



Dear Sisters and Associates,

"All honor to you, Mary! From you arose the Sun of Justice,  
Christ our God! Communion Antiphon - Feast of the Immac. Conception

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, at 7:00 a.m., Thursday morning, December 8, 1988, Sister Mary Joseph Penning died quietly and peacefully in the Lord. Her close friend since they entered together, Sister Madelon LoRang had been with her since six o'clock and had just finished the rosary for her when she noticed the change in Sister's breathing. She called the nurse and Sisters Virginia Schmitt, Camilla Cray, Marion and Mary Genevieve came to pray the prayers for the dying and were present when she died very peacefully.

Sister Mary Joseph returned to Victory Noll from Imlay City in June of 1967, because of a severe arthritic condition. Even before returning to Victory Noll, Sister suffered a cataract surgery and glaucoma in her left eye. Since returning to this Hill of Grace, Sister has suffered progressive degeneration of her knees and spine due to arthritis. Her vision has also continued to fail as well as her hearing. Sister had been able to care for herself until a few months ago when her vision failed completely. She could only distinguish light and dark. She had a total loss of hearing in her left ear and could only hear loud sounds in her right. Recently, a malignant tumor developed in her abdomen which caused her so much pain and distress. In spite of all this, Sister Mary Joseph was always thoughtful and caring of others. She always expressed her gratitude to the nurses for any help that was offered to her. When she was able, Sister loved to visit those who were ill to comfort and cheer them. Sister Mary Joseph has always been a real model of charity!

In her 63 years as a religious, Sister Mary Joseph spent 34 years in the missions of Indiana, New Mexico, California, Texas, Colorado, Wyoming and Michigan. She served on the Society's Board of Governors in 1928 and 1933 and the Corporation's Board of Directors in 1938. She was elected 4th Councilor at the First Canonical Chapter in 1938 and again in 1941 at the Second Canonical Chapter. At the second Chapter in 1941, she was also made General Secretary for six years in addition to being Councilor.

Sister Frances Meyer recalls the time she and Sister Mary Joseph went to Dubuque to solicit subscriptions for TMC. It so happened that Sister Mary Joseph's only sister was to be married on the day they were scheduled to return to Victory Noll. Sr. Frances thought it terrible that she couldn't be present for the wedding. Strangely enough, Frances became so ill that day that they had to call Victory Noll to tell them she couldn't travel. Sister Mary Joseph was able to be present at her sister's wedding!

Sister Kathleen Leven recalled their days at Victory Mount during the depression, when they dispensed clothing, wrote up and filled grocery orders and took their turns in the "soup kitchen." In spite of long hours and very little free time, they loved their work!

Sister Mary Joseph Penning was born April 7, 1895 in Dubuque, Iowa and entered the Community from St. Mary's Parish in Dubuque. She graduated from Immaculate Conception Academy and worked as a stenographer and book-keeper before entrance. She entered with Sister Madelon LoRang on January 20, 1925 and made first profession of vows February 11, 1927 at Victory Noll. She celebrated her Golden and Diamond Jubilees in 1975 and 1985.

Sister's only sister, Loretta, preceded her in death. Her niece and nephew, Mary Feltes and John Joseph Savary of Dubuque were unable to attend the funeral. They sent a lovely spray and beautiful bouquet - all red carnations.

The wake service was celebrated on Friday evening, December 9th at 7:00 p.m. Sister Virginia Schmitt led the prayer service and Sisters Mary Joan and Monica Ulibarri did the readings. The service ended with the De Montfort's song to Our Blessed Mother.

Father Leopold, OFM Cap., our chaplain, celebrated the Liturgy Saturday morning at 10:30 a.m. Sisters Gertrude, Frances Kowalewski and Camilla were cross and candle bearers. Sisters Susanna and Mary Rita placed the pall on the casket. Sister Madelon LoRang did the first reading, Sister Carmen sang the Responsorial, Sister Clarice did the second reading. Sister Joan offered the intercessions and Sisters Helen Marie, Carmelita and Virginia Hamilton brought up the gifts.

Father Leopold spoke of how quietly Sister Mary Joseph carried out in her own way, the life God wished her to live. The cross planted itself firmly in her life and she was not going to lose anything! She truly believed in God. We, on our part, believe she has eternal life. We have the assurance from the words of John's Gospel: "It is the will of Him who sent me that I should lose nothing of what he has given me; rather, I should raise it up on the last day. Indeed, this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks upon the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life. Him/Her, I will raise up on the last day." (John 6:39-40)

Sister Mary Louise prayed the final prayers of commendation at the end of the liturgy. Before she began the prayers, she said: "... I saw Sister Mary Joseph as an extraordinarily patient woman. Patient with herself and with others. During these years that I knew Sister, she was dealing with loss; loss of her sight, loss of her hearing, loss of mobility and, during these last weeks, loss of the ability to do even the smallest thing for herself. Because her mind remained keen, she realized her physical diminishment. To me, dealing with loss is one of the great spiritual challenges of aging. Losses occur throughout our lives, but toward the end of a long life, the losses often come at a faster pace and modify us more dramatically."

"During the years that I watched and learned from Sr. Mary Joseph, her continued faith, quiet strength, sincere love of and interest in others, and her gentle good naturedness, all in the face of ongoing loss, assured us that God's mercies are in fact new and renewed every day of our lives. Sister Mary Joseph did not like to dwell on her own aches and pains or limitations. Yes, she would respond when you asked her about these things, but she usually was quick to change the subject and ask about you."

"Sister's times of prayer were especially important to her, but she was even to lose the strength and energy to pray. During one of my conversations with her, she confided that she could no longer say her prayers. When I responded that her very life was a prayer, she thought for a moment and simply said she would not worry about that any longer. It seemed to me that with each loss or diminishment, Sr. MARY Joseph was given an inner and deeper gift..."

"Our Sister's gentle, positive presence among us has enriched and strengthened us all. We can only celebrate the life that Sister Mary Joseph now enjoys . . . her time of loss and diminishment is now over. Now, she sees the things that our eyes have not seen and hears the things that our ears have not heard, things beyond our imagination. Now, she enjoys all that God has prepared for those who have loved faithfully." (1Cor.9)

I always like to go back and recall what Fr. Kilduff, OCD, said about the spirituality of aging. He said the later years are for serving the Lord with gladness, and letting Him possess us, reshape us and consume us. I think that is what Sister Mary Joseph was doing - she served the Lord in surrender to grow in wholeness and holiness to that full stature in Christ Jesus to which we are all called. How grateful we are for the reflection of God in this quiet, kindly, Religious!

Lovingly in Jesus and Mary,  
*Sister Germaine Stadler, O.L.V.M.*  
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