

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER MARY COLEMAN KILKEARY December 13, 1917–February 20, 2018



Good morning, Sisters and family of Sister Mary Coleman. Because I have known Sister Mary Coleman only since the time of my novitiate, just 14 years, I was surprised to be asked to give her reflection. From the beginning of our relationship though, it was evident that the light of faith and love shone forth in her. I am grateful for sharing in that faith and love.

When I began to research her life and ask for information, I was given a thin, anemic envelope containing a few sheets of paper listing facts and dates that spanned a century of life, but giving very little personal information.

There was no oral history. Yet, on the occasion of her 70th Jubilee, Sister Mary Coleman stated, “I feel blessed to have been called to the Sisters of Charity.”

Mary Rita Kilkeary was born on December 13, 1917 in the Brookline section of Pittsburgh to Joseph and Sara Keenan Kilkeary, the youngest of their family of five: three brothers (Joseph, James, and John) and one sister (Sister Ann Agnes).

At the age of 16, Mary Rita entered the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill from Resurrection Parish on March 25, 1934. It was the Feast of the Annunciation. Her heart rejoiced as she said with Mary, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to your word." Sister Mary Coleman said these words that day, then lived them each and every day for the next 84 years. Just as Mary said yes to God's will, Sister Mary Coleman said yes to the joyful and difficult moments that accompany one's life journey—living by faith, responding to God's Providence, and accepting His will.

Sister Mary Coleman earned degrees in elementary school education, administration, and supervision from Duquesne University. A few years later, she received a certificate as an elementary school librarian from Saint Francis College, Loretto, Pennsylvania.

She taught in the Pittsburgh Diocese at Saint Kieran, Saint Luke, and Holy Innocents Schools, usually in the seventh and eighth grades. She was vice-principal at Resurrection School and principal at Saint James School, Wilksburg. Her other assignments included teaching in Altoona, Scottsdale, Arizona, and Lakewood, California. She is remembered as a brilliant, excellent teacher and a supportive teacher guide.

In 1976, Sister Mary Coleman changed ministries and began working in the Treasurer's Office of the congregation as an insurance clerk and as administrator of social security and PACE programs for the Sisters of Charity.

Sister Mary Coleman was dedicated to her ministries, worked hard, and appeared very serious. However, she possessed a dry wit and a sense of humor that delighted all who experienced it. Her generosity and quiet concern for the sisters in the community may not have been as evident but was demonstrated often. Sisters living at a distance were sometimes surprised with a phone call from Sister Mary Coleman. She wanted to know if the sister was "all right." If the area where the sister lived experienced any natural disaster, she was quick to call to see if the sister needed any assistance and assure her that the congregation was praying for her.

Some of us may be surprised that she travelled to Rome for the canonization of Mother Seton *OR* that she enjoyed liturgical movement *AND* that she loved listening to a police scanner given to her by her nephew, a retired policeman.

As the times evolved, Sister Mary Coleman was aware of the changes in the church. On her 65th Jubilee, she remarked, "Religious life continues to include many edifying women doing the work of the church as it is needed today. I am thankful for every day of my religious life."

In 1999, Sister Mary Coleman retired to Caritas Christi, volunteering her time for the needs of the sisters, particularly for her own blood sister, Sister Ann Agnes whom she loved dearly. As the years unfolded in Sister's life, she longed to go home; that is, to heaven.

One time I asked her who she wanted to see in heaven. She responded in a matter-of-fact way, "God Himself, who else?"

During these last few years of long-suffering patience, I was reminded of Simeon from the Gospel of Luke, who longed to see the Face of God and patiently waited for His coming. When he saw the Christ Child he exclaimed, “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation...”

Perhaps her desire for heaven was reflected in a habit or custom she had of saying to family members or sisters who visited her, “OK, you can go now.” And, so, dear Sister Mary Coleman, just like Simeon of old, you now see the Face of God. You can go now.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Lindena Brace
February 24, 2018*