

REFLECTION – SISTER MARY DENISE DIETRICH

November 17, 1931 – May 8, 2022

FUNERAL LITURGY, Thursday, May 12, 2022



Sister Mary Denise deliberately selected the parable of the Sower to be read at her funeral liturgy; I see it as a metaphor for her teaching ministry. . . time and talent she cultivated, the work she loved and religiously practiced for her entire life as a Sister of Charity of Seton Hill. Similar to the words spoken and actions described by Jesus, Denise went out to sow the seed. . .of knowledge, love, experience, trust . . .and it fell on a variety of pathways – some trampled underfoot, or soon eaten or destroyed; some fell on rocky soil. . .places without moisture and difficult for growth. . .falling among Thorns which grew with it, choking the message. . Is that how learning occurs? But, the good soil –indeed there were examples of rich and productive environments with wonderful results for which she was rewarded. And now, Denise your ears are completely open to hear and your eyes to see all. Your sowing the seeds through teaching thousands of students at all levels, in many places, circumstances, grade school through university; religious education, academic disciplines, school administration, catechetical director, pastoral associate. . .tell just as the parable predicts sowing seeds to a multitude of individuals with the final results known to God and to you as you begin enjoying eternity.

We may see the metaphor falter if we think of the sower randomly scattering seed without much thought . . .this would never be the case with Denise. . .She prepared, studied and planned. Her creativity was a hallmark. . .thinking always what will help this child. . .clarify for the adult. Catch attention. . .satisfy the person. . .assist the processes of learning.

Born November 17, 1931 in Altoona, PA, the fourth child and daughter to Eustace and Martina Cusick Dietrich, Martina Dolores Dietrich received Baptism in St. Theresa of the Child Jesus Church. Her connection with the Sisters of Charity came with her mother's sister, Sister Mary Stephen Cusick, a nurse at Providence Hospital, Beaver Falls, and her mother, an RN at Pgh. Hospital School of Nursing. Dolores attended Cathedral School and Altoona Catholic High School, entering St. Joseph Novitiate on September 8, 1949. From the Novitiate Sister Mary Denise began her teaching with a 6th grade at St. Stephen School, Hazelwood and many students in many schools around the country benefitted immeasurably in having her as teacher. Not only sowing the seeds but receiving them as well, Denise earned the bachelor's degree in education from Seton Hill and a master's degree in reading and language arts from the University of Pittsburgh. We use the term, a lifelong learner which is exactly what she was. . .her file records numerous workshops, summer classes, attendance at Gonzaga University in Spokane for a sabbatical, recognition for presentations given to teachers and administrators in the States and abroad. It's amazing how much her CV reports.

Sister Mary Denise ministered as teacher, principal, supervisor, textbook consultant, who taught at national catechetical workshops, representing Silver Burdette Ginn Publishing. She offered her expertise and service in underserved areas of the south, Mississippi, for one, as well as Director of Religious Education in Wheeling-Charleston Diocese, ministered as a faith formation director in a parish in California. Her role as director of Seton Arts Service Corps enabled its foundation and development in collaboration between Seton Hill University and the Sisters of Charity to sow fresh and creative seeds by serving communities through the arts.

Retiring to Caritas Christi in 2012, Denise continued to hold fast to her many friendships – another gift she cherished. She selected the reading from Philippians to honor those: “I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you.” Testimonials from her family members underscore their thankfulness in return.

With all of the seeds of goodness and truth you have sown, Denise. . .you've reached your time for harvest – well deserved. Among your memorabilia is a

prayer that you composed which initiated the final project and describes the life you led, the spirit which inspired you, the seeds of creative service you sowed:

Loving God of the children, the Seton Arts Service Corps is your work.

Please give me the guidance to direct it so that many young people will come to their full potential and be lights to others in their local communities.

Guardian angels protect and bless everyone who comes to us. Amen.

Reflection, Funeral Liturgy

May 12, 2022 – Sister Jean Augustine