

# Reflection

*Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate*

Joliet, IL

## **Missioning 2025**

By: Sr. Clarita Schumacher, OSF — June 20, 2025

I begin with two questions for each of us:  
What did it mean for you to be a Joliet Franciscan/Associate when you pronounced your first vows/commitment many years ago?  
What does it mean for you NOW, today, to be a Joliet Franciscan/Associate?

To help me unpack these questions, I revisit the story of Ruth and Naomi. This is a story of two women who leaned on each other, pushed thru the pain and walked into God's blessings together.

Naomi, her husband and two sons were experiencing hard times; a famine in their hometown of Bethlehem. So they packed up and left for the plateau of Moab. The two sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah; both of different cultures and religion. What did they experience in Moab as a family and as individuals?

This part of their story reminds me of our Sister Zita Diebold, our Postulant Mistress in the late 50's. She knew what we would be helpful to us as we began our religious life. In one of her conferences with us, she spoke in detail of the three A's: Acceptance, Adaptability, and Appreciation.

Acceptance: How have I, how do I accept myself, others and God's love?

Adaptability: How do I adapt to places, cultures, change, and schedules?

Appreciation: Am I grateful for my life and what has been dealt to me, my family, our community, all of life?

A THANK YOU in our hearts and on our lips offers a way of approach life with an openness to a bigger perspective. These three A's also are a daily challenge of how we move forward together. I have explored these three A's very often in my life. Words of Wisdom Sister Zita's legacy to me. Thank you, Zita!

In the reading we just heard, Clare admonishes her sisters of how the love we have in our hearts be shown outward in our deeds. With all of our idiosyncrasies, inadequacies, and differences, it was and continues to be not always easy to accept, to adapt, to appreciate. It is a challenge to allow the love we have in our hearts be shown outwardly in our deeds.

The good life in Moab was a short lived as within a few years Naomi's husband died and within ten years both of her sons died. All three women: Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah were widows; grieving. Now Naomi is a destitute woman; filled with fear, grief and uncertainties, and isolation. Had not God punished her, forgot about her. She wrestled with God.

Naomi does not shy away from the reality of what she feels toward God. But she is willing to get near to the God she blames. And, God can always work with a bitter or reluctant heart. Wrestling with God involves engaging closely with God even in pain and confusion.

Yes, we also have had our losses: Motherhouse, Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Guardian Angel Home, our ministries, no vocations, death of our Sisters (so many in a

short span of time), family, friends, and we have had our isolations during the pandemic. We, too, like Naomi may have some kind of fear. We may fear our Congregation's future. We may fear our Government's future. We may fear our own personal future. Am I the one to turn out the light?

Where will I go when I need help? What if I fall and break a bone? What kind of death will I have and when? If a Sister is one of the four Nursing Homes need to go to the Emergency Room, there is an On Call schedule. Sisters who are willing and able to go to the hospital anytime of day or night, so the Sister is not there alone in the ER. Life is not meant to be lived alone; we are present to each other. There is strength in having strong faith-filled women standing together with us, being pilgrims of hope. Just look around this room. I repeat- there is strength ... being pilgrims of hope. We also saw the same strength when so many people marched together this past week defending our democracy.

Word came to Naomi that the famine had stopped and there was prosperity back in Bethlehem. Naomi's husband owned a small piece of land in Bethlehem. A destitute woman filled with fear and uncertainties, and grief could not ignore that. Familiar surroundings and customs offered her something.

Naomi and her two daughters-in-law left Moab where they had been living. On the road back to Bethlehem, land of Judah, Naomi said to them: "Go back, each of you, to your mothers' house. May the Lord be kind to you as you were to the departed and to me. May the Lord grant each of you a husband and a home to which you will find rest." She kissed them goodbye but they wept with loud sobs and told her that they would return with her to her people. Again, Naomi said: "Go back, my

daughters. Why should you come with me? Go back, my lot is too bitter for you." Again they sobbed aloud. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye and returned to Moab. Ruth had every reason to go back home also, to start fresh; however, she replied to Naomi: "Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God, my God."

Ruth did not stay out of obligation; she stayed out of love. She saw Naomi's pain, saw the weight of her grief she was carrying and instead of walking away she stepped in. She became her support system, her provider, her family. And, Naomi, despite her own sorrow, became Ruth's guide in a new land. They didn't let hardship separate them. They became each others strength.

When were you a Naomi or Ruth? Maybe you've been in a season of life where you felt abandoned like Naomi. Maybe you've looked around and wondered who's really here for me? Who's willing to walk through a storm with me? Or, maybe you are in a season like Ruth, where you have had to be the strong one; the one who keeps showing up, the one who keeps giving when you feel like no one sees you. Who has been your Naomi, who has been your Ruth? And, when were you a Ruth or Naomi? Pause a bit to remember those Naomi or Ruth's in our lives. Remember and give thanks for such friendship.

Ruth's and Naomi's bond shows us something different. It shows us what happens when we choose to stand by each other even when everything feels uncertain. Ruth had no idea what her faithfulness would lead to. She had no idea that staying with Naomi would position her for one of the greatest blessings of her life; putting herself directly in the lineage with Jesus. Had Ruth chosen to leave Naomi, she

would have missed out on God's greatest plan. She would have settled for an ordinary life not knowing the extraordinary purpose God had for her. But because she stayed, because she remained loyal and faithful, God honored her beyond her wildest dreams. What is the message for me? Our future?

Being part of any family: birth, church, religious helps us to learn how to love others like and differences. God knows the difficulty we have at times with one another. God gets it! Our relationship with God does not prevent us from having misunderstandings or differences of opinion. Sometimes these relational challenges tempt us to harbor grudges or hurts. Or, they may tempt us to isolate ourselves from the community. Neither of these is healthy.

This reminds me of a mid 1980's movie: *The Mission*. A story of a missionary who was on his "mission" to convert the native population to Christianity. He packed up his belongings for the trip and for his mission. As he climbed the mountain his load seemed extremely heavy; so he snipped off the canoe and paddle and continued to climb. The load still seemed very heavy so more belongings were let go. And, his journey continued each time letting go of more items. As we climb our mountain of life, do we carry all our "baggage" with us? Or can we cut off the things that are weighing us down as grudges, rejections, hurts, stinging words, misunderstandings? A slow and difficult process, yet so vital if we want to move forward together.

Naomi and Ruth were able to bear one another's burdens. We do that by being together. We often are together in prayer; an example of when we request prayers via email for a family member, friend, situation for ourselves, we all join together in lifting up that intention. I, personally experienced the out-pouring of prayer support through texts, calls, and cards at the death of my brother and sister-in-law last year. We bear one another's burdens.

Ruth and Naomi didn't just survive their hardships, they overcame them together. Their story teaches us that true love, true loyalty, true faithfulness will always endure. Because when women stand by each other, nothing can stop what God is about to do next.

Pope Leo XIV first remarks from the balcony on May 8: "I pray that we may all work together toward that homeland that God has prepared for us." God accompanies us on the journey. God teaches us through life itself. God shapes us as long as we are willing to hope, to accept, to forgive, to love, to be faithful, and to build bridges of care.

So, Sisters and Associates: We walk the way with our God into the future TOGETHER.

**Reflection by:  
Sr. Clarita Schumacher, OSF  
Missioning  
June 20, 2025**