



Archdiocese of San Antonio

Most Reverend Gustavo García-Siller



Homily – Religious Jubilee Mass

April 21, 2015

Jubilees are times for memories, gratitude, and recommitment.

Memories. While we are celebrating different jubilees today, let us focus on fifty years ago, 1965. Pope Paul VI came to the U.S. to address the United Nations and celebrate Mass at Yankee Stadium, and the second Vatican Council was in its final session. President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed a War on Poverty, signed the Voting Rights Act and an immigration bill that abolished quotas based on national origins. The Vietnam War was raging. Locally, Archbishop Furey was visibly involved in social justice issues, especially in his support of labor unions to help families struggling to make ends meet. With the new film, *The Sound of Music*, a wide public gained a perhaps more human view of religious life --although not every religious was like Julie Andrews!!

Fifty years later, we are still trying to implement the documents of Vatican II. There is a great poverty in the U.S. There are horrific

wars and violence in the world. Serious concerns remain about how African Americans are treated by the law enforcement and judicial system, and our U.S. immigration system is clearly broken.

You undoubtedly have many personal memories of the past. While grave problems still plague the human family, there have been and are signs of the Kingdom of God in our midst. Consider for a moment all the lives you have touched in your various ministries and services to the Church and the broader community. Perhaps you did not charm them with a guitar like Sister Maria, but you did bring your faith, your commitment to the gospel, and God's love to others through your work and the witness of your religious life. If only we had time today to hear just one such story from each of you. How blessed we would be in our sharing of memories!

Gratitude. That brings me to the second dimension of our celebration: giving thanks to God for all of his blessings upon us during our consecrated lives. Faith, hope, and charity have sustained you and me on our pilgrim way as women and men religious. We are well aware of our weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and sins. God has provided us with the guidance of the Bread of Life – the Word of God proclaimed in Scripture and incarnate in us in the

Lord's sacred Body and Blood in the Eucharist. God has been very good to us, and we thank God with full hearts today.

On this I also thank each of you in the name of the entire Archdiocese of San Antonio for all that you have done for us in your witness and work here and elsewhere in the Church. Wherever the bishop is, the whole local church is. So, the entire Archdiocese is with us today in celebrating your gifts, your generosity, your goodness. Thank you. Thank you.

Recommitment. Jubilees are also opportunities to renew our commitment to consecrated life. This is where we are to be very realistic, humble, and courageous. In a meeting with priests, religious, deacons, and seminarians in Naples one month ago today, Pope Francis talked about community life as a vital witness and a challenge. He said community life is not easy in the convent, in consecrated life, or in the rectory. "The devil," he said, "always tempts us with jealousy, envy, infighting, antipathy, sympathy, so many things that do not help us to live true fraternity and thus we bear a testimony of division among ourselves." This is a great challenge. And it is not something new in the life of the Church. Let us consider our first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles.

The deacon Stephen had been summoned to a trial for his belief in the risen Lord. As he makes his defense, the judicial hearing turns into an angry mob who stone him to death. His last words echo those of Jesus on the cross, asking the Father for forgiveness for his executioners and commending his spirit to Jesus as he dies.

This is not an isolated act of violence. Acts tells us that the community (but not the Apostles) had to flee into Judea and Samaria and beyond because they were being hunted down. However, God's plan will not be thwarted – even by the demonic force embodied in a bystander whose name is Saul. The blood of martyrs will raise up new generations of Christians. Paradoxically, persecution advances the work of evangelizing the whole world.

You and I may not be called to shed our blood for the faith as so many Christians are doing today in parts of the world. We are called to pray and to work for justice and peace. We are to give witness to the Bread of Life: the wisdom of the Word of God and the sustenance of the Eucharist. We are to live poverty, chastity, and obedience in such a way that the world will find its way to God – to experience his mercy, his compassion, his enduring love. We gather with Our Lady

with our memories, our gratitude, and our hearts renewed to follow the Lord on our pilgrim way as persons in consecrated life.