the following days, weeks, months and years. They continue to comfort me and bring me peace...Truly, God's will is in every way superior to my own, and God's plans reach far beyond my own good to the good of all the world, far beyond anything I can ask or imagine."

Sister Kate, you have shown us that you experience God as the Hebrews experienced God--a God who does not abandon, who comforts and brings us peace. You witness to a God who transforms, a God of hope who brings joy and tranquility.

Today our Provident God invites you to continue the journey He has planned for you and for us. We celebrate your perpetual profession as a Sister of Divine Providence and look forward to journeying with you. We will build and rebuild---we have and look forward to serving God's people with you. Amen.