

REFLECTION

Vigil Service
Catherine Burke, pbvm
24 August 2023
By
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"Sing to the mountains; sing to the sea..."
Bob Dufford, sj

These words set the stage for Catherine's birth in Corner Brook on 23 September 1929 to her parents, Stan and Margaret (Tompkins) Burke. Cradled by the majestic mountains and nestled in the beautiful Bay of Islands, Catherine became aware from the beginning that she was held in an eternal story of love and self-giving that reached from the smallest corners of her heart to the greatest galaxies in space. I believe this probably explains why Catherine lived with awe and wonder and with the music of the spheres being integral to her beautiful soul.

Catherine joined our community on 8 September 1947, made first profession on 15 July 1950, receiving the name, Sister Mary Jacinta, and made final commitment to the vowed life on 15 July 1953.

After a Sister dies, I like to go through her file and sit with the memories.

One light story from her days at Laval High School in Placentia:

Sean dropped by the Choral Room to say hello and Catherine said, *"how come you were not at Choir Practice today? I forgot, Sister. Catherine says, "Sean, you must know that success is achieved by the sweat of your brow." But Sister, I don't wear a bra."*

They both had a good chuckle.

I also find the readings chosen for Anniversary celebrations truly revelatory of the heart's deepest desires. For Catherine's Golden Jubilee held at Emmaus House, New

Jersey in 1997, the reading from Deuteronomy spoke of God's gift of new life freely offered but open to our choices.

And Colossians 3: 12-17: *"So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you; compassion, kindness humility, quietness. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic all purpose garment. Do not be without it."*

And John's call (15: 9-17) to remember the root commandment to *"love one another."* *"The branch cannot abide by itself unless it abides in the vine."*

When I reflected on Catherine's Golden Jubilee liturgy celebration, I found this quote by the late Dag Hammarskjold that ended with these words:

I have known what it means "not to look back" and "to take no thought for the morrow".

At first glance, I didn't see this as fitting the Catherine I knew. But then I recalled that Catherine, a person of high ideals, always set the bar high and her life-long search was rooted in deep fidelity. As Catherine shared the gift of her music all over Newfoundland and Labrador, she was a perfectionist...hard on herself but not on anyone else. So that her life could be full she took steps to get the help she needed and what beamed out from the shadows was a beautiful, sincere person who followed Nano Nagle and the charism and mission of our congregation and who had to the end a gentle presence and a listening ear.

Before I conclude, let me return to the distant past, 1947. Monsignor Kirwin, in recommending Catherine to our congregation wrote, *"It is matter for rejoicing that the child of such parents should seek to follow more closely in the Master's footsteps by choosing the religious life...I shall follow her career with great interest and I trust that her life and example may prove an inspiration to many others to imitate her."*

From these beginnings, Catherine inherited a deep love for her family and spoke fondly of Olivera, Mercedes and Bernardine. When Catherine was struggling with dementia, she often obsessed over her sister, Bernardine, a Sister of the Congregation of Notre Dame, who entered eternal life on 5 July 2023. Also, her friends from her entrance date of 1947 were significant in her life. We remember

Pauline Barry, Chrys Brennan, Philomena Christopher, Teresa Doyle, Josephine Kennedy, Winifred Power and Marie Ryan.

Her students didn't wait until her death to let her know they were touched by her love and concern. One card read: *"I have been blessed by angels, some whose one-second smiles have made a difficult day a little easier."* Another wrote: *"Thanks to you I will always appreciate the gift of music, my capacity to listen and appreciate it at a deeper level than I would have managed without you."*

We now send Catherine on her way with a quote from Bernardine's Prayer Card:

*Today I dwell within
Your Holy Presence with
prayers too deep for
words...and...yet
You know the whispers
of my heart and I am
held in loving grace.*

Rest in loving grace, dear friend.