

**SISTER ROSE CLARE HOLPP**  
**May 15, 1908 – September 15, 2008**

Mary Elizabeth Holpp, one of the nine children in the Holpp family, was born May 15, 1908. Her mother, Ella Oates, was born in Ireland, her father, John, in Maryland. Mary Elizabeth was one of their three daughters.



A little over 100 years later, as Sister Rose Clare, a Sister of Charity, she entered eternal life on September 15, 2008. Having entered the community on September 8, 1926, Sister Rose Clare was a faithful daughter of Saint Elizabeth Seton for 80 of her hundred years. Her sister, Margaret Ella, had followed her to the community in 1928, and we knew her as Sister Catherine Agnes.

For the first eighteen years of her life, Mary Elizabeth lived quietly with her family, among friends and neighbors, teachers and classmates in Hazelwood. When she petitioned to enter our congregation, Father Dugan, the associate pastor at Saint Stephen's, recommended her quite simply "as a fit subject for your novitiate." This simple recommendation is matched by the simplicity of Sister Rose Clare's community file. We see recorded there the list of mission after mission—Saint Benedict, Saint Leo, Sacred Heart (Greensburg), Saint Mary Magdalene (Homestead), Holy Innocents, St. Joseph (Mt. Pleasant), St. Stephen, St. Theresa (Munhall), Saint Luke—from 1934 to 1980. Then, she began to teach part-time until 1984. Most of her teaching was in the seventh and eighth grades. She was vice principal at least once, and local councilor several times.

Except for the certificate of her baptism, Sister's file contains no other memento of honors, medals or trophies. One might look at her record and think, "My, she didn't do anything." But then one would have to remember that Sister Rose Clare carried out the mission when a Sister of Charity did everything—and anything! No one ever thought to write it down. There is, however, one tribute, a note sent to Sister Rose Clare by the son of one of her former students at Saint Mary Magdalene in Homestead. The note is undated, but it seems to have been written following the death of Sister Catherine Agnes. He wrote: "While you may not know who I am, I feel a special bond with you, as you were my late mother's favorite teacher. Her name was Lois Doerr, and you taught her at Saint Mary Magdalene's in 1936/1937. Sixty years later, she often spoke of your great kindness and gentleness, and how much she admired you, both [when she was] a child and as an adult. It was through my mother that my great love for the Sisters of Charity was first fostered. Although many of the Sisters with whom I first came in contact are now enjoying their eternal reward with your dear one, I am in no doubt that many of the blessings I have enjoyed throughout life has been through their intercession. Please know you are in my thoughts, and more importantly, in my prayers. Now and always. (signed) Paul."

A reflection such as we are doing this evening on the life of Sister Rose Clare is called a eulogy—a word from the Greek meaning "to speak well of." It is a statement of praise for one who has died. As I reviewed the short official record we have of Sister Rose Clare's life, I recalled having read a poem at one time that seemed pertinent to what I was trying to write. It was written by Linda Ellis, and she titled it, "The Dash." The first few verses go like this:

I read of a man who stood to speak  
At the funeral of a friend.  
He referred to the dates on her tombstone  
From the beginning to the end.

He noted that first came the date of her birth  
And spoke of the following date with tears,  
But he said what mattered most of all  
Was the dash between those years.

For that dash represent all the time  
That she spent alive on earth,  
And now only those who loved her  
Know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not how much we own,  
The cars, the house, the cash,  
What matters is how we live and love  
And how we spend our dash.

It's interesting, isn't it, that the word dash also means "to rush or scurry or race." But we know the dash in Sister Rose Clare's dates—1908-2008—does not recall something done with hurry or speed, although for sure there was probably a lot of that in her life as a Sister of Charity. No, Sister Rose Clare's "dash" took a hundred years. But her life recalls the words of Saint Paul, who used "the race" to describe a life of Christian faithful endurance. Paul was speaking to the Greeks for whom the "race" was what we today call the Olympics. Paul, however, was not talking about the speed of the race but of the goal that was worth such effort and discipline. A translation I like puts Paul's words like this: "You've all been to the stadium and have seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. We're after one that's gold eternally.<sup>i</sup> So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air."<sup>ii</sup> The way one runs the race, Paul might be saying, is really tied to the goal one seeks.

Dear Sister Rose Clare, thank you for hanging in there, for persevering to the end. Thank you for inspiring us by your life lived with your eye on the only prize that counts. Thank you for spending 80 years of your dash with us as our Sister. Thank you for showing us what it means to live a hundred years in simplicity, humility, and love.

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Cor. 9:24-25. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Eugene H. Peterson. NavPress Publishing Group, 2005.

<sup>ii</sup> 1 Cor. 9:26. *The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1990.