

December 12, 2008

Dear Sisters, Associates, Family & Friends,

Sister Jean Brosnan went peacefully home to God at 12:30 a.m. on December 8, 2008. She was 92 years old. Sister Monica Haines was with her at the time of her death. Sister Jean had been in a semi-coma and Sisters were with her around the clock for four nights. It seemed she was waiting to die on December 8th the feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception. During the days and nights leading up to her death, she was very peaceful.

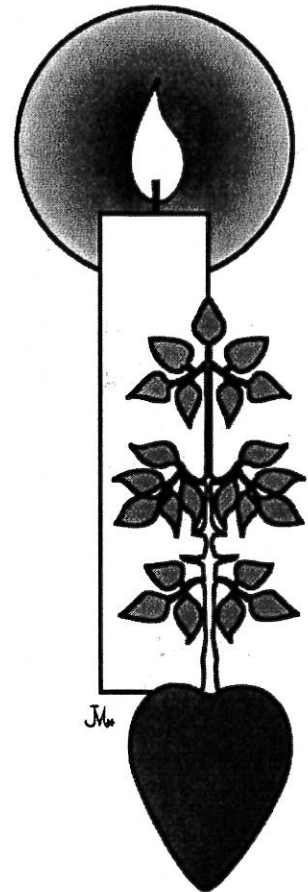
Jean was born on January 26, 1916 in Pittsburgh, PA to James and Margaret Mary Toomey Brosnan. She was the youngest of four children. She had three older brothers, Jerome, John and James. All preceded her in death.

Sister Jean entered the Congregation on August 29, 1934. She made her First Profession on August 5, 1937 and Final Vows on August 5, 1941 in Monterey, CA.

Jean served in the missions of Indiana, Iowa, California, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Vermont. Jean's missionary journey called her to minister as Catechetical Director and in Pastoral Care of the sick.

Sister Jean had a charming personality, keen intelligence and a good sense of humor. She was a woman of grace and deep spirituality. She touched many people in her ministry, especially those who were suffering either physically or emotionally. It was told by co-workers Dick and Rosalie Worland from Olney, IL, "that whatever Jean's work had been or wherever she had gone, whether it be Pastoral Care Coordinator or Religious Education Director, she made a difference in the lives of those she has met."

When Jean was in Springfield, VT, her leadership abilities were recognized by Bishop Robert Joyce when he appointed her in 1966 to be a member of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission. This was before ecumenism was respected and encouraged as it is today. She was also made vice-chairman of the Teaching Sisters and Brothers Committee for the Burlington Diocese and representative to the Deanery Pastoral Commission. If this was not enough recognition of her skills and administrative abilities, she was the only woman among ten men columnists chosen for the Diocesan paper, The Vermont Catholic Tribune, who contributed to the lively discussions on a variety of timely topics, by their expert opinions.



After about ten years in the missions, Jean went back to Victory Noll for a few years where she served as Assistant Treasurer and did secretarial work for Archbishop Noll. She was appreciated for her skills and ability in these areas.

Back in the missions, Jean's ministry as Pastoral Care Coordinator and Associate Chaplain at St. Margaret's Hospital, Hammond, IN was a high point of her religious service. Jean, a woman of deep faith and great devotion to the Divine Indwelling, was able through her presence her poetry and prayers to bring comfort to many. During the Vigil, one of our Sisters shared how she was told by someone at the hospital that the people always wanted Jean to bring them Holy Communion. They said she more than any other Eucharistic Minister would make a beautiful service at their bedside and then spend time listening to them, counseling them, and praying for their needs. One patient said, "She was there for me, she has this calming effect on you like it is the hand of God."

In 1989, an article about her work at St. Margaret's stated: "Sr. Brosnan's words and expressions are so soothing, and such a balm, that if the hospital were to bottle it they would probably go out of business." One of our Sisters, Sister Dorothy Anne Lengerich, while staying at St. Margaret's with her brother Msgr. Vincent Lengerich when he had surgery stated, "She was impressed with Sister Jean's compassion and kindness."

Sister Jean had the gift of writing spiritual poems and poetry that came from her heart. Excerpts from two are entitled, "Home" in which she states:

*I have a Shrine
Within myself;
A Place where I can dwell.
Jesus is my dearest friend,
My Love and Joy I tell.
I have a Chapel right in me,
Where I can close the door
And get the Courage
And the Strength
To Cope
With Life
Once more!*

Another states,

*This has become, dear God
My constant prayer
That I may be
Increasingly aware
Of Your Indwelling
Deep within my heart
And that no busyness,
No daily care
Distract me from
That Sacred Trysting
Where
Wrapped in communion
With my God,
I dwell in You
And You in me
EMMANUEL.*

*O let me stay like Mary
At Your feet
Since You have led me
Not to the retreat
Of Hermit cell
Or desert place apart
But to the turmoil
Of the city street.
Help me create a
Sanctuary sweet
In my own soul:
A secret, holy place
Where I can hear
Your voice
And see Your face!*

Jean also wrote reflections on several topics that she entitled "Bedside Theology." Her friends Dick and Rosalie Worland put them into a booklet. Here are a few excerpts on Gifts: "The priceless gifts we possess are the persons in our lives..... We can waste our beautiful minds, hearts, emotions, and speech on the various aspects of the flaw in another, we can go through life waiting for the people gifts in our life to become perfect – like we ourselves are not, never have been, nor ever will be this side of the grave. There's nothing all that wrong with the people in our lives. They are just imperfect human beings. There are no other kinds. However, there just may be (remotely possible) something direfully unhinged with our attitude. You'll probably never know how much I admire and appreciate you because I'll probably never tell you until I stand over your coffin."

The compassionate, loving healing touch of Jean through her counseling with people one on one brought freedom, peace and healing to many. When Sister Maria Luisa Valdez' ear was badly infected and bleeding, many Sisters prayed with her over her ear. Afterwards when she was walking alone down the corridor, Sister Jean quietly beacons her to her room and without words, Sister Jean anointed her ear with Holy Oil, cupped her hand over the ear and prayed silently for a moment, then sent her away with a smile. Her ear was immediately healed.

Another gift/quality of Jean was a keen sense of humor. One story told at the Vigil by Sister Mary Helen Rogers related that as Jean was leaving a building to go to her car, she saw a young police officer at her car with his pad out ready to write a ticket. She said, "officer, I'm so glad the police officers are still so efficient and doing such a fine job. My father who served on the force for many years would be proud of you." Needless to say, she did not get a ticket.

Sister Jean retired to Victory Noll in 1989 and did volunteer ministry in the communications department until 2000. In September of 2001, she retired to Holy Family and was still active offering her poems and prayers to many. In 2002, she became a patient and declined greatly during the last two years of her life.

In his very meaningful homily during the Mass of Christian Burial, Father Fahey called Jean a "Mystic." He said she embraced all people, all creation as a gift from God. She saw God's presence in everything and everyone. She was especially aware of God dwelling within herself. This Divine Indwelling was her focus, her life.

After Mass on a cold brisk day we processed to the cemetery where we laid Jean to rest, with the final prayers, blessing of the casket and the singing of the hymn to Our Lady of Victory, "We have a Holy Mother."

Sister Jean we thank you for your presence among us and for your gentle, compassionate care for God's people and all of creation. In her prayer card are the words from Revelations 2-1:5 "See I make all things New!" We know that you are now a new creation in God's presence, with all the angels and saints you will glorify God with your beautiful poetry for all eternity.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sister Betty". The ink is dark and the script is fluid, with the word "Sister" written in a smaller, more compact style than "Betty".

Sr. Elizabeth Anderson, OLVM
General Secretary