

Reflection
Vigil Service
Jean Whelan, pbvm
23 April 2023

I welcome you all as we gather to celebrate the life of our Sister Jean and, on behalf of our Sisters and Associates, I express prayerful sympathy to Steve's family. You lost your Dad so soon after Jean's death. That is difficult.

Our sister, Jean, was born on 22 February 1936 to her parents, Elizabeth and Stephen. She joined our community on 15 October 1956 and made final profession of vows on 15 July 1964.

To help prepare for this reflection, I went back to the leaflet from Jean's 50th Anniversary Celebration in 2009. The readings testified to deep faith in the lives of Jean and her Jubilee companions, Helen Corrigan, Mary Molloy, Sylvia Staples, Patricia Tobin and Regina Vickers.

Using translations from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, I pondered words from Jeremiah: *"Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you."*

Then, in St. Paul to the Philippians: *"I find myself praying for you with a glad heart. There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears."*

And Isaiah: *"Don't be afraid. I've called your name...When you're in rough waters, you will not drown. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end because I am God, your personal God, your Savior."*

And, John's Gospel proclaims: *"I've loved you just the way God loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love."*

Comforting words for a celebration of Jean's life, consoling words for a celebration of Jean's life and death.

Jean's ministry as a teacher and principal took her all over the island of Newfoundland to Avondale, Cape St. George, Carbonear, Harbour Breton, Piccadilly, Placentia, St. Bride's, St. John's, Torbay, and Trepassey.

From 1997-2009 Jean spent privileged years providing loving care to her Mom.

When Jean moved to our Motherhouse, she shared her significant computer skills with our Sisters and provided literacy training to disadvantaged young people. She gave much service driving our Sisters to various appointments. She was also a valuable volunteer at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind from whom she received a Certificate of Merit acknowledging her countless hours as a reader. Her citation says that Jean *"read everything from cookbooks through computer texts to accounting and business mathematics."*

There have been many reminiscences in the days leading up to Jean's death on 2 April 2023 as Jean received tender care from our Sisters, our nursing staff, her brother, Steve and sister-in-law, Patricia, and their family, John, Evelyn, Barb and Frank, her niece, Jacqueline, and her grand-niece, Elizabeth, who were always so faithful to their Aunt Jean.

Before I conclude, I return to another excerpt in their Jubilee Booklet from *Begin Again: A Woman's Song*.

It describes the struggle of a salmon swimming upstream against the current.

A long swim and uphill at that!

A hard swim, water pounding her, pushing her at every surge!

Did she want to go on?

She leaps and sputters knowing that some force is pulling her.

It is time now to let go of the past and die to the present. It is time to swim into the future, trusting only the flow.

When I reflect on Jean's 64 years as a professed Presentation Sister, I am amazed how these words are so suitable for a celebration of her life, death and resurrection.

Jean's life had a lot of health struggles and she has now let go. She has moved now into a new future, trusting only the flow, her new life with her God.

Jean, enjoy your new life of joyful resurrection.

Betty Rae Lee, pbvm
Province Leader
Presentation Sisters (NL)