Today’s Scripture Readings bless the occasion in which this community celebrate and give thanks for God’s fidelity throughout 70 years in the life of Nilus O ‘Regan. We celebrate and give thanks for God’s fidelity throughout 60 years in the lives of Bernard Murphy, Mark Fitzpatrick, Majella Burke and Germanus Noonan; and we celebrate and give thanks for God’s fidelity throughout fifty years in the lives of James O ‘Donovan and Hugh Sweeney.

Jubilee celebrations are precious times. Precious because of the names we give them: Silver, Gold, Diamond and Platinum. And precious especially because of the gift of dedicated service we celebrate. We rejoice with the sentiments expressed in Isaiah: “that day, you will say; give thanks to Yahweh; call his name aloud. Proclaim the deeds of Yahweh to the people; declare his name sublime. Sing of Yahweh, for Yahweh has done marvellous things; let them be known to the whole world”.

As I prepared this reflection, I wondered what were some of the emerging trends taking place in the world and closer to home when our Brothers were considering Religious Life in the mid-sixties and fifties. It was the era of rock-n-roll and the Beatles. These were the years of excitement and hope with the Second Vatican Council. We didn’t know it at the time but these were also the early years of the digital and technological revolution. The telephone and television beginning their arrival in every house would, within a few decades, be found in every pocket! Galway beat Kerry in that year’s (1964) All Ireland football final and Tipperary beat Kilkenny in the hurling. (Let’s hope not a sign of things to come!) In ’54 the country celebrated the Marian Year and 30.000 marched through Dublin in a huge procession and the second inter inter-government party under John A. Costello came to power that year. You too have your own memories from that time.

It was against this background of a changing world that our Jubilarians were preparing to take vows and launch forth in the world. And I asked myself, why? It was, I believe, your enthusiasm, your zeal, your passion for Christ and a strong desire to serve Him; you believed you could make a difference in the lives of people, wherever in the world. You believed that your call to Religious Life was about seeking God, leading you to a search for meaning, happiness and truth in your lives.

Pope Francis puts it beautifully in his letter to religious for the special Year of Consecrated Life which takes place next year when he says it is; “the joy of the moment when Jesus looked at me,” and he recalls elsewhere that; “It is the answer to a call, a call of love.”
And this is what happened in places like Kilmeady, Ballinabrackey, Rosmackowen, Ballinamona, Whitegate, Tuamgranell & Kilbritten. Christ looked at you and you said yes, yes to a call to love - You did not have to wait to come to Religious Life to learn about love, community, faith, or about vocation, generosity or concern for those in need; it was a natural development of who you were and where you came from. And so, we remember and give thanks for your parents, your families and friends – the people, who loved you, nurtured you, supported you in your vocation and taught you your first lessons in the faith.

And what wonderful lives of presence, witness and service you have given on the home mission of Ireland and England, and further a field in Canada and the West Indies – you quickly adapted to changing circumstances as you grew through fragility, engaged with diversity and were truly Brothers in Christ to the people you lived and worked among.

St. Paul reminds us in today’s reading that God accomplishes all this in us as he “strengthens us inwardly with power through the working of the Spirit. Glory to God, whose power, now at work in us, can do immensely more that we can ask for or imagine.”

Over four hundred years of professed religious life is a lot of years, a lot of days, blessings and influencing the lives of numerous communities and individuals in different parts of the world. None of us will fully understand the full extent of the good work that has been done by our seven Jubilarians, not even the Jubilarians themselves. The kind word, the listening ear, the compassionate presence, helping someone find a way where there appeared to be none. These simple things will have made a world of difference to many that each of you have met over the past years. You have witnessed to Brotherhood and to the charism and mission of Blessed Edmund Rice – we can only guess at how many lives have been enriched by your love, sacrifice and generosity.

An occasion such as this reminds us that a jubilee is a time of new beginnings and a time to look forward in hope. The biblical tradition of the jubilee year as we know was a time when debts were cancelled; hurts forgiven and slaves set free. Indeed, it’s a year that reflects the call of our Chapter in 2011. Undoubtedly, there were failures, regrets and disappointments in your lives too, maybe not always shared with anyone. This year of Jubilee is an invitation to bring into the presence of God the totality of our being. Not just our giftedness but our shadow side too that which fills us with despair, regret, fear and frustration.

Brothers, as you know, the whole Congregation is living the years since the 2011 Congregation Chapter with the meditation of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Christ, after befriending and revealing Himself to the disciples, told them to return to Jerusalem. He told them not to continue their journey of escape to Emmaus. Let us now return to Jerusalem, Brothers. For the apostles this had been the place of high hopes and bitter disappointments. To our Jubilarians and all of us, let us return to the high hopes and idealism of our own lives, of our religious lives. Let us turn the water of our disappointments into a rich wine of generosity in the years that are gifted to us now.
The words of today’s Gospel are reassuring; “I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you entertained me; naked and you clothed me; sick and you looked after me; in prison and you visited me…I assure you, insofar as you did it to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me.”

Brothers, as you begin this year of Jubilee celebrations of your Religious Profession in your communities and with your family and friends, we thank God for inviting you to live the consecrated life of Presentation Brothers, and we thank you for saying ‘yes’ to God - and for repeating that yes in good times and in challenging times. We rejoice with you today and we assure you of our prayer as we continue to journey with you on pilgrimage towards our final goal of life with God in the glory of heaven. Amen.