

Beth DiNatale Johnson

I'm Beth Johnson and I'm a historian, the director of the Ursuline Studies Program at the College, a wife and the mother of a grown son. I was raised in a Christian home, attended Lutheran High School East and have been a member of several protestant churches Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and the Church of Christ. I must confess that I had neither met nor known an Ursuline sister until I came to campus in the spring of 2000. So, when Sr. Joan asked for volunteers to speak at tonight's prayer service, I was sure that she didn't really want me—

Well, you all know Sr. Joan, she doesn't take no for an answer and she was also very clear about what I could and could not do:

1. She warned me not to be historical or 'professorial,' by which I think she meant not to lecture;
2. she insisted that I should not go on and on--- 2 to 3 minutes at most;
3. Focus on some of the things I had learned or experienced through the Mission and Heritage Commission.

So, let me see what I can do. I am not in the habit of hearing voices, or at least if I do hear them I don't readily share that information....but, from time to time I believe I have heard the "still small voice" referred to in the Old Testament in the chapter of 1 Kings 19:12

1. the first time I visited campus, I heard a 'voice' that told me I was in a good place and that I should accept the challenges that lay ahead even if I didn't know what they would be.
2. I had that same experience when I was asked to join the Mission & Heritage Commission –it was a call to receive something that I had not asked for, and I have learned to listen to those voices and opportunities...whatever they might be.

I have to admit, some nights, it seemed like a burden- one more item on that list of things to do. But the burden always seemed lighter as I came up the stairs to this building and sacred place, and was warmly greeted by faces that grew more and more familiar. I came to enjoy our time of fellowship with new found friends. Even more important, was the opportunity to share, pray and learn about the words and gifts of St Angela and the company of Ursulines.

Last fall, Sr. Joan gave us a journal and asked that we record our thoughts. In preparation for tonight, I thumbed through mine and came upon a wrinkled and dry autumn leaf. It brought to mind an evening last fall, when we found fall leaves scattered on the tables. Sr. Joan asked each of us to select one, write about it and then share our thoughts. That simple task represents for me what my time on the Mission and Heritage Commission has meant and how I can take the Ursuline mission and core values of contemplation, justice, and compassion into my own life and into the world I inhabit.

- First, the leaves, resplendent in their autumnal colors of gold, bronze and burgundy, made me aware of how often we forget to take time just to be. To practice private meditation and the call to silence and reflection. There is an art to contemplation, one which I am still trying to learn.
- Secondly, studying my individual leaf, honoring its shape, color and size, led me to reflect on how each of us, like the leaves of a tree, are unique, and yet we are all children of God. We need to honor, respect one another and accept differences with compassion.
- Finally, the leaves reminded me that we live in a beautiful world and we need to respect it. We need to appreciate the space/ environment / relationships that we have and work to improve them, rather than complain about what we don't have. This is both a personal and a communal responsibility that show we value world that God has created.

So, for me, the Mission and Heritage Committee has been a reminder to listen to the indwelling voice of God and to reflect on its meaning in my daily life; to remember that nothing happens by chance if you follow where you are led;and that sometimes when you hear a voice, it is God answering the Psalmist's prayer in 25:4 which says "Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths."