

AOH Award, 3/10/19

When Paul Hogan called to ask me to accept the Christian Charity Award from the Ancient Order of Hibernians of Holyoke I was surprised and moved but I also thought of many, many others, especially Sisters of St. Joseph and other women religious of Western Massachusetts who were far more qualified to receive this honor. But I am happy to accept it for all the good works performed by my sisters in this area. I am pleased that this recognition comes from the AOH and the LAOH because I have found the members to be fine people who not only treasure their Irish heritage but serve their local community well. I feel a sense of gratitude to all of you.

I first heard of the AOH when I was a child and the name captivated me, not just the lyrical ring to the word Hibernian, also the word Ancient. My father was a student of Irish history and the word Ancient conjured up in my mind that this organization had sprung from the historical lore of ancient Ireland. I was a little disappointed to find that it had begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the U.S. But then I realized that the traditional Irish spirit of friendship, unity and Christian charity was carried out in your activities, especially in your work with Irish immigrants to help them navigate this new world to them. Many of these people were strangers to the Hibernians but as it says in the Gospel, "I was stranger and you welcomed me" and the me of course is Christ, a good reminder for us in the world which we inhabit today.

One of the five questions that Fran Hennessey asked me in his task of doing publicity for this event was to mention what I received from my Irish legacy. There were several but the most important to me was my faith, the cornerstone of my life. When I was growing up I heard many stories of the Irish struggles for freedom and independence, as well as for their Catholic faith. I listened to the talk of heroism in the face of persecution, war and hunger. When at times I feel sorely tested in my faith, as has happened especially in the last few years, there comes into my head a painting, a powerful painting of my Irish forbears. The painting depicts very likely the Penal Days, and in it are several very poor Irish

peasants, men, women, and children half starved, dressed in rough clothing and looking apprehensive. They are gathered in a small room of a neighbor's house participating in a hidden Mass forbidden by their overlords. They risked their lives, their homes and all their possessions to host and or attend this Mass. Since it is always well to remember where we came from it is my hope that the Hibernians can continue to keep alive this kind of sturdy, enduring faith that serves the neighbor as a way of serving God.

Once again I thank you for this award which both humbles me and makes me hopeful. May St. Patrick and St. Brigid and all the other Irish saint bless you and keep you. Thank you

