

MURIEL BALCH
Victo: October 18, 1989
Huntington, Indiana
October 23, 1989



Dear Sisters and Associates,

For the past nine years, I have wanted to use the following poem, and it never seemed to fit. Today, it fits and I would like to begin this letter with these thoughts on Death.

It's putting away life's playthings and running to the gate
With quickening pulse and longing, half fearing to be late.

It's peering outside the window all through the thunderstorm,
And hoping through lighting flashes to see the Father's form.

It's scanning the road in darkness to glimpse the Father's face,
And then, with a child's abandon, to bask in his embrace!

Sister Blanche Marie Richardson, o.l.v.m.

R. Tagore says: "Death is not extinguishing the Light; it is putting out the Lamp because Dawn has come!" The DAWN came for Sister Muriel Balch in the early hours on the Feast of St. Luke, Apostle, October 18, 1989. Indeed, with a child's abandon, she flew into LOVE'S embrace!

Sister Muriel was an indefatigable Missionary who was graced by God with health and strength to carry out her missionary labors proclaiming the Good News. For 55 years she labored with joy in the missions of New Mexico, California, Colorado, Massachusetts and Latin America. In 1968, Sister was elected a member of the Council and served as Area Coordinator for the South West Area for three years. Three times she served in an administrative capacity in the missions of Los Angeles, Denver and West Harwich, Mass. In January of 1966, she was chosen with Sister Carol Ortega to "look over the field" in the Republic of Panama and in South America for possible OLVM missions. In April of 1967, they submitted recommendations and reasons for their choices for the opening of missions in Oruro, Bolivia, Chitre, Panama and Santa Cruz, Bolivia. That following August of 1967, the Council met and made the decision to open our first mission in Oruro, Bolivia. Shortly afterwards, the names of those Sisters missioned to Oruro were made known. While in South America, Sister Muriel attended ICLA (Institui Catequistico Latinoamericano) in Manizales, Columbia to prepare herself for the missions of South America. However, her dream was not to be realized because of her position as Councilor and South West Area Coordinator after the Chapter of 1968.

In 1971, Sister returned to Massachusetts to minister there as parish Director of Religious Education for eight years. In 1979, she went to El Centro and remained there until the time of her death. Sister retired in 1987 and her volunteer ministry as a retiree included: giving basic catechetical training for new teachers of religion; acting as a para-lega interviewing those seeking asylum from El Salvador and Honduras; teaching English to Spanish-speaking adults; instructing teens jailed on drug charges; ministering as an active member of Birthright through counseling. In her last note to me, Sister said she was still happy to proclaim the Good News - giving sight to the blind - whatever sight was needed to SEE JESUS!

Sister Muriel was born June 18, 1913 in St. Louis, Mo. and entered the Congregation from St. Phillip Neri Parish. September 4, 1931. She made first profession of vows at Victory Noll on September 8, 1934 and spent the first year of her missionary life at Victory Mount in Las Vegas. From there, she began her first sojourn in California which lasted for 18 years.

Sister received her B.A. degree in History from Mt. St. Joseph College in Mt. St. Joseph, Ohio and her M.A. degree in Religious Education from Boston College at Chestnut Hill Mass. She also received a certificate from ICLA in Manizales, Columbia.

Sister Muriel is survived by her step-sister, Mrs. Dorothy Ellison of Catawissa, Mo.

Dorothy, her husband Ed and their daughter Mary arrived after 4:00 p.m. on Sunday and were present for the wake and the funeral. We appreciated their presence here at the Noll.

The wake was held at 7:00 p.m. in Memorial Chapel. Sister Joan Arnold led the prayer service. Sisters Callista and Mary Joan did the readings and Sister Rita gave a short reflection on the readings. (1Cor.15:35-38, 42-44; John 12:23-25) "Things," Sister said, "are not always what they appear to be." She gave the example of the seed planted and dying and the sufferings and death of Jesus, which in both cases appeared to be an end, but were just the beginning. She mentioned that St. Paul asked the right questions - He did not ask, "how can a seed come back to life?" but, "into what new and glorious and fuller life will this seed be changed in order to possess and share fuller life Our call, like Mary's should be, "let it be done to me according to your word!" As we celebrate Sister Muriel's change of residence and lifestyle, let us pray for the courage, faith and openness to the changes God wishes to effect in our lives to be like Mary - Jesus!

The Liturgy of Christian Burial was celebrated by Father William Kummer from St. Mary's parish in Huntington. Sister Virginia S. was the cross bearer, Sisters Frances K. and Lucy Marie were candle bearers, Florentine and Magdalene L. placed the pall on the casket, Genevieve D. and Geraldine K. did the readings, Carmen sang the Responsorial and the Alleluia verse, Father Kummer gave the homily, Sr. Gertrude offered the prayers of the faithful and Dorothy, Ed and Mary brought up the gifts.

Beginning with a quote from Isaiah, Father Kummer spoke of the functions of the prophet which, he said, are two-fold: to shake us from our complacency and also to give us consolation and courage in time of trials. He said that in many ways the life of a religious missionary represents the same function or parallel as that of the prophet. The life of a religious should prod us, challenge us, not leave us alone, but call us forth to a great love of God and neighbor. The life of a religious should also bring consolation and peace to others. We come today to bury our Sister Muriel, someone, who believed in the Lord Jesus and gave her life for the welfare of the poor and neglected. We remember her, her life and the life of Jesus! We pray that her faith in Christ Jesus will be fulfilled and that she will live forever. She ate the Bread of Life and remained in Christ. In Him, she will live forever!

Sister Martha Wordeman gave a very beautiful eulogy. It is typed on a separate sheet attached to this letter. After the prayers of commendation by Sister Mary Louise Rowney, we walked to the cemetery for the prayers at the gravesite. Sister Mary Joan drove Sister Frances Meyer in the golf-cart. It was a very lovely fall day to walk to the new grave. Sister Muriel's grave is the first one on the south west side of the road which was put in this year. It is on the far west end next to a beautiful Scotch Pine. Some of the leaves fell gently to the ground as Father's prayers ended the service and we sang our hymn to Our Blessed Lady of Victory. We walked back to the dining room where Vince and the cooks had prepared a tasty meal which included Sister Barbara Marie's freshly baked rhubarb pie.

Dorothy, Ed and Mary left the Noll shortly after dinner.

We come together again to remember and give thanks to God for the blessing of Muriel's presence among us in this congregation. How much we must treasure the blessing we are to one another! What a proclamation of joy to hear of her happiness in proclaiming the Good News in giving sight to the blind - whatever SIGHT was needed to SEE JESUS! ALLELUIA!!!

Prayerfully in Jesus and Mary,

Sister Germaine Stadler, o.l.v.m.
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