

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER MARIE B. HIRT October 25, 1914–January 16, 2017



“There can be no disappointment where the soul’s only desire is to seek the will of God and fulfill it.”

These words of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton were echoed for 102 years in the life of Sister Marie B. Hirt. On the occasion of her hundredth birthday, she gave these words of advice: “Live one day at a time and do God’s will.” Her entire life was especially devoted to fulfilling the will of God.

Sister Marie’s parents were George and Lillian Hirt. Sister Marie had two sisters, Dorothy and Agnes, and a brother, Bernard. Nieces and nephews, several of whom are here today, knew Sister Marie as their “Aunt Mickey,” the name given to her in the family. They lived in Mount Washington in Pittsburgh and were members of Saint Mary of the Mount Parish, where Sister Marie attended elementary and high school.

In later years, Sister Marie would say that she had always wanted to be a Sister, but apparently did not see the dream as a possibility until a Sister of Charity came into Woolworth’s 5 and 10 where Sister Marie worked, to buy gifts for three young women who would be entering the Sisters of Charity. Everything fell into place then and Sister Marie entered the community on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1933.

Sister Marie earned a Bachelor’s degree from the University of Pittsburgh in—to my surprise—chemistry and English; I thought it would be math. She later received a National Science Foundation grant to study mathematics at Catholic University in Washington. She certainly would have succeeded in any field.

Sister Marie taught elementary school for ten years, then taught math in several high schools: Saint Luke, Saint John the Baptist, Elizabeth Seton, Saint Anselm, Bishop Boyle. She was a compassionate teacher. One year at Resurrection School she was given an eighth grade class in which all the students found academic work challenging. She discovered creative ways to motivate the students and the year was a success. This was all the will of God for Sister Marie.

Her mathematical gifts were evident both in teaching and in working with finances. She was business manager at Elizabeth Seton and later at Sacred Heart High School. At Sacred Heart Sister Marie not only kept track of the money, but also was able to make money for school needs.

When she retired, Sister Marie stayed on at Sacred Heart Convent, working for a while in finance at the Ursuline Center and volunteering in the convent. Since she had spent so many years at Sacred Heart, she petitioned: "May Sacred Heart Parish and the Sisters of Charity ever remain together in prayer."

When Sister Marie reached 100 years of age and she was to receive a citation from the Westmoreland County Commissioners, she searched for and found the ten qualities, talents, accomplishments to be printed on the citation. Among other gifts, she noted special musical ability and interest. Her father was an outstanding tenor and Sister Marie had a lovely singing voice. She also enjoyed doing and teaching art, especially preparing for the annual student art exhibit. The art done by her students was beautiful.

Although it is not in the list of qualities on the citation, Sister Marie's creativity was evident. She enjoyed a good time for herself and for others. At Sacred Heart, she regularly dressed up for the convent Halloween party and no one ever knew who she was!

As time moved on Sister Marie fulfilled the will of God in an active old age using her sharp mind in many ways. She kept up with world, national, and local news both on television and in the newspaper. Every day she

drove her motorized chair down the long hall to the second floor atrium where she read the newspaper, even when eventually she needed a magnifying glass. She followed Pittsburgh Pirate baseball enthusiastically, and worked crossword puzzles, not in pencil, but in ink. Sister Marie didn't make mistakes.

Sister Marie was grateful to God for her talents and blessings. Recently she said: "My sight is poor, my hearing is shot and I can walk only a few steps. But I am grateful to God every day that he has given me the ability to think clearly."

Sister Marie frequently thanked God for her vocation and for calling her to a "special community," the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill. We are happy that Sister Marie was and is a member of this "special community."

Sister Marie can now speak in the words of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, words written by Mother Seton in her *Following of Christ*, the book kept here at Caritas Christi:

*The sleep and dreams of life . . . the horizon of futurity . . .
the pure skies of heaven . . . Rising sun of immortality . . .
splendor, beauty . . . Jesus—infinity itself,
boundless light, all delight, all bliss, all God,
all this may be tomorrow (or today for Sister Marie)
if only from the sleep and dreams of life,
I may awake in Jesus. Amen.*

We know, Sister Marie, that you are "awake in Jesus" doing God's will in eternity.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Brigid Marie Grandey
January 19, 2017*