

Reflection on the Life of Sister Clementine O’Friel

March 23, 1920 - June 8, 2022



After Monsignor Rathgeb anointed Sister Clementine and the crowd in the room was leaving, Sister Clementine asked me, “Am I going to die?” I hastily printed on her white board, “You may see God soon.” She replied, “that is all I need to see.” Those last words we exchanged are “telling” about our senior sister, aunt, or friend.

Sister Clementine was the third child born to George and Lillian O’Friel on March 23, 1920 and baptized Joan Regina on March 28, 1920. Her parents, three brothers, and five sisters preceded her in death. She is survived by many nieces, nephews, friends, and Sisters of Charity.

Our Provincial Office holds a record of each sister’s life. The file that I received and reviewed contained the dates of her entrance (September 8, 1938), the reception of the habit as a novice (January 1, 1939), temporary profession (January 1, 1941), and Final Profession (May 20, 1949) and a list of schools where she ministered and the places where she resided from 1950 until 2000. The majority of these were in Altoona and the Altoona Johnstown Diocese. The file also contained a letter dated July 11, 2000 from the Most Reverend Joseph V. Adamec, Bishop of the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese, addressed to Sisters Clementine and Cornelia O’Friel acknowledging the receipt of their kind letter relative to their departure from the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. He wrote in part:

... Know that I appreciate hearing from you, although regretfully, due to the letter’s content.

As you know, women religious have been an important component of this Diocesan Church in the Allegheny Mountains. You have made your own contributions to the growth of faith life among God’s people here.

As Diocesan Bishop, I extend my gratitude to you and pray that the Lord will be kind to you in return.

Your promise of remembering this Church in your conversations with the Lord is heartening. Please continue to do that. I will count on it."

Personally, I never became acquainted with Sister Clementine until after I retired and moved to Caritas Christi. She and I frequently ate dinner together with Sister Marie Clare and I listened to their stories about their families and their lives in Altoona before they became Sisters of Charity.

Sometime in late 2018 or early 2019, when Sister Clementine was hospitalized and those of us who lived here, volunteered to visit and keep her company in the hospital. It was during one of those visits that I noticed a white board and black marking pen on her bed and asked if she would like to play tic tac toe. Since then until about a week ago, she and I have had a running tic tac toe tournament almost every evening. She always won . . . I wonder why..

We ended each visit the same way. She would ask, "for whom shall we pray this evening?" Then I would either print the names of the Sisters who were ill or dying, or issues in the local or world community that needed our prayer.

Sister Clementine would begin with the sign of the cross and pray directly to either God the Father or to Jesus Christ with the words, "we bring to you this evening." . . and proceed to pray eloquently about the needs of the suggested person or issue and then end with the sign of the cross. After praying, she would then take and kiss my hand and thank me for my visit as the nursing staff helped her prepare for the night.

The last evening that we played and prayed was different. Without beginning or ending our prayer with the sign of the cross, she prayed "In the name of the Father. . .we pray for our sisters who are ill. . . now and at the hour of our death. Amen." I left her room without hearing a thank you for your visit and noted to another friend that I thought she was preparing to die.

Psalm 90 speaks of living to be 70 or 80 if we are strong. Today we bid farewell to a very strong woman who lived to be 102.

Sister Clementine, may the promise of Psalm 91 be yours. . . “I will save those who love me and will protect those who acknowledge me. . .I will reward them with long life; I will save them.” Rest in peace with God whom you now see and hear in person.

- *Sr. Victoria Marie Gribschaw*