

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

- Suzanne Johnson: So, I would like to invite Sister St. Louise de Marillac to come forward and introduce our next speaker. I know we're a little early, Sister, but I thought we'd start early, that way, if we need to run over, we're good.
- St. Louise de M: It's so wonderful to be back here with you this morning, bright and early, to get started on our final day of this conference. It's really a pleasure for me to be able to introduce one of the leaders up here in the Pittsburgh Diocese, Father Joseph Mele.
- St. Louise de M: So, I want to begin by saying, Father Mele, I see that you were ordained back in 1973. You know, from my vantage point Father, you're just a baby.
- St. Louise de M: Father Mele currently serves as the Episcopal Vicar for Leadership Development and Evangelization and he is the Head of the Secretariat for that same department, Director of the Department of Clergy and Parish Leadership Development, also for the Diocese of Pittsburgh.
- St. Louise de M: His previous assignments included Rector, Vice-Rector and Director of Spiritual Formation at St Paul's Seminary, Director of the Department for Pre-ordination Formation and Vicar General for the Diocese of Pittsburgh.
- St. Louise de M: He sounds like a mover and a shaker to me. He holds a long list of degrees, culminating in a doctorate in communications and rhetoric from Duquesne University. He is also the author of a book entitled, *The Sacred Conversation: The Art of Catholic Preaching and the New Evangelization*.
- St. Louise de M: Father Mele joins us this morning, all of the daughters, all of the ladies, to talk about how the more things change, the more they stay the same.
- St. Louise de M: I just want to say, I venture that the one thing that stays the same throughout all these hundreds and hundreds of years, is that each of us in this room, is able to see the face of Christ in every sick, poor, orphaned person that we come in contact with. So, Father, help us to understand how it stays the same. Please welcome Father Mele.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: Good morning, everybody.
- Congregants: Good morning, Father.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: St. Louise de Marillac said it as best as it could be said. I hope I measure up now to help fulfill the request that she made. Thank you for having me here today, and I was told that sister kept you a little later last night with a late night catechism, so it's wonderful to see you up this early and willing to listen to more.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: I understand you took in a great deal yesterday and I heard it was all wonderful ever since you arrived, but particularly yesterday. So, I hope that we can

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

continue to process so much at one time. And I hope what I have to add is another part of the contribution.

Fr. Joseph Mele: I want to thank Suzanne for having me on the roster. Nice to see Father Richard again, I had him come to a couple of the parishes where I was pastor, and he and his brother did a fantastic job, so it's nice to be able to be with him again. And of course, my good friend and colleague, Father Jim Gretz, your spiritual moderator in the Diocese.

Fr. Joseph Mele: If I can also take a moment to thank my dear friends, all of the planning committee, but especially Peggy and Ruth and Terry. They met with me a long time ago to help me understand what their expectation was. That meant a great deal to me that we were able to meet together and to prepare that long ago.

Fr. Joseph Mele: I remember another significant gathering, like your gathering is significant, but here in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, when I was still seminarian and we were in a different ballroom, but as many people as we are right now. People were doing welcomings and then finally the keynote speaker was a woman religious, a sister from St. Louis, Missouri. I think there's some St. Louis people here.

Fr. Joseph Mele: The sister was going to speak on the theme of kerygma, carrying the joy and the message of Jesus Christ and the gospel into the world. This was back in the early 1970's and she was talking about how to do that with kerygma, with joy filled hearts and spirits, and then carrying it out in service, particularly service to the poor. But she kept mentioning that word 'kerygma', and she could see maybe puzzlement on the faces of a lot of different people. We have not heard that word at that time.

Fr. Joseph Mele: So finally she said, "Maybe what I'd better do is tell you, the best translation I'm imagining for Pittsburghers about kerygma, carrying that gospel message and living it out in witness and in service. She said, "Kerygma in Pittsburgh, the best we translate it," and she pulled the microphone very close to her mouth and she said, "Kerygma means, ta-ta-ta-ta-ta, charge! Carry it with great enthusiasm and zeal, and that is what you are all about."

Fr. Joseph Mele: Someone told me that some of the talks are being taped, that made me a little bit nervous. I don't know if this one is. But the first time I was taped, I was sharing that with Father Jim a little earlier, for the Mass for the Homebound at Channel 11 in Pittsburgh. You go there and it's a studio, and you walk into the room, and all that's in the room is a table with a tablecloth over it, serving as the altar. Now the chalice and all the other vessels are there, but nothing else.

Fr. Joseph Mele: I was taken back by that because the room was so barren. There was all this green material everywhere. So I asked, "What's going on here, where ... I thought I was going to be in a little chapel." They said, "Well, actually you're almost in a cathedral, there's a stained glass window behind you, there's a beautiful crucifix, there's ..." I could see it, and they explained to me, "Father we project all of that on there." I said, "You mean everything is being projected while this

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

Mass is being taped and I'm in this beautiful cathedral." They said, "Absolutely." And I said, "Well, if you can do that, could you give me some hair?" And the technician said, "Father Joe, we can, but if you step over to get the wine or water, your hair is going to stay over there."

Fr. Joseph Mele: In my welcome to Pittsburgh I also want to refer to the brilliance of the community in letting out for you, who are visiting from other cities and Diocese in the United States and Canada. I wanted to say they did a great job with one of the most important traditions in Pittsburgh with their cookie table. Wasn't that fantastic? We thank them one more time for that. I joined you for night prayer that evening and then was so happy to discover the cookies table, I took a lot home with me and especially for the seminarians and the people in the seminary.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Such an honor to be invited here to speak. Thank you for having me as your guest. I cherish the role guest. Even though I added my welcome to Pittsburgh, with the other welcomes you have received, I now stand before you as your guest and I am humbled by that, I really am.

Fr. Joseph Mele: As Ladies of Charity, remembering the past and racing the future, you already know what is deep in your heart and what makes you tick as Ladies of Charity. Your personal story and experience as a Lady of Charity is an integral thread in a beautiful tapestry. You are across the Catholic Church, as well as this wonderful nation of ours in general.

Fr. Joseph Mele: You are the presentations of this assembly. It's written in your hearts and witnessed to in the way you've conducted this assembly already. You're not only much liked, you're patron saints, you are here in our midst. Very, very much like the biblical women whose praises are sung in the bible. Wisdom and courage, and still you invited me as an outsider to reflect with you on matters that you have internalized, interiorized and made visible in everything that you do.

Fr. Joseph Mele: You're probably the last one to take credit for it, sometimes even being aware of it. But that is the reality of who you are already. So, thank you for having me in your parlor, your living room, almost part of your kitchen, because like in your catholic homes, that's where the sacred conversations happen. The sacred conversation that I hope I can add a little bit to and receive from. I appreciate your trust.

Fr. Joseph Mele: I was invited, as the introduction stated, to speak on the topic, the more things change, the more things stay the same. Many things remain consistent, even as change happens. That phrase is often said in resigned, or sometimes sarcastic, tone. So, for example, "I moved in to a new office, fancy new office, and still the server crashed all the time like it did anywhere else." The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Fr. Joseph Mele: The phrase was coined by the French writer, Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr. I saw my high school French teacher, Sister Patrice, of Sister of Charity not too long

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

ago. Sister Patrice, I think, what she taught us in high school was one year older than the rest of us who were her students. I remember [inaudible 00:11:21]. I thanked Sister Patrice for all that she gave me and my education, but I also thanked her when I saw her for throwing out my French grades, so I could get into college.

Fr. Joseph Mele: But I also saw one of my other leaders from high school, Sister Mary Matthew. She's now Sister Gertrude Foley. Sister of Charity, she said, and it is one of the most brilliant leaders that I have ever met, and I have learned a great deal about leadership from her. She taught me Latin as well. When I met her, she said, "Joe, what's this position you have now in the Diocese of Pittsburgh?"

Fr. Joseph Mele: I said, "Sister, can you believe it? The Bishop made me an episcopal vicar, I couldn't even conjugate a verb for you in Latin." She smiled and then piously folded her hands, shut her eyes lightly, looked up to heaven and said, "Just goes to show you, there's still mystery in this Catholic Church."

Fr. Joseph Mele: When we say the more things change, the more things stay the same, we are really admitting that change is the only constant in life. Heraclitus, the Greek Philosopher, is credited with that quote, but a wonderful woman, Janet Singer, founder of one of the most effective programs to help people living with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and the storms in their lives, tells the story of going through a very difficult time herself. She said it wasn't until a true friend told her, "Janet, just remember, nothing every stays the same. This storm is going to pass as well."

Fr. Joseph Mele: She always says the words of her friend helped her as she had been feeling that this is it, this is all that's going to be, I'm never going to get out of this. My guess is a lot of people feel that way when they're experiencing trauma or storms in their lives.

Fr. Joseph Mele: It's easy to assume that that's the way it's always going to feel. But many of you work with people who suffer like that, many of you have sat with people contemplating suicide, because they typically feel as if nothing can and ever will change for them and we know how easy it is to lose hope. But thank God you are there for them, to remind them that this storm shall pass as well.

Fr. Joseph Mele: When things are going poorly we take solace in the fact that no matter what, things are not going to stay the same, they might get better or they might get worse, but they're going to be different. What is important is how we handle things in that moment. How we handle them can make a difference.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Conversely, when life is going great for us, we want things to stay the same, don't we? Let's keep everything the same and these happy times will continue indefinitely, but unfortunately that's not the way it works. Again, whether we actively try to keep things as they are or not, change is going to happen.

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

- Fr. Joseph Mele: So what is the use of talking about the more things change, the more things stay the same? Obviously, how we feel about the same depends on the situations. In our day-to-day lives, with a healthy attitude as the distinguishing characteristic for outcomes, we all need to trust our hearts. We need to follow our hearts and continue to live lives according to the values of the gospel.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: For all of you in this room right now, they are the values of this dignified and noble institution, The Ladies of Charity. Whether you call it mindfulness, or what other way you stay focused in a non-judgemental way, paying close attention to the choices you make or some of it we do not make, and how these decisions transform darkened times into a new era of promise and hope.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: Allow me, for a moment now, to be a little more philosophical. Philosophers say we are living in a time that is darkened. That does not mean these times are bad, we never give in to that, and it certainly never means that people are bad. There are so many, many, many more good people than bad.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: Philosophers, when they refer to a darkened age, simply mean that we're living in a time of tremendous upheaval, transition. We all know that during times of paradigmatic change, the first thing we need to do is to let go. Then grieve, in a healthy way, of what we are being called to let go of. Then, as you know, entering to a neutral zone, but in that zone of neutrality to stay there long enough to allow that moment to speak to us. In silence sometimes we hear the most profound voice of all. But it can only happen if we stay in that neutral zone, having let go long enough for the voice to be heard. Not rushing through that zone, until finally we begin to see glimpses of something new, something that we can contribute to, something that we can make a difference about, and with one another, commit to doing so.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: It wasn't very long ago for most of us in this room that some of our ancestors came to the United States. Some came voluntarily, unfortunately, there are some in this room that have ancestors that they did not want to come, but were forced to come by a crime, a sin of slavery. But our ancestors came here, from other beautiful parts of the world. They came from living under the sky, with the sun shining or the rain falling down. They came from open spaces, they came from working hard and then in the evening with the extended family sitting around one table, whether they had a little or they had much, they came.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: Many of our ancestors, isn't it true, came and needed to go into mines, under the ground. To factories, industry, where maybe the only light in that place was one light bulb. Having lived most of their life under the sun, under the sky, they lived in those conditions. It was not that long ago, under those conditions, that they began to run machines. But they were also, weren't they, treated. Like some of them would treat machines they needed to run, and if a machine broke down they had to throw it out, and if they broke down they were thrown out. No matter how many children that woman or man might have at home.

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

- Fr. Joseph Mele: Tremendous transition, rapid change happening all around us. So, philosophically what happens in those moments, tradition seemed to fall apart. Nobody lives in a full tradition any longer, even we in this room live in fragments of traditions. The overarching story that once used to guide us has now begun to disintegrate. A new story, the story to be formed and we need to be part of the tellers of that story and makers and shapers of that story.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: During times of that rapid change and that much confusion, what do people normally do? They do what everybody else does, they begin to focus on self. With sometimes great pain they begin to validly ask, "Who am I, in the midst of all of this? Who am I becoming? Who have I become?"
- Fr. Joseph Mele: These are valid questions. But when we can't answer them alone, then what happens is we can begin to fixate on the focus on self. It can even become an obsession, a chronic condition. We say now, this is not only a darkened age, but sometimes it's an age of narcissism.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: Narcissus, remember him? The little Greek deity who all the other deities thought so fondly of, and so they designed that he was going to meet another deity, that he would fall in love with. So he goes on the course of the journey, but the deities all want to give him a test to make sure he's going to love her the way she deserves to be loved. So they put a big fire in the road, a huge fire, and when he comes upon the fire he backs up. He doesn't look on the other side of the fire, to the one who he will behold and one waiting for him.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: Fearful of the fire, he looks down and there's the puddle and he notices there's a reflection in the puddle, that's an image of his face, and instead of looking at the fire, and knowing he can get through that fire, and there is someone to behold, a face waiting for him. He makes a decision to stay fixed on his own face, his own image in that puddle and is punished for eternity to remain there forever.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: That's why Pope, St. John Paul II used to say, "We need to encounter the holy other again." We need to encounter the totally 'not us' person. It is this other than ourself that Pope Francis now tells us, "We need more than ever," we need to encounter the other person the only way that will help us to move through a darkened age. All of the saints tell us, the only way to do that is to look into the eyes of who you behold in every moment that you do.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: In the neutral zone, when we let go long enough, you begin to see other people appearing. They may appear as a stranger, the more we look them in the eye, the freer we become, we will never be the same. All things will change for the best in a twinkle of an eye.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: So stay with me just a little bit more as a philosopher. Philosophers teach that in darkened times, when most people are afraid by the confusion in their lives, what begins to happen is certain roles start to surface in the night sky. Certain roles surface like stars in that sky. Slowly but surely, over time, these roles begin

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

to connect to each other, they form a constellation, and just like any ship navigating through a night, those constellations begin to show the way, they slowly provide new light. Light is so important, especially when we need to navigate through a night we all love the light.

Fr. Joseph Mele: I enjoy telling the story about Michael O'Donnell in Ireland. He and his young wife, Mary, waiting for their first child. Sure enough, early in the morning before the light, while it's still dark, they're out there milking the cows and Mary goes into labor. "Michael hurry, go back to the house call the doctor, I'm going to have my baby. I'll have to have it here in the barn."

Fr. Joseph Mele: Michael runs, calls the doctor, comes back and says, "The doctor told me to get hot water and a lot of towels, he'll be here in a moment." Sure enough the doctor shows up. Mary is down in the hay and he kneels down and he says, "Come on, Mary, push. Come on, Mary, push. Oh, look, Michael bring the light here, a little closer. Bring the light closer. Oh, Michael look, you and Mary are parents of a little baby boy." And Michael's so happy, he's standing up proud.

Fr. Joseph Mele: And the doctor says, "Oh, Michael, wait a minute here, bring the light here, bring the light here." So Michael gets down, the lantern close to Mary. He says, "Oh, Mary, push, push, push, Mary, Mary." "Oh," the doctor says, "Look, you have twins. God bless you." And Michael is holding his chest out, he's pounding his chest, he is so proud and the doctor says, "Oh, wait a minute Michael, here, bring the light here. Michael you're the first one to have triplets in this village!" And Michael's jumping up and down, and the doctor says, "Fourth time, fifth time, sixth time, bring the light closer." Finally, Michael stands up and he says, "Doctor, with all due respect, do you think it's the light that's attracting them?" They love the light.

Fr. Joseph Mele: I love the story of Father Carretto, maybe some of you read him. Letters from the Desert. He gave his whole life to solitude in the desert and he taught in those letters that sometimes the most redeeming light of all comes during the middle of the night in the desert.

Fr. Joseph Mele: It's in the blazing sun, the brilliance of the light of the daytime that sometimes we're blinded, we really think we see, but we do not. But in the loneliness of the night, oftentimes a light appears that gives us the best direction of all. But we need that light, we need the constellations in the sky and we need the important roles that are surfacing to show us the way.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Well, I don't need to tell you that I firmly believe God has given us, in this assembly, in this room this morning, one of those rising roles. Casting light in the midst already, that is surfaced in this time. That He's giving off a brilliant light and beginning to lead others out of a darkened time into a new beginning of encountering the sacred other, who is not only our beloved Lord Jesus Christ and his canonized saints, but the stranger. Particularly those on the fringes and the margins of life that we begin to look into their eyes because of the role who you are.

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

- Fr. Joseph Mele: That role takes it place to help form a constellation in the night sky that will guide many, many others. Not only in the local Diocesan Churches where you serve, or your parishes, or institutions that the church across America and even into the entire world, through the role of the Lady of Charity, born by the Vincentian spirituality, shaped by the social gospel, particularly the gospel of non-violence.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: I served in parish industry for 35 years before the Bishop asked me to come into formation work. It was always in the parish that I enjoyed working alongside your members. I enjoyed working alongside Ladies of Charity. They did more than any other lay apostolic in the parish, because I was always learning a great deal from you.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: In preparing this address for this morning, I asked some of you what the members of the assembly might want to hear. In my presentation related to the assembly's theme, remember the past, embrace the future, some of you mentioned questions around, how are we going to bring together various groups of the Ladies of Charity, especially in light of limited resources, as well as, we need recruits? We need younger women to come on board with us.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: Some say, what are the ways to reach out to pastors in our parishes, that sometimes are so overworked? But also, in some cases, "Father Joe, it doesn't seem they cherish the same values that we hold, it doesn't seem that we have a common vision of what poverty really means and how the marginalized are treated in their daily lives. How do we make a bridge, how do we dialogue with them, our fathers our brothers?"
- Fr. Joseph Mele: Others express not only a sadness, but it seems doors of opportunity are shut on you and the services you know you can offer. But there's also justified anger, when you discover that the people sometimes shutting the doors are your own neighbors, your own parishioners. The very people that you never imagined would see things so differently from what you hold and cherish, and what the gospel compels you and every disciple of Christ to do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because when it's done in His name, you know it becomes transformed here. It is not just another act of service. Done in His name, to His honor and His glory, it has the power to transform.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: So, as I prayed over these expressions of interest and concern and reflected and pondered more and more and more, faces began to appear. Faces of so many of your members, many still living, some in this room, also many of them now belong to God. Women of Charity that share your legacy and the legacy of the saints you honor. Women who were the founders of your mission and your purpose.
- Fr. Joseph Mele: Once again, I began to think of the metaphor of tapestry, the quilt. The quilt so rich in diversity, color and design, creativity and imagination. There's something

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

so beautiful and distinctive about the legacy of the Ladies of Charity, something so good. So, as I begin to conclude, I want to, as an outsider, tell you what I see in those faces and how they might reflect an image of other faces for you, and maybe if you allow it, to humbly allow God to tell you in these faces, the Father's speaking about, "I see you, my daughter, I see you."

Fr. Joseph Mele: You know, we call it koinonia, it's another fancy Greek word, but it simply means that when we look into one another's eyes and a face appears, we realize we are all sisters and brothers, we are all one family.

Fr. Joseph Mele: So, allow me for the closing moments, to describe what I saw in those faces that I began to see appear as I prayed and reflected for this talk. The more things change, the more things stay the same.

Fr. Joseph Mele: I saw Ladies of Charity that incredibly work hard, no nonsense kind of women. Women that know what makes you tick. Pittsburgh, as you've come to discover, if you've been here a few days, are filled with the kind of people that really enjoy working hard. People here work hard and they pass along the same honest values, maybe from where you come. Values like, you never kick a person when they're down, there's always another chair at our table even if we have to go without, we're happier knowing that we've helped you. Pittsburghers are maybe like your family, your home where you were raised, where you heard your mom or your dad say, "We'll make do, let's pull up another chair for a visitor, somehow the Lord will provide tomorrow, we'll have enough and enough is all we need, we don't need more than enough."

Fr. Joseph Mele: Number two, I saw faces that I can describe of women who think with the church. Saint Paulinus of Nola, echo Christ. Ladies of Charity, I've come to know, do not have many extremes type O blood. Pretty much the same when it comes to the truth, the magisterium of the church. You're diverse, that makes you even more endearing, many of you are cosmopolitan, this helps you to see things differently, but always within the horizon that keeps us identifiably catholic. There's plenty of room for differences in the Catholic Church. But your membership have few that go outside the parameters, for problems or divisions or unnecessary schisms can easily exist or happen.

Fr. Joseph Mele: You're trusted for your fidelity, your credentials of loyalty. You're not afraid of originality, but never at the expense to go against sound teachings or authentic witnessing to the good will of God.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Number three, I saw the faces that you have a great pride for one another's accomplishments. When I came to night prayer the other night, I said, "Wow, this looks fantastic", and everybody in that small group gave credit to everybody else and not themselves. You were proud of what your members were accomplishing. This sensibility helps you as a lay movement, because it collectively advances your strong Vincentian identity. It is what helps you when doors are shut, not to give up. And I know you will not give up. I read about

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

some of your major initiatives and I guarantee you I will pray for them, especially that you do not give up on them, they have to happen.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Number four, you're close to your people. You know what Pope Francis means when he says, "Smell like your sheep." Many today have become collectors of celebrities. People who are notorious for being overly refined, thinking of class divisions. Their sheep smell like cologne or perfume. What about the love of Lady of Charity? Who comes to mind for you as I'm describing this? Is she in this room with you, did you mentor her, did she mentor you? Women that know so many people in this assembly, having been here only for a few days and some of you know each other by name already.

Fr. Joseph Mele: I love the story about one of the Franciscan sisters in Pittsburgh, at St. Francis Hospital, now closed, but at their nursing school, who gave a pop exam to her students. At the bottom of the exam the, tenth questions, it was a bonus question, and it said, "What's the name of the woman who cleans our classroom?" And as the other young women left the room they said, "Sister, you were kidding, weren't you? That wasn't a serious question." She said, "Oh, I absolutely am serious." She said, "That is the bonus question that will take a B-grade to an A-grade, because in this hospital, in this nursing school, everybody is important, every single person has a name and every single person is valued." You stay close to the people you serve.

Fr. Joseph Mele: The fifth characteristic, generosity. It's called diaconia, the word for which we have the deacons now, the permanent deacons in the church, those who do the lowly services, the tasks left behind.

Fr. Joseph Mele: You know where that came from? It came from the early church, when they celebrated Eucharist. At the end of Holy Mass there would be a basket with parchment, or slips of paper. Written on them would be a task for the week ahead for the faith community and people would come up and they would take one.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Some people would take one, they would read it and they would put it back. The deacons would wait until the end, and then when nobody else was looking they would come up and they would take what was left over. The task no-one else wanted to do, that is also you. In the parishes especially, but other institutions where you serve you do the lowly task, and you do them ... If there were a crucifix here, I would point to the crucifix. You do it because that lowly task, He did for you, He did for me, He did for our children when no-one else

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

would. So, the deacons would not only do it, but they would kiss that piece of parchment because they would do it in His honor.

Fr. Joseph Mele: The sixth characteristic, Ladies of Charity are well informed. That's why I enjoyed them so much. The rich history of not only doing but studying why we do what we're called to do. It's not easy to serve the way in which you are called to serve. There are many challenges but you rise to the occasion and people respect you because you stay up on things. You're able to explain the background, you're able to explain the reason why, and that invites other people, even those who may be obstinate at first, to at least consider what you do and why you do it. Things that really matter. Your ongoing spiritual formation and your lifelong willingness to keep learning enriches your local community of Ladies of Charity, but the institutions at large as well.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Number seven, you encourage vocations. Not only to the priesthood, but to vocations to service to the church in general. I want to thank you for that. All pastoral leaders, lay leaders, lay ecclesial ministers, deacons and their wives, priests, bishops, cardinals, pope need to be encouraged more than ever today, but we also need young and vibrant people to replace us, energetic leaders. So, thank you for promoting church vocations as one of your premier values.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Number eight, you never forget your elderly members. I love the stories that I read about in your program booklet. A lot of work went into there, I was touched very deeply by reading Grace Eckhardt's name of Happy Memory in Pittsburgh. Also the stories you tell about former members that are still alive that may be no longer able to actively be involved. Stories about the way things were. These stories are like treasure boxes, the ones we have in our home, that every time we open them up, especially for the grandchildren, it allows them to discover their personal identity in one more way, and remember those treasures of remembering. What the bible says, "Every memory, especially of someone we love, is a gift from God so that we can continue to laugh in the days to come", and we can, because by remembering, especially the loved ones, we know we're going to see them again.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Number nine, this assembly. Thank you for being here, thank the committee for their hard work. But thanks to the members who have come here to Pittsburgh. Members I met from Austin, Texas, members I met at night prayer from Baltimore. Members from St. Louis, how we laugh when I ask, "You have cookie tables in Missouri?" And they said, "Some of the Italian families do," then the one woman said, "But I'm Irish, we like a beer table." She said it, I didn't say it. Then the third woman there said, "Well, I'm German and we like both." It's getting better all the time.

Fr. Joseph Mele: And finally, when I see the faces that appear, I think of deep sea diving. You go deep enough into, not only language and words, relationships, but you go where communion is formed. You go where you create a bond. You know one another so well that you've formed not only a relationship but a communion. And believe me, as your guest, that spirit of communion is what I felt when I

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same"

Very Reverend Joseph Mele, VE, PhD

immediately first entered into this assembly, a Holy Communion. And that's why I commend you for being Eucharistic. Because the more things change, the more things stay the same.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Then finally, I just want to mention about Simone Weil, a young French philosopher, she died too young, she was Jewish. One day she met a group of catholic women on their way into church, they were chanting a hymn. She fell in love with that melody and she followed them into the church. I don't know if you know her story, it's worthwhile reading, Simone Weil, W-E-I-L.

Fr. Joseph Mele: Going into the church there was adoration with the Holy Eucharist, the blessed sacrament. She stood in the back of the church, had no idea. She grew up Jewish, but not in a religious family at all. She said that she stood there and she watched the backs of the women bowed down before the Eucharist. She became aware, not only of them, but of the sacred [inaudible 00:43:59]. And before she could gaze upon him, she said, "I started to discover there were eyes already gazing on me and it was not my imagination."

Fr. Joseph Mele: Although she was Jewish and she never converted, her spiritual director wanted her to be baptized, but she said, "I cannot be baptized, because I'm unbaptized and I tell people what I'm encountering and who I'm experiencing, they will say, 'Well, it's just because you're a member of that body.'"

Fr. Joseph Mele: She said, "I need to be a guest. I need to be an outsider to tell them this is real and I hope you, who have grown up with Him love Him the way I have come to love Him and could see Him." She began to have visions. An unbaptized woman blessed with visions of Jesus Christ. Then she said, what I believe is one of her most profound, and she was probably the most brilliant women of that century, Simone Weil. She said, "It's that one tiny consecrate host that holds a billion of you together and more. That host holds you in Holy Communion and for you who receive that host, you become the one you receive. The world needs you."

Fr. Joseph Mele: And my sisters, the role of Ladies of Charity, surfacing into the night sky, starting to form a constellation for us to travel through the night is because of you, and may I sincerely thank you.