Sister Dominic Foley celebrated her Diamond Jubilee of Religious Profession on March 1. Ballarat born, Sister joined the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph in January 1946. After her novitiate training in Sydney, she was professed as a Sister of St Joseph in the Mother House Chapel – Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney – on January 6, 1949. She then returned to Victoria and began her teaching ministry. She calls herself the “Happy Wanderer”, for her nomadic teaching years took her to country and city schools in every Diocese in Victoria as teacher and Principal over a period of 31 years. In 1981 her ministry brought her to Ballarat where she spent three years at the Catholic Education Office and finally in 1984 she commenced at Australian Catholic University – Aquinas Campus, where she had ten happy and memorable years with students and staff. This completed her involvement in the whole cycle of Catholic Education – from class teaching to teacher administration, to teacher training – so satisfying, grace-filled and personally fulfilling.

In 1994 Sr Dominic semi-retired and began pastoral visitation in Ballarat. Belonging to the Cathedral Parish is a joy for her, as she enjoys coffee and friendship with parishioners after midday Mass and is able to participate in the liturgical life of the place where she was baptised and confirmed. 2009 is proving to be a SPECIAL year of joy and thanks to God, to her religious sisters, her family and friends, as she celebrates the Diamond Jubilee – 60 faithful years – of her Religious Profession. May she be blessed to continue God’s work with joy, dignity and prayer for the time ahead.

Photo: Sister Dominic with Bishops Peter Connors and Ronald Mulkearns

The Sisters of Mercy, Ballarat East gathered on Sunday, March 1 to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee – 70 years - of Religious Profession of Sr. Mary of Mercy. Bishop Connors was the celebrant for the Jubilee Mass which was followed by a luncheon with Sisters and friends.

Born in 1914, Sr. Mercy entered the Convent of Mercy, Ballarat East on July 2, 1937 and was professed as a Sister of Mercy on February 23, 1939. During her religious life, Sr. Mercy taught for many years in the Junior School of Sacred Heart College and cared for the juniors in the Boarding School. She was also Principal of St. James’ Primary School, Sebastopol. At the conclusion of her teaching career, Sr. Mercy lived in both the parishes of Mortlake and Donald for a number of years and was greatly loved and respected as a member of both local communities.
In responding to her Jubilee celebrations, Sr. Mercy reminisced on her own schooldays as Sacred Heart College and on her life as a Sister of Mercy. She said, “Firstly, the sisters taught and loved me. Later, in community the Sisters shared their friendship, support and Mercy spirit. Over the years I soaked up Mercy, it was all around me and my life became centred in Mercy. The older I get the more I can see God’s plan leading me. I praise Him for His loving gifts and thank Him for His care of me. I also thank each of you present with me today and the endless number I have met along the way who have touched my life. My heart beats faster when I think of the wonder of it all. “Thank you” does not seem to do justice to what I want to say. Maybe rather, “Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!”

Photo: Sr. Mercy (left) with Sr. M. Monica (Donald)

**Homily for the Jubilee Mass - Sister Mary of Mercy RSM**

I have many pleasant memories of making visits to the communities along the Sunraysia Highway of the Diocese. It was very soon after I came to Ballarat in July 1997 that I met Sister Mercy and Sister Monica in their large and probably not very comfortable home at Donald. Sister Mercy would send me on my way back to Ballarat with a several containers of stewed fruit from the deep freeze in the Convent kitchen. Over the years I have often reflected upon what life must have been like in those northern districts during the great depression and during the Second World War. And being dressed up as a Sister of Mercy would not have made life any easier in dealing with the heat and the dust, not to mention the mouse plagues. Fortunately and probably because of the prolonged drought I have not had to deal with this frightening phenomenon of finding a nest of mice in my bed.

I also have noted the many large convents scattered throughout the northern Wimmera that provided boarding accommodation for girls from the even more remote districts of the Diocese of Ballarat and beyond. All if not most of you have spent some years living in what might appear to be the wilderness of the Diocese. But you would quickly tell me that you found so much that was both good and beautiful in those communities. You knew that you were being faithful to the charism, to the vision of Catherine McAuley. Moreover, you were aware of the presence of God manifested in the people whose lives you shared and in the events that remain indelibly impressed in your memories. Today as we recognise and give thanks to God for the manner in which Sister Mercy has faithfully lived out the commitment that she made seventy years ago, you understand something of her story and of the reasons why you gladly salute her as a Woman of Mercy today.

Our Gospel for this first Sunday of Lent is very brief but behind the words there is much that challenges and consoles us as we enter into this time of preparation for the celebration of the Easter mysteries. As soon as he was baptised at the hands of John and proclaimed to be the Son of God, Jesus is literally cast out by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days. It was to be an experience that was in some ways similar to the journey in the wilderness of the people of ancient Israel after they had come through the waters of the sea on their way to the Land of Promise. We recall that after Paul received his call from Jesus, the Risen Christ to be his apostle to the Nations, he too went out in to the desert like Elijah of old to seek God and to come to grips with his new prophetic commission.

During his own period of living in the wilderness Jesus was alone with the Spirit of God and with the spirit of evil personified in the wild beasts but also with the angels. The themes of conflict and of abiding communion would be repeated over and over again when Jesus took up the mission that had been given to him. It was a period of struggle for Jesus with the forces of evil which he would confront in the coming years. But he was able to claim victory thanks to the knowledge that God would never fail him but would strengthen and protect him at the hour of battle. The assurance given to Noah of old that God would be ever faithful to the covenant that he had made with the human family would have made it possible for Jesus to come out of the wilderness strengthened for praise, pain and mission.

As Sister Mercy reflects on her journey as a woman of Mercy, she recognises that all through these many years, Jesus has been her companion and her strength. She knows that he has
inserted himself into the whole human experience of temptation, of loneliness, of pain, of suffering, of rejection and of failure according to human standards. As the Letter to the Hebrews says, Jesus was made “completely like his brothers and sisters. In him we have a high priest who can feel our weaknesses with us for he was tempted in every way as we are, though he is without sin”.

Sister Mercy knows that compassion is not learned without suffering. Unless we have suffered, we don’t really understand what compassion is, nor can we comfort someone who is suffering. Unless we have cried, we cannot dry the tears of others. Unless we have walked in darkness, we cannot help wanderers to find their way. When we have suffered, we can become pathfinders for others.

As we move into the season of Lent, our thoughts are very much focussed on the celebration of the great victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death in which we shall share because of our Baptismal calling. It is a reminder to us that in a sense all through life we are living in the wilderness. We are beset with the struggle against the forces of evil and are subject to all kinds of temptations. Yet there is the assurance that God is on our side. God will not fail to be faithful to the covenant God has made with us. Moreover, because Jesus has been through temptation and has experienced the wilderness, he understands us and is able to help us. Hence, we can approach him with confidence knowing that we will have mercy from him and find grace in our time of need. He is the angel always at our side.

*Bishop Peter Connors*