


April 13, 1988

Victory No.11

Huntington, Indiana

April 13-18, 1988

HE goes
Before YOU

in LIFE
and DEATH

"I have chosen you from the world to go and bear fruit that will last, Alleluia!"
(Communion Antiphon (John 15:16.) Wednesday, second week in Easter)

Dear Sisters and Associates,

Her final act of love expressing her faithful discipleship came at 9:00 a.m. in response to the call of "Come!", just as we were finishing the Wednesday Liturgy of the second week of Easter! How quickly dear Sister Mary Paul Barthen was gone from us - into eternity - to begin her new life with Christ Jesus where there is only peace and blessedness - this Wednesday morning, April 13, 1988. We assembled at 9:15 a.m. in the new section, in her room and hallway to assist at the Memorial Service (for all those who donate their body to Medical Science). Father Giles led the service which included the rite of sprinkling and the laying on of the pall. The prayers and songs are very meaningful to all of us. Sometime later, Mr. Hart took the body to Indianapolis.

Sister Mary Paul returned to Victory Noll from Gary January 31, 1967 because of a broken arm suffered after she fell on the ice. In July of 1967, she was among the group that went to Grand Rapids to attend the summer school at the Dominican College. During that summer school, she stumbled over a chair, fell and broke her left leg. Since that time, she has been in Holy Family Health Care Center. During these years at Victory Noll, she has enjoyed relatively good health until very recently, when her health began to decline. Even until a few months ago, Sister could sit at the piano and play simple pieces. Music was very soothing to her. About two weeks ago, Sister contracted a severe chest cold and her breathing was labored. For several days she received continuous oxygen. On the morning of April 13, she had taken some juice at breakfast time. Pauline Blacker, nursing assistant, was with her when she noticed a change in her breathing. She called the charge nurse, Lori Johnson, LPN. Lori came to chapel to get Sister Virginia. When Sister Virginia arrived, Sister Mary Paul had just died. It was 9:00 a.m. The last hymn was being sung in Chapel. Sister Virginia came into chapel to make the announcement that Sister Had just died. Father Giles and the Sisters went to her room immediately to pray. The Memorial Service followed shortly afterwards.

Sister Mary Paul spent forty-two years of her religious life in twenty-one of our missions in the seven States of New Mexico, California, Texas, Indiana, Ohio, Oklahoma and Missouri. She, like Sister Catherine Olberding went to the missions as a Junior Catechist. Her first love was the mission of Carmen, New Mexico. Six years later, she wrote this delightful story of one of her experiences as a Junior Catechist. "Carmen," she wrote, "was a pretty little spot in the mountains where they lived, seven miles from the post office and received mail only when the school teacher brought it to them." "They had Mass once a month and the people came from great distances to attend. Father would wait until he thought everyone was there before he started the Mass, so it was always noon before the celebration began!" "They had a 'divided house.' two rooms were in one building, with a part of one room partitioned off for a chapel which was so small that for Mass, the Catechists had to remove the chairs so there would be room for the Catechists and Father. The third room was in another building some distance from the other part of the house. This was used as a kitchen. Can't you just imagine the Catechists running back and forth from the chapel to the kitchen to stir the soup or put another log on the fire? One morning, Catechist Barthen had to fix Father's breakfast. When she went to put wood on the fire, she was startled to see a chicken in the woodbox! Not being very familiar with 'livestock' of any kind, she tried to chase the creature out through the open door. It flew up and down squawking in the wildest possible way. Finally, she pushed it out through the door, not bothering to see what became of it. A few minutes later, a child appeared in the doorway and said: 'Catechist, someone has let your chicken go that was brought to you as a present!' Then Catechist understood!

'Frankie, Tom, Jose!' she called to the boys playing nearby, 'Go! get my chicken!' They brought it back with its legs tied. After that, she said she thought twice before she chased a chicken from the kitchen!"

Sister Mary Paul was born July 21, 1894 in Chicago, one of thirteen children, four of whom died in infancy. Her brothers and sisters, James, Richard, Virginia, Agnes, Antoinette, John, Isabelle and Clara all preceded her in death. Her sister Isabelle was the mother of our Sister Isabelle Kestler and her brother Bernard. While Sister Mary Paul was baptized Anna Maria, she was always known as "Hannah", which is the Hebrew form of Anna. For a time she used Johanna, but "Hannah" was the name she loved. Hannah worked for the telephone company in Chicago and became so efficient in her work that she was made a teacher of operators. She worked the day shift and studied music at night. After several years of serious study, she and two other young women graduated from a School of Music in Chicago.

Hannah came to know the Congregation through her friend, Madeline Sophie Renier, who invited her to attend an Investiture in Gary. After the celebration and a meal, Catechist Olberding took her upstairs to meet Father Sigstein. Some time after that meeting, she received a letter from Father Sigstein telling her when she could arrive at Gary. She entered the very young Congregation from Our Lady of the Angels parish in Chicago June 29, 1924. This was the Junior Training Center in Gary. She said the first night all she heard was sirens screaming. Even as a native of Chicago, she wasn't used to that much noise! Catechist Barthen made first profession of vows at Victory Mount in Las Vegas, June 11, 1926. She celebrated her Golden and Diamond Jubilees at Victory Noll in 1974 and 1984.

One of Catechist Barthen's first experiences in Gary was the unique way they began the laundry at the Annex. First, they walked to the Settlement House to borrow the equipment they needed to do the laundry. Then, after doing the laundry at the Annex, they walked the eight blocks back to the Settlement House to return what they borrowed! "Can you imagine how funny we felt carrying all those things through the streets?" she asked.

On April 18, 1988, we celebrated a Memorial Liturgy in Our Lady of Victory Chapel at 4:15 o'clock p.m. in the afternoon. What memories this brought back for all of us! Sister Mary Paul had requested that we do so in a letter she left concerning her death.

Sisters Mary Joan and Florentine did the first and second readings, Carmen sang the reponsorial psalm, Florence Garbacz offered the prayers of the faithful and Helen Marie Beall and Madelon LoRang brought up the gifts. Father Giles' meaningful homily spoke to us of the Christian aspect of life after death in its fullness. Among many other important points, he emphasized the importance of having a correct understanding of what resurrection means. "What Jesus' resurrection means," he said, "is that he went forward, breaking through into a totally new mode of existence, beyond death's grip and beyond our imagining. We are talking about Jesus in his human nature, that human nature in which he suffered and died; it was in his human nature that he rose. Having risen, Jesus was beyond conflict and struggle, beyond the limits of time, space and barriers." "The resurrection of Jesus is the model and exemplar of our resurrection. We are dealing here with mystery. The mystery of the kingdom of God in our midst...still hidden like a bit of yeast secretly working in the dough, but really there, 'the power of his resurrection', ours to taste, if we believe." "If we can firmly believe that Jesus is in our midst when we gather for prayer, that we 'abide in him' and are 'members of his body' while we are alive in our present condition, what is hindering us from believing that Sister Mary Paul is already now enjoying her resurrected life with the Lord in a way invisible to us, except in faith?" "If we can grasp this Christian aspect of life after death in its fullness...we will experience an even closer union with our beloved Sister in Christ."

The Communion Antiphon for the day Sister Mary Paul died, speaks to me so forcibly of what her life was all about! She loved life and lived it to the hilt and she bore fruit that will last for all eternity! How grateful we should be to our Creator for the reflection of his love as it shone forth in Sister Mary Paul in her ability to live life and enjoy it! She was such a blessing to us!

Sincerely in Jesus through Mary,

Sister Germaine Studler