

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER CATHERINE MARY July 29, 1928 – October 16, 2020



Last week while naming all those for whom I promise to pray, I stopped at the name of Sr. Catherine Mary. Knowing that she was near death, I asked God to take her home and let perpetual light shine upon her who had been a shining light to so many. When Sr. Mary Lou Palas called to tell me of her death and to inform me that I was to offer the reflection, my thoughts turned to so many happy memories of times spent together and joys shared, that always included stories about the children. A line from Shakespeare's King

Lear came to mind: "Her voice was ever soft, gentle and low, an excellent thing in a woman."

Sister Catherine Mary, the daughter of John and Mary Erma Malloy, was born on July 29, 1928. She was baptized at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona, and given the name, Mary Catherine. She had three sisters, Sister Jeanne, Pat, and Peggy and three brothers, Jack, Jim and Bob. She attended Cathedral Grade School, Altoona Catholic High and Mount Aloysius College, where she received an Associate Degree in Secretarial Sciences.

After working a few years as a secretary and a bookkeeper, she entered the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill on September 8, 1952. Shortly after entering, she was missioned to Saint Luke High School to teach business courses. In June 1953, she received the habit and was given her family name, Mary Catherine, but in reverse order.

After pronouncing first vows on August 15, 1955, she began her very effective ministry as a primary teacher for 55 years. Sister taught in the Dioceses of Altoona/Johnston, Greensburg, Phoenix, Tucson, and the Archdiocese of Washington. Family members often remarked, “If you want to see the world, join the convent.” Finally, in 1983, she returned to the Altoona/Johnston Diocese where she ministered in several schools and parishes until 2009.

In 1992, the Altoona/Johnston Diocese awarded her the Outstanding Catholic Educator Certificate. In her response to the award, she wrote, “As a teacher in Catholic schools, my support and commitment are very strong. I believe that we are giving a great service to the Church and the community. Our Catholic schools teach not only the three R’s, but the three R’s of Religion, Respect and Responsibility, which will enable students to take their place as active Christian members of society.

A parent, who nominated Sister, wrote: “Sister Catherine Mary, my daughter’s first grade teacher, exemplifies “love one another, as I have loved you.” She is kind and patient. There is always a feeling of serenity in her classroom. I believe that by having Sister as one of her early Christian role models, some great values have been instilled in my daughter.”

A teacher wrote; “Sister Catherine Mary sets a fine example for children. She is kind and soft spoken, always understanding the needs of the child dealing with personal problems. The atmosphere in her classroom is peaceful and productive. Sister is also willing to extend a helping hand to other teachers. She takes time to listen. Her quiet, uncomplicated faith and way of serving God have been an example to me and the other teachers.

Let me conclude with the words of an eighth grade student at Cathedral Central. She won an essay contest, sponsored by the Catholic Daughters. In her essay, entitled, "Angels in my Life," she wrote; "My first experience at Cathedral School in first grade was with Sister Catherine Mary. She welcomed twenty nervous and giggling boys and girls and taught us how to read, write, sing and pray. She did all this without ever raising her voice. Her pleasant smile and calm manner inspired each of us to dream, to learn, and to achieve more. She taught us to love and to use Christ's love to become stronger members of our faith community. She did this in a kind and gentle manner with always a sparkle in her eyes. Sister Catherine Mary taught us that an angel is more than wearing a pin on your collar. An angel is one individual who allows God's grace to enlighten, to challenge, and to teach. There is an angel in Altoona in the first grade classroom."

Now that this angel, Sister Catherine Mary, has joined the choirs of angels in heaven, we say, "Pray for us now and forever, AMEN!"

Funeral Liturgy Reflection

Sister Patrice Hughes

October 20, 2020