



## DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



Homily for the 125th Anniversary of the  
Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth in the United States  
Monday, July 4, 2011

Dear Sisters in the Lord and friends present this day,

Thank you so much for the invitation to be with you at this great celebration of Faith for your community and for all that your community has been a part of, which has been a blessing for the families in this country these past 125 years, the families to whom you minister to and the bigger family - what our Hispanic brothers and Sisters call the Church - "La Familia de Dios."

Although I certainly knew of St. Mary of Nazareth Hospital here in Chicago from my days in Illinois, you have been a personal blessing for me since I came to Fort Worth, both in the foundations you laid, and in your ministry in Texas. I don't go through Wichita Falls without thinking of you. Even though you are no longer there, the lives of the people and their families were strengthened by the way you brought the living presence of the Holy Family to them. The Cross, which is still on the hospital and overlooks the city, is a visible reminder of "The word of truth, the Gospel of salvation" as stated in the hymn to Christ in Ephesians this morning. I can't go through Mineral Wells or Vernon, or drive on Stadium Drive in Fort Worth near St. Andrew's, without reflecting on the mission and ministry of your community in Texas. I am grateful to know that you are still in Tyler, but for me personally, presiding at your first and final vow ceremonies in Grand Prairie, being with you on the Epiphany, working with the Sisters at St. Rita, on our Diocesan pastoral council and in ministry with families and vocation work - and playing the piano for you - are all very much joys and blessings of the present moment that I give thanks for, and express my deepest gratitude for your ministry and presence in the Dallas/Fort Worth/Irving/Grand Prairie, the "Metroplex"!

The Church in Texas is a family that is vibrant, strong, and growing, and the story of Nazareth is a part of that story of Faith. Life in frontier Texas was not for the faint of heart, but the Family of Nazareth (all of you) were instrumental in building a family of faith that today is embracing its future in Faith, Hope, and Love! Your prayer for families "Help me and the members of my family to love, listen to, support and accept one another. Encourage us to challenge one another to be compassionate, merciful and forgiving as we struggle with the difficulties of our lives," certainly reflected the realities of those Catholic pioneer families in Texas, and it guides us still today.

Growing up, I knew that Holy Family Sunday was always between Christmas and New Years. We all knew the Holy Family was Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Although they were certainly real to us, more often than not, they were the figures in our nativity sets, creches, or presepi... however we named them.

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That began to change for me. The Holy Family first began to take on a realness -- an incarnational sense, when I found the reading of Pope Paul VI for Holy Family Sunday. From then on I would read it every year. And, when I began to know all of you, the witness of your vowed life made the figures of the Holy Family real people, and gave clear witness to the reality of the love of the Holy Family for us, year round, not just for a few weeks of the year.

Pope Paul VI, in his homily, called Nazareth a "kind of school where we may begin to discover what Christ's life was like and even to understand his Gospel." Here he would go on to say that at Nazareth we can learn to realize who Christ really is; here we can learn from silence; we can learn about family life; and we can learn about work, its redeeming value. Nazareth has much to teach each of us - and that is all of you here for those to whom you are missioned.

The school of Nazareth has had many students over the years that learned and later taught what Pope Paul VI spoke about. "When I think of this miracle of God's mercy to have chosen our small Nazareth, the last in God's Church, for such work and that He entrusted to us such an important task in his Kingdom... I cannot tell you how grateful I am to the Lord of love." These words, of Blessed Mary of Jesus the Good Shepherd, writing about the first Nazareth establishments in the United States, are words learned in the School of Nazareth, and words of invitation for others to come to that same school of faith!

In every school there are lessons and reflections, and these lessons and reflections in the school of Nazareth are certainly the Sacred Scriptures which are proclaimed today. As we recall "the favors of the Lord, all he has done for us, and his great kindness" in all of the moments of these 125 years - personally and corporately - in good and challenging moments - the Visitation and the Magnificat in the Gospel give us a road map for the present and the future. The journey of Mary to Elizabeth in Ain Karim can be a mirror for the journey of the Community a-day-at-a-time, a journey linked with the families whom you serve in so many capacities. "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled" is what you witness to in a world of increasing unbelief, skepticism and indifference, and sometimes hostility. "Blessed are you who believed" is a part of God's plan that is taught in the school of Nazareth and lived in the vows of consecrated life.

"Blessed are you who believed" is reflected in your vocation prayer as it says "Good and gracious God, you have a great and loving plan for our world and for me. I want to share in that plan fully, faithfully, and joyfully. Help me to understand what it is You wish me to do with my life. Help me to be attentive to the signs that you give me about preparing for the future. And once I have heard and understood your call, give me the strength and grace to follow it with generosity and love." That prayer has certainly been reflected in those joyful moments I have spent with you during the celebration of first and final vows and other community celebrations!

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Blessed are you who believed! How important and essential it is for families in all of their daily challenges and struggles in this age to believe in the presence of God in their midst. Blessed are you who believed! Does not that reflect the life and faith as the sisters arrived in New York on July 4th - 125 years ago today? To profess and live that belief is the constant link in the history which we celebrate these days and the path to the future. And the witness of consecrated life is a testimony of FAITH, and yes, belief is not only possible, but necessary, and is learned and lived in the School of Nazareth!

"O Holy Family, bless and protect  
all the families of the world;  
safeguard their unity, fidelity, integrity and dignity.  
Enable them to live according to God's law  
that they may fulfill their sublime vocation.  
May their lives be a reflection of yours  
and may they enjoy your presence forever in heaven. Amen."

God Bless,  
+ Bishop Kevin W. Vann

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