

## SUSAN AND JEANNE: SINGING A SONG WITH OUR LIVES

(June 1, 2009) Seemingly out of nowhere, a humble 47 year woman old bursts onto the public stage, evoking the skeptics who ask in the Gospel, “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? ... But has anything good ever come from Nazareth?” Indeed, she hails from an obscure village, and until this totally unforeseen moment, her life has been rather mundane. Neither beautiful nor brilliant in the usual sense, she spends her days visiting the elderly and doing a good bit of church work. But then at the precise moment chosen by God, this seemingly ordinary woman rises to the occasion to take the place God has destined for her from all time.

The woman’s name? No, not Susan Boyle—but Jeanne Jugan, foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, our very own hero. Jeanne’s public acclaim, although of a very different sort from Susan’s, will reach its pinnacle this fall when she is canonized a Saint of the Catholic Church by Pope Benedict XVI. Like the Scottish celebrity, Jeanne lived a hidden life at the service of others until the age of 47, when she stepped out of obscurity to make a difference—a huge difference in the world.

On a cold winter night she encountered Jesus Christ in the person of a blind and paralyzed old woman. After years of practice—the practice of charity that is—Jeanne was ready for this opportunity. She seized the moment, carrying the old woman home and lovingly placing her in her own bed. One heroic act and her life would never be the same.

Today the work of Jeanne Jugan goes on in 32 countries around the world as we Little Sisters offer hospitality to the needy elderly in an atmosphere of love and respect. Not many people have that kind of impact on the world, especially coming from such lowly roots.

When all the media hype surrounding Susan Boyle is over and she returns to her quiet life in the village, let us hope that she will have accomplished something much more valuable than a recording deal—for Susan has challenged us to look upon those who are different, those who are not attractive or smart by the world’s standards, with a bit more respect. Jeanne Jugan did the same in her day, embracing the unwanted and the marginalized with God’s own love, bearing the burden of their sufferings, teaching the world that beauty is more than skin deep, and that every life has inestimable value in God’s eyes.

During the recent talent competition Susan was quoted as saying that all her life she has had to struggle to prove that she is not useless, and that a win would prove that she is a worthwhile person. As we all know, in the end the grand prize went to someone else. If Jeanne Jugan were alive today she would assure Susan that she has been a winner all along, because our true dignity and worth are God-given, not bestowed by any worldly audience. The song that really matters is the one we sing with our lives, and by serving the less fortunate, Susan Boyle, like Jeanne Jugan, truly sings a heavenly tune.

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