

I am very happy to be with you today on this joyous occasion. Today, we are about to witness a truly momentous event as Sisters Bella and Julie in a few moments will stand before us and vow their entire lives, perpetually, to God. This is in answer to a call which, probably unknown to themselves at that time, was already stirring in their hearts when they were baptised. Through the profession of Perpetual Vows today, they will pledge to live radically the seed planted at their baptismal consecration.

You, the parents and family of Sisters Bella and Julie, and also the people of Korea, have nurtured that seed of God into life. We, Columban Sisters, are full of gratitude to you for the gift of these two Sisters to our Congregation and we know that you will be richly blessed in return for such a gift to us. Thank you.

In their vow of poverty, they are proclaiming to the world their dependence on God and their recognition that all that we have and are is gift from God. Through their living of the vow of chastity they show that they have developed an intimate relationship with the Divine, a relationship of love for God and God's people which will continue to grow and deepen throughout the whole of their lives. And through obedience they have learned to listen in a contemplative way and to respond to the Word of God with courage and conviction.

All of this is only possible because each of them has heard God name her, "My chosen one in whom my soul delights". Each of them has heard him say, "Do not be afraid for I am with you" and they have taken to their hearts the words of Jesus that we heard in the Gospel, "You did not choose me, I chose you and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last."

Our Congregational Constitutions (#4) state, "Through this commitment, we manifest our willingness to leave all things for the sake of Christ and to be available for the proclamation of the Kingdom to those to whom we are sent." And, as you know, Sisters Bella and Julie were sent in this spirit to the Philippines where they have followed the example of Christ and been particularly attentive to the cry of the poor through their ministry to the children and families who make their home in the cemetery of Pasay in Manila. They have not only been involved in providing healthy meals for these children and offering tuition and music classes. In their tireless efforts to improve the living conditions of this group of families, they have also been richly blessed and experienced great life in this place where the living live among the dead.

They have surely become God's servants who have been endowed with his spirit so that they may bring true justice to the nations, who do not cry out nor shout aloud, nor break the crushed reed nor quench the wavering flame. And in preparing to return to this mission in the Philippines after making Final Vows, they are showing that they will neither waver nor be crushed until true justice is established on earth.

This will only be possible as Sisters Bella and Julie allow themselves to be drawn to an ever deeper union and love for God in Christ and as they learn more deeply that, as St Paul tells us, "Love does not come to an end. There are three things that last; faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love." This ceremony of profession of Perpetual Vows is a celebration of this love.

As part of the ceremony which follows and as a symbol of their lifelong consecration to God, Sisters Bella and Julie will receive a ring. In the inside of this ring is inscribed the motto of

each Sister, a motto which expresses the personal spirituality of each one, the spirituality which will be a source of strength through every difficulty and challenge which life will bring to them.

“Be still and know that I am your God” is the motto chosen by Sister Julie and symbolic of what both Sisters have learned from St John of the Cross that “Silence is God’s first language.” And it is in this stillness and silence that they will learn the wisdom of the motto of Sister Bella, “Through Christ, with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.” In God, and only in God, all things are possible. As the Gospel reminds us, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in them, bears fruit in plenty for cut off from me you can do nothing.”

These last several years of formation in our Columban missionary life, Sisters Bella and Julie have joined all of us in the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban as, “Urged on by the Spirit, we joyfully respond to God’s call to leave all things and commit ourselves to bring the Father’s saving love to those to whom we are sent, so that all may be one to the glory of God.” (Constitutions #3)

Today, Columban Sisters are responding to this call of God in many countries throughout the world, (in the USA, Peru, Chile, Ireland, Scotland, England, Pakistan, Myanmar and the Philippines) and at this moment in time we are all united in praying for Sisters Bella and Julie.

In a small village in the south east of Ireland, the parishioners in the area where our patron, St Columban, was born are also united with us today, so many miles away from Seoul, Korea. During their recent time in Ireland, Sisters Bella and Julie received lanterns from this parish, symbols of the light they need in their hearts in order to be able “to be the light of the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison and those who live in darkness from the dungeon”. These prayers of intercession, scattered throughout the world, are a symbol of the Universal Church to which we all belong.

And in making perpetual Vows today, Sisters Bella and Julie are united with St Columban in exclaiming, “Lord, you are our everything, our life, our light, our salvation, our food, our drink, our God.” Amen

Sr. Ann Gray, SSC