

Sisters of St. Joseph deserve gratitude of all

I have known the Sisters of St. Joseph since I was 14 years old. Sister Mary Clare was the very first one I met. She taught art and was freshman homeroom teacher for some of us in the class of 1955 at Catholic Central High School in Troy.

She came to my mind this afternoon at Sacred Heart Cathedral during the magnificent celebration marking the 350th anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of St. Joseph. What I experienced today touched me deeply because the beauty of the ceremony made me aware of how much I admire these great sisters and how much I owe to them. It just seemed natural to me to remember where my association with them began.

Remembering Sister Mary Clare today renewed two memories of her for which I am still grateful. The first was her ability to combine encouragement for our desire to grow and mature with patience with the many ways by which we demonstrated that we still had a long way to go. The second was a prayer she taught us that I have said daily since 1951: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph I give you my heart, my soul and my life. Jesus, Mary and Joseph assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph may I breathe forth my soul in peace in your blessed company."

When I say that prayer — most often at the end of the Communion Rite at the Eucharistic Liturgy — I thank God for Sister Mary Clare and all of the 22 Sisters of St. Joseph who taught us during our high school years. And I include in that prayer the Sisters of Mercy and priests of the Diocese of Albany who formed the rest of the faculty. (In those days, believe it

along the way



By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

or not, only the athletic coach and the music teacher were lay people.)

After high school I had no further direct contact with the Sisters of St. Joseph until I came to Rochester in 1979. Renewed association with them has been one of the great graces and joys of these years. All through that time I have admired the scope and quality of the loving service they have offered to the people of this region and beyond since they came to Canandaigua in 1854. Since then they have been where people were in need, responding to them with generosity, compassion and competence.

Their history of service has embraced the orphans and children from families in need, elderly women and men in need of care, and students from the wide-eyed pre-schooler to the sophisticated graduate student. Those in need of the hospitality of a meal, medical care or someone to speak on their behalf have found friends in our sisters. For all the years, they have done what they could do for their neighbor. In so honoring the dignity of their sisters and brothers they have done more than any of us could to give glory to God and to help peo-

ple come to their full stature in Christ.

As we celebrate the 350th anniversary of their foundation in France, I stand in awe at what the Sisters of St. Joseph have done and still do for the people of our diocese. For myself, and for you, I thank them for their work in health care, education, parish pastoral ministry, the care of persons with special needs, and advocacy for the frail, vulnerable and forgotten among us.

No less do I admire the self-effacing ways in which our sisters go about their daily rounds. I associate them with an evident desire not to be served but to serve: warm hospitality, inclusiveness, genuine discipleship and a deep commitment to the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council. I add to that a respect for the integrity with which they deal with congregational issues and the honesty with which they engage me and the local church of which they are such an important part.

These have not been easy years for our sisters. Times of transition and renewal rarely are for any of us. But they have modeled for all of us the kind of honesty, mutual respect and patience that allow a community to remain strong, even grow stronger, in times that can test the spirit.

I hope that we all have some opportunity in the days ahead to say a word of thanks to any of the sisters we may meet for all that they have done for us and still do for us each day. It is not their way to look for such thanks, but we all know that such a word brings great strength to the spirit and puts renewed bounce in the step.

Peace to all.

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Kids' answer from page 12: Michael the archangel.