

**REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF
SISTER FRANCIS LOUISE HONEYCHUCK
October 22, 1914–April 29, 2017**



“The principal end for which God has called and assembled the Sisters of Charity is to honour Jesus Christ our Lord as the source and model of all Charity by rendering to Him every temporal and spiritual service in their power in the Persons of the poor, either sick, invalid, children, prisoners, even the insane, or others who thro’ shame would conceal their necessities.”

Original Rule, 1812

Today we affectionately remember a Sister of Charity who was totally challenged and motivated by the “principal end” described by Saint Vincent de Paul. After a lifespan of 102 years, 85 of those years living a community life, she shares her story with us so that we can get to know her even better. Here, in her own words, is the life journey of Sister Francis Louise.



“I was born in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania, on October 22, 1914, and baptized with the name Emma Marie on November 1, 1914, at Visitation Church in Mount Pleasant. My parents, Andrew and Sophia Sidlovski Honeychuck, had six children: [Robert, Andrew, Lawrence, John, me, and my only sister, Helen.] They have all now experienced the promise: ‘What eye has not seen, what ear has not heard’ and are waiting there for me. My surviving nieces, nephews and cousins have been caring, generous and thoughtful and I am truly grateful to them.

My father died on November 12, 1918, during the flu epidemic. After his death, my widowed mother moved to Scottdale, Pennsylvania, with her six children. Robert was 10; Andrew, 8; and Lawrence, 6. I was four years of age; Helen, 2; and baby John, born three weeks after my father’s death.

With Mother's great faith and trust in God, she was able to raise our family. She worked every day cleaning offices, taking in washing and pursuing other jobs. Until I was old enough to go to school, my memories included keeping my sister Helen and brother, John, sitting on rocking chairs until my mother got home from work. We never thought of going outside, opening the door, or making any noise while we were alone. We would watch the clock until the hands moved to twelve when we knew our mother would soon be home.

On Saturday mornings, I helped my mother do the cleaning at the Casket Factory in Scottdale. My job was to clean the bathroom sinks and toilets and mop the floor with soap and water while Mother performed those same tasks in the rest of the building. As I cleaned, I remember picking up *oodles* of straight pins from the chairs and floor that had been dropped by the ladies who used them in making the white silk linings for the inside of the coffins.

We were fortunate in being educated by the Sisters of Charity at Saint John the Baptist School in Scottdale. The exercise and fresh air gained during the mile and a half walk to and from school in the morning, at lunchtime, and at the end of the day kept me healthy. On rainy days, I rode the streetcar, paying three cents for a ticket. I also attended high school at Saint John the Baptist. During those years, I carried my lunch because there was not enough time to go home.

I recall that every Friday my mother cleaned the church, dusting the altar and pews, polishing the candlesticks, and mopping the floor with soap and water. She was paid three dollars for a day's laborious work. At lunchtime each Friday, I went to the back door of the convent and asked the sister in the kitchen for soup and crackers for my mother's lunch. The weak radiators in the church kept the building very cold and my mother was always happy to have that hot soup!"

***“It sometimes lessens personal sorrow to
compare our condition with that of others.”***

Elizabeth Ann Seton

“When I was a junior at Saint John’s, I began to consider what my vocation would be. I was 17 years old when I prepared to enter the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill on March 25, 1932. However, because that date was also Good Friday, I was told to arrive on Easter Sunday, March 27. That day as a postulant, I received my new clothes—a black lace cap, a simple black dress with a short pleated black cape, and black stockings. After three months, I made a silent retreat of six days and became a novice taking the name Sister Francis Louise, Francis for Saint Francis of Assisi, and Louise for St. Louise de Marillac. I now wore the long black habit with a black serge cape, white starched collar and white cap with detachable bows, and a long black rosary worn at my left side. As a novice, I attended classes on community life as well as on teaching techniques. I remained at Seton Hill until 1934, when I was assigned to teach elementary school students at Saint James, West End (Pittsburgh), where I remained for three years.

In 1937, I was missioned to DePaul Institute in Brookline to begin in-service training for teaching hearing-impaired students. From 1937 until 1997, I worked with severely deaf students, ages six to twelve years, with six or seven pupils in each class. We focused on speech reading (lip-reading combined with facial expressive reading) and language development using the oral-aural (no sign language) method of instruction for all elementary students. The ultimate mission of DePaul Institute was to prepare students to succeed in a hearing and speaking world. To do this was a challenge but in time was also rewarding.

Because we always needed to keep abreast of the latest teaching techniques and methods, I pursued Continuing Education/Special Education Certification at Wayne State and other colleges and universities.”

“Keep on with hard-earned but eternal blissful merit.”

Elizabeth Ann Seton

“During the years 1949-1970, my teaching career took a new direction. Bishop John Dearden, then bishop of Pittsburgh, had received a request from a woman in Altoona whose daughter was blind. Bishop Dearden asked that

DePaul Institute begin to teach blind and partially sighted students. I was asked to take a course at Columbia University to become certified in transcribing Braille using Slate and Stylus. Certification requirements allowed for only one transcription error on the exam. I had two, and was not granted certification! Determined to be certified, I purchased the little book, *Black Beauty*, and transcribed it into Braille. I submitted it to the Library of Congress, which certified me as a teacher of Braille. There were a number of blind and partially sighted students at DePaul during those years and many other sisters were involved in teaching them.

At the conclusion of full-time teaching, I tutored students at DePaul. I did this on a private basis for students who needed special individual help with reading and language development to further their chance of success in classes with other students. While tutoring them I treated the deaf students as though they were hearing and the blind students as though they were sighted. I wanted them to believe that they could do anything a hearing or sighted student could do. I took pride in their many accomplishments. How rewarding it has been to see them grow up to be wholesome, well-developed citizens who took their place in society. I especially remember fondly my blind students: Bill Burgunder and his twin brother Tom, Marita Matthews, Cindy Kudes, and many more too numerous to mention.”

“Sweet is the Providence that overrules us.”

Elizabeth Ann Seton

“I retired in 1997 with gratitude and the knowledge that God had given me a precious gift to devote my time and efforts to teach handicapped students entrusted to my care. Every day we sang gratefully. My years at DePaul School for Speech and Hearing were deeply gratifying to me. God chose to convey in small ways that my vocation to teach these children was worthwhile. God has shown me that success in life is always found in the ways we give ourselves to others in God’s service. We shared this over the years with the students from the University of Pittsburgh, Duquesne University, and Indiana University of Pennsylvania who came to DePaul for a six- to ten-week period for in-service training and education.”



Sister Francis Louise never lost her dedication enthusiasm, or interest in community life. Soon after her retirement, she said “I need a job,” which took the form of volunteering in the archives at Caritas Christi, distributing copies of the *Catholic Accent* and *Pittsburgh Catholic* to the sisters, praying the Office with several sisters who were sight impaired, even watering the plants in their bedrooms. She attended exercise sessions and helped the sisters solve computer problems. As her ability to see and to hear diminished, so also her activity, but never her interest.

And so, with grateful hearts, we pray our farewell to a dedicated Sister of Charity of Seton Hill, as we ask with Elizabeth,

“Who can bind the soul which God sets free?”

Elizabeth Ann Seton

Funeral Liturgy Reflection

Sister Colette Hanlon

May 3, 2017