



## **SISTER MARTHA WORDEMAN, OLVVM**

Sr. Martha died on September 4, 2013, at Holy Family Health Care Center at Victory Noll. She was age 89 years old.

Sister Martha had many names by which her family, friends and community called her throughout her life. This trend started as soon as she was born. She was born in Bellevue, Kentucky on May 24, 1924, the third of three daughters to Albert Wordeman and Aurelia Stolle Wordeman. She was baptized Martha Mary at Sacred Heart Church the same day, although her birth certificate states her name is Martha May. Her parents and her two sisters, Rita Rechten and Joan Ramler, preceded her in death.

Sister Martha, again with another spelling of her name, Marthamae, entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on October 27, 1944, professing first vows on August 5, 1947. She was then known as Catechist Marthamae Wordeman. She served in the missions in Colorado, Indiana, Missouri, Michigan, Texas, Massachusetts, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Kentucky. During these years she went by Sister Martha Mary. In 2003, Sister Martha retired to Victory Noll to continue her spiritual and inspirational writing.

Sister Martha was born prematurely at home on the feast of Our Lady of Victory. She liked to think that birth experience gave her a sense of urgency, the need for relationships, the zest for adventure and the tangible love for God that made Victory Noll right for her. Early in her life she assumed she would marry and have children as the women in her family had done and her two older sisters would also do. She enrolled in a marriage course at St. Xavier University at the age of 20. It was the final class of this course that changed her life. The topic of that final class was the religious vocation. The instructor said, "If life with one of God's creatures can be so beautiful, what must life with God be?" This quote gave her a new direction, not marriage and family, but the need for a very direct relationship with Jesus. In this life she would go on to a vowed life that provided time for prayerful reflection and a wide scope of activities in a variety of places. She met different kinds of people with whom she would minister with and to over her 69 years of living as a member of the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory.

In the early days, sisters received an assignment with very little, and sometimes no, consultation. Blind obedience sent her to places she would never have thought of, much less chosen. Wherever she went, she always gained more than she expected. With her ongoing training and her practice of personal prayer, she made Jesus the focal point of every challenge and experience. During her very first mission in Denver, Colorado, she experienced anxiety of life on the streets, living in tenement housing, and learning how to respond to the endless needs of people. She learned the selflessness and joy of humble service in the name of the Gospel. She once said of her life's adventure, "Married life probably would have been very beautiful, but, oh, what life with God has been!"

In the early years after the Second Vatican Council in the 1970's, Sister Martha lived in Nashville Tennessee, serving with the Glenmary priests in Appalachia. During these years she became interested in clowning and was encouraged to explore her interest and make it into a ministry. Her clown name was "Mighty Marty" and in her own words she spoke of what this ministry meant for her; "My clowning experience seemed to help make 'sense' out of the prevailing 'non-sense' of many life experiences."

Another one of those adventures was in 1979 when she chose to go to the mountain-locked coal town of War, West Virginia. The town's isolation and lack of financial and psychological support made it impossible for most outsiders to remain. Sister Martha, as she was now called, served the people through her advocacy for the poor. In a location where there are very few Catholics, she worked to help build an activities center for the community and also helped to build not only a community, but a church, a Catholic Church.

Many of Sister Martha's family and friends were able to join the Victory Noll community to celebrate her life. They gathered on Friday evening September 6, 2013 for the vigil service and sharing of stories and memories. Then on Saturday morning they celebrated the Eucharistic liturgy for her together with her nephew, Father Michael Ramler.

After the prayers at the cemetery were said, a Monarch butterfly that had been nurtured by Tom and Becky Smith was released on Sister Martha's casket. It stayed for a few moments and then flew off on its new adventure, just as Sister Martha had begun her new adventure.

On the celebration of her golden jubilee Sister Martha wrote, "I have always realized that Victory Noll was the right choice for me. Of course there were some rough times when, at night I buried my face in my pillow to weep copious tears of frustration and anger and 'not understanding.' How else does one grow?"

Now Sister Martha, you have no more tears of frustration, anger or of "not understanding." You have ended one adventure and begun a new one. May this adventure be all that you hoped and prayed it would be - a "love life with Jesus"!

In the love of Jesus and Mary,



Sr. Ginger Downey, O.L.V.M

