

All for Jesus through Mary

Victory Noll
Huntington, Indiana
March 29, 1976

Dear Sisters:

" . . . unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit." (John 12:24)

This morning we came together in faith, hope and love to bring someone we loved to final rest and to thank God for sharing His life with us through Sister Mary Gerard.

Sister Mary Gerard received the Sacrament of the Sick in a communal celebration with thirty-seven sisters on March 19. She died at 5:45 a.m., on March 27, after a brief bout with pneumonia which became apparent very suddenly on March 25, the forty-first anniversary of her profession of vows. Her lungs became very congested and she suffered much in her labored breathing in spite of all the techniques employed by the nursing staff to alleviate her distress. Her weakened and broken-down body was a perfect target for pneumonia, which was the immediate cause of her death.

On Friday, March 26, after Mass, Father Bill Frigo went upstairs to pray with Sister and to bless her. Seemingly, there was no outward response. In many different ways, Father prayed to ask Sister to open her heart and mind to the Father so that when He called, her answer would be "yes!" Someone was with Sister around the clock and when the end came, several sisters were with the nurses praying the prayers for the dying.

Sister Mary Gerard's suffering was no secret to any of us; I suspect few of us understood the deep suffering she has undergone throughout the years or the agony that it caused others. It seemed to me a sort of relief when her illness was finally diagnosed for what it was. Late in December of 1975, after many tests, her condition was diagnosed as Lupus Erythematosus which is a chronic and usually fatal systemic disease characterized by pathological changes in the vascular system, especially the collagen which serves as a binding substance for the capillaries and the small blood vessels.

In order to explain Sister's diagnosis, her behaviour and to recommend procedures for our dealing with Mary Gerard, Mrs. Mary Leffers, R.N., Director of the Nursing Services, spoke to all sisters at Victory Noll on January 14 and 15, 1976. She explained the disease for which there is no known cause or cure. The only treatment is medication to control the symptoms and care for the person with a very special kind of dedication and love. Her talk came from the heart of one totally committed to her profession.

In spite of her infirmities, Sister used to visit the elderly and the sick in Huntington until it became impossible for her to do so. For the past six or seven years, she has been a member of the Red Cross Service "Tel-a-Care" which means caring for people through the use of the telephone. Sister received a specific number of persons to call each day and the time she was to call. If, at any time, the person failed to answer, she immediately reported by phone to inform others to follow-through. It was through her vigilance that a woman's life was saved about eight months ago. That woman is alive today. Even this loving apostolate had to be taken away from Sister when it became unwise to allow her to call in her condition.

Sister Mary Gerard was born June 8, 1904 in St. Louis. She entered the Congregation February 11, 1932 and made first profession of vows March 25, 1935.

None of Sister's immediate family were able to attend the funeral. Her sisters, Estelle Byrne and Mrs. Agnes Zeller were ill. Her nieces: Mrs. J. Schneider of Madison, Wisconsin, Mrs. Robert Haist of Grand Blanc, Michigan and a nephew Byros Byrne of St. Louis were unable to come.

Father Michel Antoine, ofm cap., concelebrated the Liturgy of Christian Burial with Father Bill Frigo, ofm cap. The novices assisted them. Father Michel's homily was an interweaving of the readings (Hosea 2:16,21-22; Phil. 3:20-21; John 12:24-26) applied to: suffering; God's presence shown to us in others; how our life in Christ must be a life called to die in order that it bear fruit; Christ laying down His life and the Father raising it up in order that we be given the fruit of that love; how we are held in the Father's love in, with and through Christ; the necessity of our trust being like the trust Jesus had for His Father. Mary Gerard had that trust---now, she calls us to trust in that same LOVE which brought her home to the Father's love.

We know that Mary Gerard had a deep devotion to Our Blessed Mother. Mary was very real to her and her name was on Sister's lips many times during the past months of suffering. In and through Mary, she stepped with confidence and love through the mystery of death into her new life with Christ.

". . . unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies. . ."

Lovingly in Jesus and Mary,

Sister Germaine Staller