

FATHER MATTHEW ERNEST, ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK
ACCEPTS THE ALLELUIA AWARD ON BEHALF OF SR. JANET BAXENDALE, SC
OCTOBER 11, 2019

It is my great pleasure to accept this award on behalf of Sister Janet. As has been mentioned, Sister is unfortunately unable to be with us this evening due to several recent health complications, but she asked me to be sure to extend her warmest greetings to all of you and to thank you for this wonderful award.

As you know, the theme for our gathering during this National Meeting has been "Prayer Without Ceasing," a reminder that our prayer and our work of fostering the liturgical apostolate is meant to be marked by continuity, the passing from one generation to the next of our apostolic faith in Christ and our liturgical traditions and expressions. I am grateful for this opportunity to speak briefly on Sister Janet's behalf this evening, inasmuch as I have been a witness to the way in which she has lived out what has been our focus during this National Meeting.

I first came to know Sister Janet as a seminarian placed under her tutelage, and it was in her classes that she, with her characteristic enthusiasm and tenacity that is well known to so many of us, carefully introduced me and my classmates to the history, theology, spirituality, and pastoral aspects of the Church's liturgical life. In those sessions, we were challenged to expand our understanding of the liturgy beyond simply what we had experienced in our parishes growing up. We were faithfully instructed in the liturgical documents associated with the Second Vatican Council and asked to apply these teachings and lessons to the way we would one day celebrate Mass and the sacraments, the liturgical decisions we would make on behalf of the people whom we would serve, and the manner in which we would arrange and decorate our places of worship. These were all lessons that have served me very well throughout my priesthood, most especially in those first formative years of ministry.

When I was sent to study liturgy after ordination, Sister Janet was one of the first to congratulate me, to wish me her very best, and to offer her prayerful support during the time of my studies. I know that she even regularly checked in on how I was doing with my dissertation director! During those days, she also brought me in to assist with Pope Benedict XVI's visit to New York in 2008. Once again, she took me under her wing and helped me at the time to navigate through the complexity of personalities and details involved in such a daunting undertaking.

When I eventually took up her former position as liturgy professor at the seminary and director of the archdiocesan Liturgy Office, Sister Janet couldn't have been a more gracious and enthusiastic supporter of my fledgling efforts to foster the liturgical life in New York. In her current role as Chair of our archdiocesan Art and Architecture Committee, I have come to rely on her keen insights, wealth of experience, and her discerning editorial eye. (If you are looking for a great proof-reader, look no further than Sister Janet Baxendale!) Over the years, she has become an indispensable colleague, an energetic collaborator, and, I am grateful to say, a trusted and dear friend.

I bring all of this up at this time because it seems to me that Sister Janet is such an exemplary model of what it means to be a liturgist who ensures that the Church "prays without ceasing." Her generosity in handing on the Church's liturgical theology and traditions to the next generation is something that I have been privileged to witness firsthand and have benefitted from in my ministry. I know that, in this room, I am not alone in feeling a deep sense of gratitude to her for all that she has contributed to the Church's liturgical life both in New York and throughout the United States.

And so, won't you join me in saying "thank you" this evening to Sister Janet as she receives this well-deserved award. Let us keep her in our prayers during her current illness, and, inspired by her life's work, may we pass the torch she has so faithfully given to us to the next generation, as we play our own part in carrying on the Church's mission to "pray without ceasing." Thank you.