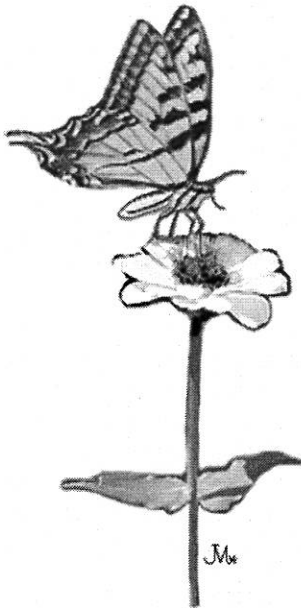


September 22, 2008

Dear Sisters, Associates, Family, and Friends,

SISTER RAFAELA MENDOZA went peacefully home to God at 10 a.m. on Saturday, September 13, 2008. She was 100 years old and would have celebrated her 101st birthday on October 24th. Up until one month ago, Rafaela attended the Hospice sing-along every Thursday evening. She would tap her foot in time with the music, and enjoyed being there, giving a smile to anyone who spoke with her. Sister Rafaela had recently been having TIAs or mini-strokes. These weakened her heart, and finally at her age, her heart could no longer sustain her life. Sister Rose Elizabeth Hohner was with Sister Rafaela during the last hour of her life.



Rafaela was born October 24, 1907 in San Diego de Alejandria, Jalisco, Mexico to Gregorio and Jacinta Martinez Mendoza. She was the oldest of eight children along with Mary, Augustin, Otilia, Ignacio, Henry, Gregory, and Teresa. Surviving Sister Rafaela are her sister Teresa Garcia, Crete, Ill., and her two brothers Ignacio Mendoza, Lynwood, Ill., and Gregory Mendoza, Crest Hill, Ill.

Sister Rafaela shared the story of how her family survived the Mexican Revolution of Venustiano Carranza and Pancho Villa. While her father was away doing his work as a merchant, soldiers came in and ransacked their home. They threatened to kill Rafaela's mother and baby Otilia. One soldier picked up baby Otilia and was going to kill both mother and baby because Mrs. Mendoza would not tell them where her husband was. These were Carrancistas and they thought Mr. Mendoza belonged to Villa. When Rafaela's father returned and saw the suffering of his family, he decided to move North. The journey was a perilous and lengthy one. They were in constant fear of being killed by Carranza troops. When they finally arrived in

El Paso, Rafaela's mother said, "Gracias a Dios." In Texas, the family faced great hardships such as the struggle to obtain food and shelter, and Mr. Mendoza's difficulty in finding employment to provide for his family. After some time Mr. Mendoza found work on the Railroad, but sustained a severe injury and could no longer do hard work. A friend took him to Chicago where he found lighter work and shortly after, the whole family moved there.

It was in a little Chapel in Chicago that Rafaela's pastor introduced her to Father Sigstein. This meeting took place on Rafaela's 17th birthday. Father Sigstein had heard from the pastor of Sister Rafaela's love for God and daily visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Father invited her to join the Society of Missionary Catechists and to work among the poor in New Mexico. She had wanted to be a Missionary in China, but after a little persuasion she said "yes" to the call to become a Missionary Catechist of Our Blessed Lady of Victory. The Society was only two years old when Rafaela entered. She was truly one of our pioneer sisters. Sister Rafaela entered the Congregation on November 2, 1924. She made profession of vows on October 7, 1926, and final vows on August 5, 1941. Father Sigstein must have greatly respected and admired Rafaela. In her file she saved a letter he had written to her in 1938, before she had pronounced her final vows. He asked for her prayers and sacrifices as he left on a trip to collect money to pay off some debts. He also asked her to pray that the new Constitution and Rules would be approved and for the upcoming election. He told her that it would make him happy to know that she would pray that God's will would be accomplished as quickly as possible so that, "I may lay down the

office and power which Our Good Mother, – Our Foundress and Patroness, – gave me – Her unworthy instrument, for acting in the founding of our dearly beloved Society.”

Sister Rafaela served in the missions of Arizona, California, Colorado, Indiana, New Mexico and Texas. Rafaela loved her mission work. She served as a religious educator and conducted classes for both children and adults. It gave her great joy to organize and direct choirs in various mission parishes. She also worked tirelessly in any local efforts to assist the poor and underprivileged. Stories are told of Rafaela spending many hours walking through the neighborhoods where she lived, ringing doorbells, greeting the people, and inviting them to church services. She loved the people and was a friend and servant to all.

In 1988, Rafaela retired to our house in Tucson, Ariz., where she continued volunteer ministry, assisting in the Parish, visiting families, and being a caring presence of God’s love and compassion for all. During this time she continued to attend workshops for ongoing education. In the summer of 1988, she attended the Marian Symposium at St. Mary’s College, San Antonio. In 1997, Rafaela and a group of our sisters went on a Pilgrimage to New Mexico, to visit the sites of our early missions. In 2000, Sr. Rafaela returned to Victory Noll. She was often seen walking around the grounds, and if a sister stopped to greet her she would remark, “God is so good, to give us all this beauty of nature.”

Approximately 25 members of Sister Rafaela’s family came for her funeral, including her sister Teresa, brother Gregorio, and many nieces, nephews, grandnieces, and grandnephews.

During the Vigil on Monday evening, many spoke of Rafaela’s love for nature and music. She saw God in everything. Her family described how Rafaela was very quiet during a more recent visit. They began to sing “O Maria Madre Mia” and her eyes lit up and she began to sing. Then they sang the Mexican National Anthem and smiling Rafaela clapped and tapped her foot to the music. Her family also shared with us how Rafaela’s mother died on September 13th; five years later her brother died on September 13th and five years later Rafaela went home to God on September 13th. This has made September 13th a memorable date in the life of her family. Truly Rafaela’s love for God, love for people, love for music, and love for all of creation were evident throughout her life of love and service.

Tuesday morning, the day we laid Rafaela to rest, was a beautiful day and significantly it was Mexican Independence Day. During the homily at Mass, Father Fahey recalled Sister Rafaela’s length of years. He said he envisioned our Sisters, family, and friends greeting her with “what took you so long to get here? We have been waiting for you.” During the Liturgy, the family took part by being Cross Bearer, placing the Pall on the casket, being lectors, praying the Intercessions, and bringing the Gifts to the Alter. We sang traditional Spanish hymns that Rafaela loved, concluding with the Song of Farewell, Adios, and Oh Virgen de Guadalupe.

We rejoice with you in your victory, Rafaela. We know that you are singing God’s praises with all our sisters. Thank you for your long life of love and dedicated service in our Community. We will always remember you and know that you will pray for us.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sister Betty". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and elegant.

Sr. Betty Anderson, OLVM
General Secretary