

Third Sunday of Easter
April 15, 2018
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

Some of us have been part of the care given and received at the Élisabeth Bruyère hospital. They offer rehabilitation to the elderly and to those who have suffered strokes. The caregivers help to answer the plea that we heard in the psalm: "Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer." Maybe you have memories of the place; here are mine. As a deacon, I assisted at a daily Mass for the Sisters of Charity. They founded the hospital in 1845, and still keep there a sizeable chapel. A deacon proclaims the Gospel and prepares the altar. It was my first time publicly exercising this ministry in Ottawa - en Français! The hospital cares for the elderly and also gives palliative care to the dying. As a newly ordained priest, I there gave the "last rites" to a friend, before celebrating her funeral: more firsts. "I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety." The efforts of all the hospital's caregivers help to comfort and heal those weakened by the burden of years. They console the residents of the city, and continue the work of Élisabeth Bruyère. She is the founder of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa. For 31 years, she established hospitals, schools and missions throughout Ontario, Quebec and New York State.

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19
Ps 4
1 Jn 2:1-5
Lk 24:35-48

Today is (yesterday was) a special day for the Archdiocese of Ottawa. On her path towards canonization, Mother Élisabeth Bruyère was elevated by Pope Francis: from Servant of God to Venerable. Her ministry is an encounter with the risen Lord, a witness that led her to proclaim in word and deed; teaching and example; hard work in hard times.

But did her call to Ottawa come from a private revelation? We remember how St. Theresa of Calcutta received her call within a call to serve the poorest of the poor; a direct experience of the risen Lord. But that wasn't the case for Élisabeth Bruyère. She had joined the Grey Nuns six years earlier in Montreal. At the age of 26, she was tasked with the mission to Ottawa. She said, "If I accept, it is to be of service to my community [...] but I do not feel any calling. If my superiors do not find any good reasons to refuse, I leave the decision up to their prudence; for myself, I reserve nothing but obedience." As her biographer states, "Élisabeth will maintain this attitude throughout her life. What strength is required by such obedience!" In the second reading, St. John says, "Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments." In her obedience, Élisabeth Bruyère encountered the risen Jesus. She helped to bear his Cross, console his heart and caress his wounds. She knew his suffering and love until entering eternal rest at the age of 58. Her last words were "My beloved Jesus."

At last a vision, infused by God; merited by obedience but given as grace.
"Whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection."

Élisabeth Bruyère says she didn't "feel any calling," so she stood upon her vows. Did she feel any doubts? The apostles did when Jesus stood among them. They were startled and terrified. He asked, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" To bring them peace, he showed his hands and feet; he let them touch his flesh and the feel bones beneath; he asked for food and ate in their presence. Their joy was still wondering and disbelieving so he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures: that he was the suffering servant who died for the forgiveness of sins. Now they could witness to the Resurrection of the Author of Life. Later, given hope at the Ascension and power at Pentecost, they could proclaim the Gospel in his name to all nations; beginning in Jerusalem, starting at the temple gate. Like the apostles in the upper room, we are deepened in faith by the Eucharist, grown in hope, and strengthened in love. These virtues ease our fears with certainty, peace and joy. For this Eucharist, we give thanks for the virtues that girded Élisabeth Bruyère in her obedience, and which let us flourish in whatever vocation we call our own.