

Preaching for Ann E. Killian's FIRST PROFESSION of VOWS

(Deuteronomy 7: 6-9; Galatians 6:14-18; Luke 10: 1-9)

Are you crazy, Annie?

Perhaps others have asked you that—

Or at least thought that.

Perhaps you have wondered yourself at times.

The Yale graduate who studied at Oxford;

The team captain of the swim team in Division One athletics;

The runner of half-marathons;

The resourceful Notre Dame post-doctoral fellow in the Medieval Institute who managed to bring falcons and forges to campus on football weekends—and who was likely the only one on campus who didn't know what a "tailgate" was;

The advocate for prison reform who volunteered to teach Julian of Norwich's "all shall be well" at Westville Correctional Facility for men;

The creative teacher who managed to entice South Bend public high school students to sign up for an elective course on Medieval Studies—during COVID;

The Peace Advocate who amazed at least one of her cohort at the Pax Christi young adult caucus who remarked with astonishment: Annie is "a real nun."

The woman with SO MANY POSSIBLE PATHS open to her....

Why make PROFESSION of VOWS in a religious congregation at this point in the history of religious life and the Church?

Why commit yourself to life in community, a life of prayer and ministry focused on preaching the peace of Christ with all of the chaos and challenges facing our country and world?

And WHY the Order of Preachers and specifically the DOMINICAN SISTERS of PEACE and our Associates?

Undoubtedly you have pondered those questions yourself in moments of silent prayer and contemplation, questions we all face as the realities of our life commitments unfold.

THERE IS ONLY ONE POSSIBLE ANSWER to THOSE QUESTIONS.

The answer of another young woman who threw in her lot with the Dominican Family in 14th c.

Italy ...

when the Church was even more divided than ours is—bordering on schism;

when the city-states of her native land were locked in competition—and even war;

amid the Hundred Years War in Europe and another deadly pandemic.

In the face of all of the crises of *her* time, why did Catherine of Siena desire to embrace a life of contemplation?

And why did God remind her that her contemplative vocation included a call to action on behalf of the Gospel?

“Remember that I have laid down two commandments of love: love of me and love of your neighbor...On two feet you must walk my way, on two wings you must fly to heaven.”

In her *DIALOGUE with DIVINE PROVIDENCE*, Catherine heard God REVEAL to HER the ONLY REASON that one can offer for the most important decisions that we make in life--the ones that shape our identity, our relationships and our future:

“THE HUMAN HEART IS ALWAYS DRAWN BY LOVE” (Dialogue, 26).

A profession of FAITH such as the one that Annie is about to make is possible ONLY *because GOD* first made an oath of FIDELITY to US—all of us --God’s “treasured people” --as well as to Annie.

Today's FIRST READING reminds us that Annie's "YES" is not the first word that we celebrate today. Rather her words of commitment are a response to *God's Word: AN INVITATION* and a PROMISE made to our ancestors in faith—and through them, to us.

**Those ancestors in faith include communities of Jewish and Christian believers through the ages;
the Dominican Family into which Annie will be more deeply incorporated today;
our own Dominican Sisters of Peace and Associates—both those living and those who have gone before us in faith;
and Annie's first ancestors in the faith—her parents T.J. and Sally and her family and extended family and friends gathered here—and in the communion of saints.**

**The reading which Annie chose from the Book of Deuteronomy is clear: It is not because we are numerous, or prosperous, or No. 1 in the eyes of the world that God has chosen the likes of us to be God's Treasured People.
RATHER, GOD'S HEART too is DRAWN by LOVE.**

**According to Catherine of Siena, in fact,
GOD is EVEN MORE CRAZY than WE ARE.**

Catherine couldn't quite believe what God was inviting and empowering her to do either. And others, including her own parents and family, her spiritual director, and many Church leaders in her day had their doubts about her chosen path—or rather what she claimed that God had elected her to do.

As she pondered the **EXTRAVAGANCE** of the **LOVE** of our Trinitarian God, she prayed in amazement:

*O fire of Love,
Was it not enough to gift us
With creation in your image and likeness
And to create us anew to grace in your Son's blood?
Without giving us Yourself as food—the **WHOLE** of **GOD**?*

WHAT DROVE YOU?
NOTHING but **CHARITY**
Mad with love as you are.

Prayer 10

(Noffke, *Prayers of Catherine of Siena*, 78-79).

No wonder that our brother **TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE**, former Master of the Order, challenged the Dominican Family—and all baptized Christians--to **DO SOMETHING CRAZY...RISK EVERYTHING FOR THE GOSPEL.**

At the time, Timothy was reflecting on another part of Luke's Gospel-- the parable of the PRODIGAL SON which he described as "a taste of GOD's NEW CREATION."

That economy of grace is ruled by God's EXTRAVAGANT LOVE and FORGIVENESS rather than our human measures of who deserves to be included at the God's banquet table.

Then Timothy put the Gospel's challenge to all of us:

"In our cautious, risk-averse world,..., "do we dare to do crazy things that will certainly be misunderstood? We have not begun to preach, according to Timothy until we have done things which seem a bit mad—like throwing a party to welcome home the one who least deserves it."

(GUTD reflection on Luke 15)

Do we dare to do crazy things in our time and culture?

**Like setting out on a journey with no money and no sandals—
Going out like lambs among wolves, armed only with the
PEACE that the World cannot give—the SHALOM of GOD's
REIGN?**

**Do we dare to give that same gift to a household of strangers
who may or may not welcome us-- or receive that word of
peace-- AND OFFER IT ANYWAY?**

“IF a PEACEFUL PERSON LIVES THERE, YOUR PEACE will rest on THEM. And IF NOT—it WILL RETURN to YOU...as a GIFT TO BE GIVEN TO THE NEXT PLACE that you are SENT.”

Annie is indeed about to do something crazy in the eyes of many. Through her public profession of vows as a Dominican Sister of Peace, she will deepen her baptismal commitment and affirm her desire to live her life as Jesus did in freedom, love and obedience to his mission of preaching the good news of *God’s* reign of justice, peace, and compassion, even to the extent of laying down his life for his friends.

We rightly celebrate the mystery of God’s Spirit at work in Annie, and later this summer, in Margaret, as well as in all who come to discover the vowed life in community to be a source of freedom and joy. As Dominicans that life is grounded in contemplative prayer and study. And we promise to share the fruits of that contemplation with others through our diverse ministries of preaching the gospel.

Whether that vocation is Annie’s call—“her truth”--is what she and her mentors and the leaders of our congregation, as well as all those who have shared her journey these past three years and beyond, have been trying to discern.

Today we celebrate that God's grace has led Annie to affirm publicly the reason that she has offered spontaneously more than once when she has been asked why she chose to enter this religious community: "I want to share their JOY."

At the same time, this Gospel (and Pope Francis) remind us that we are all called to play our part in the story. All Christians are called to bear witness to the JOY of the GOSPEL, to be laborers in GOD's HARVEST. In today's gospel, Jesus sent out 72 disciples—not only 12—including women as well as men, many of whom were not the "usual suspects."

Even as we celebrate Annie's profession of faith this day, her YES, is an invitation to all of us to reflect more deeply on our own unique call to live the JOY of the GOSPEL and to preach the Gospel of Peace.

Do we dare?

**Mary Catherine Hilkert, OP
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