

HOMILY

*The 70th Anniversary of
Profession of Religious Vows by
Sister Jane Edward Schutz, O.P.
and
The Nativity of St. John the Baptist
June 24, 2007 ~ 10 AM Liturgy*

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St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

I have a confession to make. Whenever I'm called upon to share in an anniversary celebration, I breathe a sigh of relief and whisper a little prayer, "Thank you, Jesus." For when we commemorate an anniversary, we have something to celebrate. We celebrate a life that has been lived, something that we have seen with our own eyes, that which has been tried and tested and true. And it is a testimony to what God can accomplish in us.

Although every anniversary is special, the one we celebrate today is no ordinary one. Seventy years. Seventy years is a long time. The only 70th anniversary I have been to was a church anniversary. In fact, I haven't even been on this earth that long! How many of you were around in 1937? No wonder we call it a Double Diamond Jubilee. (I think she got that idea from the casino where they have double diamond slots.)

What a coincidence that today we celebrate the birth of John the Baptist. For with his birth came an even greater gift—to witness what God can accomplish in one of his chosen servants. In the First Reading from Isaiah, we heard some awesome words:

*"The Lord called me from birth,
from my mother's womb he gave me my
name."*

Just as that was said of God's servant, John, so too it could be said of Sister Jane.

I'm sure you know that when she was the sixth child born to her parents, Anthony and Anna, in 1920, before she became Sister Jane, she was Rita Bertha. And there were fourteen Schutz children in all! What I find fascinating is learning that until after her junior year in high school, when the desire to become a sister and to enter the convent surfaced, Sister Jane had never seen or met a sister. So that dream, that purpose, was put in her from day one by her beautiful, faith-filled parents. At the age of seventeen, Rita Bertha received her veil and was given the name Sister Jane Edward of the Good Shepherd. In time, two other sisters, as well as a niece of Sister Jane's, entered the same congregation.

As to be expected, Sister Jane Edward had places to go and things to do. Sister joined the ranks of the Adrian Dominicans who served as highly respected educators from coast to coast. Some of the classes entrusted to her care had class sizes in the sixties and seventies. Along with a great track record as instructor, councilor, moderator, Sister served as principal at Gate of Heaven in Detroit with twelve hundred students, nineteen sisters and a pastor who prided himself on his ability to get rid of all the principals. But Sister Jane and the pastor got along well because she spoke with him on good terms.

And if that wasn't enough excitement, for eight summers Sister Jane was director of Camp Stapleton in Lexington on Lake Huron, funded by the St. Vincent DePaul Society. Eleven hundred girls from the inner city came to stay...two hundred fifty at a time for two weeks.

Sister Jane has always been on the cutting edge. As Vatican II was beginning, Sister Jane was personally invited by Cardinal Dearden to serve as Associate Director of Vocations for the Archdiocese of Detroit, the first sister in the entire country to be so named. Eventually, along with Father Ed Baldwin, Sister Jane was asked to form the Office for Permanent Deacons...again, the first in the country. Keep in mind that it was the first time that permanent deacons were restored to the church since the eleventh century.

Sister Jane then went on to work with Bishop Dozier of Memphis, Tennessee, and to become the first woman diaconate director in the United States. As Sister Jane of the Good Shepherd, she not only looked after each deacon candidate, but

recognized the key role that wives of deacons play in the process. Sister Jane is remembered as a courageous woman who ventured to call for justice when the role of women was taken for granted. When Sister went on to serve as founder of the Diocesan Diaconate in Covington, Kentucky, she also worked in the Tribunal, ministering to people in failed marriages. Thousands of cases characterized by sorrow, heartache and disillusionment passed through her hands.

Though Sister was truly at home and of tremendous service to these places, she felt the need to be closer to her family and perhaps be of service to a parish closer to family and home. Lo and behold! It's all history from there. Sister Jane moved to Lapeer, signed up, and wanted to be of service. And in twenty-one years she has served as director of the RCIA, Director of Religious Education for middle school, as well as the person for annulments, bereavement ministry, grief, illness, and everyday pastoral ministry. And, of course, Advent wouldn't be the same without her annual appeal advocating the needs of the retired religious. Would you believe that in seventeen years Sister has brought in over \$183,000 for this annual cause and at the same time, making us so aware of the needs of the retired religious. There's no telling how many miles Sister put on her car or traveled to be of service to people she knew and loved.

Sister Jane, please accept our gratitude for being a part of our lives. Accept our esteem for being a valiant woman, tender, compassionate and loyal. A pioneer. A leader. And for remaining so much a part of our life and experience.