



## SISTER MARY JOHN SULLIVAN, OLVM

Sister Mary John Sullivan quietly entered into the eternal embrace of God's paradise on September 23, 2014. She had been doing well the last few weeks and then took a turn in the morning. I went to her room around 1 p.m. and she was breathing very slowly and shallow, but she was peaceful. I prayed with her and blessed her before I left. She was welcomed into heaven about 2:30 p.m.

Sister Mary John was born in Chicago, Illinois, on December 1, 1912, to John L. and Mary Bridget Sullivan, the third of three children. She was baptized Hazel Everaldise Agnes Sullivan on December 29, 1912, at St. Andrew Catholic Church.

One brother, John Sullivan, Jr. died before Sr. Mary John was born and her parents and sister, Mary Eugenia Berry, also preceded her in death.

Sister Mary John entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on August 30, 1936, and made first vows on August 5, 1939. Her first mission was Elko, Nevada, where she worked until 1943. She then moved to Monterey, California, for two years. Sister Mary John would serve in other missions throughout the United States including New Jersey, Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana. She spent the majority of her Mission life serving in the state of Florida. She was there for more than 20 years, serving in Punta Gorda, Sebring, Miami and Fort Myers. After coming to Victory Noll from Florida in 1990, she lived in a couple of different missions as a companion with another Sister. While she lived at Victory Noll she helped by serving as sacristan in Memorial Chapel before completely retiring from ministry in 1997. Even in complete retirement, she continued to do volunteer ministry around Victory Noll.

In the March, 1965, **Victory Noll Challenge** story, Sister Mary John shared her vocation story of how she became a Sister. When she was four, her older sister Mary, who was nine, and her friends, who Sister Mary John called the "The Trio" would play at being nuns, using dishtowels, rosary beads and long kitchen aprons as their flowing robes. Sister Mary John was excluded from the play-acting because she was too little and not one of "The Trio." One day after being excluded she gave the door a good kick, banged with her fist, and said in a singsong voice, "You can just be Sisters – see if I care! I'm going to marry the richest man in the world and have a hundred kids." This promise made in haste and in the frustration of a four-year-old would come back to Sister Mary John for many years and in many ways.

The first time that occurred was in eighth grade when she wanted to graduate with her class even though she was too young and the Sister teaching the class thought she was not ready. Sister Mary John decided to have a Mass said to persuade the Sister to change her mind. After working many odd jobs and giving up the "extras" in her life, she finally earned enough money to have a Mass said. She asked the Monsignor of the parish to say the Mass for her and during their conversation he asked her if she might be considering being a nun. "Oh no, not me, my sister Mary ..." The prayers worked and Sister Mary John was allowed to graduate with her class. The Monsignor came to class to congratulate the students and asked how many of the boys would be going on to become priests. None stood up. He asked about how many girls would be going on to become nuns. She did not want him to be disappointed again, so she stood up. The Sister was not pleased and made the comment that this young lady was just showing off. The pastor winked at Sister Mary John and said, "Sister, you may be surprised one day."

Although she had no real intention of religious life, she wanted to be a nurse. During nurses training she suffered a foot ailment and had to discontinue training. It was during her recovery that once again the question was put to her about the possibility of religious life. After her foot had recovered she went to work as a stenographer and she had a very interesting life; playing golf and bridge and attending plays and the opera. But there was also something missing. She kept trying to put the nagging question out of her mind. Finally, on a trip to New York with her parents and friend Finney, she realized that something was missing and said to Finney, "You know, by this time next year I will have made a decision. It's either marriage or a religious vocation. Life is too real, too important, to keep on drifting." She did take a year to discern where God was calling her and to stop the drifting she felt. After a visit to Victory Noll she had her answer and applied. Once she received her acceptance letter, Sister Mary John had a "Tell Party" where she told everyone she was going to become a Sister and auctioned off her belongings. Her friends bid crazily for her belongings, thinking they would return them, however the next day Sister Mary John and her parents drove to Victory Noll. It was not easy to say goodbye, but there was peace and gratitude in her decision. Even though Sister Mary John struggled to answer the call she kept her promise. "The Trio" told her years later after they were all married with children, "You really did keep your promise. You did marry the richest man in the world and had a hundred kids."

In the sharing for Sister Mary John's wake, the virtues of kindness, gentleness and a good sense of humor were shared many times. One way these virtues were showed was by offering a glass of wine, a smile and a simple, "I knew you would need something," after a long day, a traffic accident and shaky drive home. It was also shared that Sister Mary John taught Sister Judith Ann Turnock how to play the accordion during Christmas vacation in 1965 in Flemington, New Jersey. It is a gift that Sister Judith Ann has been grateful for ever since, and which she shared with the community after the vigil on Sunday afternoon September 28, 2014.

Sister Mary John's nephew Tom Berry and his wife, Maureen, were able to join the community for the funeral liturgy on Monday, September 29, 2014. During the homily, Father Dale Bauman shared about how Sister Mary John did not marry the richest man in the world, but in the universe, and she had more than a 100 children because of all the "children" she taught and nurtured through her many years of ministry in religious education. He also made the connection with her name with the two who stood under the cross of Jesus. Those two witnessed the suffering of Jesus. In her almost 102 years of life, Sister Mary John had witnessed the suffering two world wars, the Korean conflict and Vietnam, not to mention the violence of the civil rights movement and other types of cruelty and destruction. Through all of these she remained faithful and stood with those she loved and who loved her.

Sr. Mary John, you were a faithful servant, you proclaimed the Gospel with your life and kept your promise. May you now enjoy the fruits of your labor and be welcomed by the one to whom you promised your life and now share in the eternal banquet of life.

With peace and blessing,



Sister Ginger Downey, OLVM

