



We remember Sister Mary Catherine Kenny 1921-2009

~ a Sister of Mercy for 64 years!

By Sister Marilyn Wallace

We arrive today to celebrate the life of Sister Mary Catherine Kenny who dedicated herself to Christ through the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Blessed Virgin was her special friend, and when you asked her to pray for something for you, she would promise to place your intention in the hands of our Blessed Mother because, as John Paul II says, "The Mother of God is the one who 'precedes' the people of God in the pilgrimage of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ."

Catherine's life was varied and interesting. Let us hear her talk about it in her own words: "I taught 35 years (mostly junior high) and 1 ½ years in high school. I had to quit in order to have serious heart surgery. I then volunteered at Mercy Villa as a receptionist and driver, until Dr. John Hartigan asked me to work in medical records in his office. I was there for 10 years and then came back to Mercy Villa where I worked in the sewing room. I've been crocheting for 31 years making afghans."

Catherine was born Catherine Rita Kenny on Sept. 7, 1927; her father, Patrick Kenny, was born in Longford County, Ireland in 1888. Her mother, Teresa Smith Kenny, was born in Omaha, Neb. in 1895. Catherine's two brothers, James and Francis, attended St. Bridget's School, Creighton Prep and, later, each was ordained to the priesthood in 1949 and 1951, respectively.

Catherine attended St. Bridget's School and St. Mary's High School. She entered Mount Loretto on Sept. 8, 1945. She later attended College of Saint Mary and Creighton University, receiving a B.S. and M.A. from Creighton.

Several years ago she responded to the following question: "What was your favorite ministry? She said, "St. Peter's, Omaha. There were large classes and good obedient children." When asked what she could tell us about herself as a worker, she responded, "I am willing to help, willing to learn, and be cooperative." She was 67 when she retired, but she said she would rather be active. She spent her closing years both in chapel and in the sewing room. When they asked her: What is holiness? She said, "Cooperating with God's Will." What will heaven be like? She said, "Being with Christ and His Blessed Mother." Her motto was "Jesus, keep me close to Thee."

Carefully packed away with Catherine's things was an article by Sister Marie Bernadette Mertens, IHM, given for a regional workshop entitled, "Consecrated Chastity: the Spousal Relationship and Spiritual Motherhood". I have adapted Sister Mertens' work in the following remarks to compare it with Catherine's life.

"Tomorrow is Mother's Day. Catherine will be buried on the vigil of the day that celebrates her spousal union with Christ. Motherhood is not simply biological, it is spiritual. The Vatican II document 'Lumen Gentium' states, "Perfect continence for the Kingdom of Heaven is a source of spiritual fertility in the world (L.G. #42).

John Paul II in his address 'Via Consecrata' said that this fruitfulness fosters birth and growth of the Divine Life in the hearts of the faithful. And shortly afterwards, in the Synod on Religious Life, John Paul said: "Evangelical Chastity is a superior kind of motherhood on which the light of the Virgin Mary's motherhood shines." Religious are called to give birth to Christ in souls. But their fruitfulness does not come from themselves, but from union with their Spouse, Jesus Christ."

Catherine spent endless hours in front of Blessed Sacrament. She was a Eucharistic Minister, reader, and one who pondered the Word of God. Adoration of the Eucharist and Its reception are the two ways in which one is most physically and spiritually united with Him. By these means, Catherine became a channel of His creative Love. Spiritual motherhood was a direct result of her prayer life. And Prayer was the center of Catherine's life. Pius XI once said, "The most fruitful work in the Church is a life dedicated to praying, loving and suffering."

Catherine once described herself as an Irish American. She and her brothers experienced a little bit of heaven in their enjoyment of Notre Dame football. The brothers often had season tickets and Catherine, herself, was known to attend a few home games. Interesting to note, I have an afghan in my room made by Catherine with the Notre Dame colors – green and yellow. I just found out yesterday that Notre Dame wears green and yellow only for home games.

Undoubtedly, what Catherine liked most about Notre Dame was the beautiful Lourdes Grotto of her beloved Blessed Virgin and the mosaic of Jesus on the wall of the library. He is sometimes called "Touchdown Jesus" because his arms seem to extend over the football field.

On behalf of Catherine, I would like to thank all of you who prayed so hard for her in the last few days: The Prayer Team around the city; the Sisters here at Mercy Villa; St. Margaret Mary's prayer

group; her special friends; and of course, Father Jim, our outstanding quarterback who gave the last blessing which was to be the deciding play. After all, death is a close call, a deciding factor; you win or lose the game of life in a split second after a lifetime of training. That's why it's good to have a "Hail Mary Pass" if you can at the end. What is this pass except the Divine mercy of God that propelled Catherine forward into eternity. In the words of the most famous African American to never visit Notre Dame: "Free at last, Free at last, O Lord, I'm Free at last!"

Touchdown, Jesus! Notre Dame, O clement loving, O sweet Virgin Mary, pray for us, O Holy mother of God, that we, too, may be made worthy of the promise of Christ!

Death is not extinguishing the Light;
it is putting out the lamp
because the Dawn has come.
- Tagore