



SISTER ELEANOR DILLON
October 31, 1923 – November 23, 2008

Integrity ... determination ... strength ... courage ... intensity – all these words come to mind when we think of Sister Mary Gerard, Sister Eleanor, “E.” Someone last evening even called her a “tiger.” She was totally dedicated to the love of God, struggling always to serve God purely and truly in whatever ways she was called.

Who was this person, tiny in body, but large in heart and fierce in spirit?

Eleanor, with her five sisters and four brothers, were the children of Elizabeth and John Dillon of Masontown and later Uniontown, Pennsylvania. Most of us remember Mr. Dillon, a feisty Irishman and an electrician in the mines, who, in his later years, was the caretaker at Marymount. Sister Eleanor’s mother was calm and never complained about hardships or difficulties.

Sister Eleanor’s parents, her sisters Kathleen, Mary Frances, and little Loretta Mary, as well as her brother Vincent welcome her into Heaven. Bill, Jim, Paul, Betty, Pat, and Florence are with us this evening.

When Vincent died recently, a small montage of photographs was prepared and printed. When Sister Eleanor saw it she exclaimed, “Oh – a whole card of Dillons!” One picture taken before Sister Eleanor entered showed the members of the family, but Sister Eleanor said, “Where are the babies?” The babies are Florence and Paul. She then quickly located them at the bottom of the photograph.

The Dillon’s are an outstanding family and Sister Eleanor has always felt your love and support.

Eleanor became interested in the Sisters of Charity when she read an article about Mother Seton in the Pittsburgh SUN-TELEGRAPH. She wanted to work with the poor as Mother Seton had. Also, when she was growing up she would see Sister Paulina Glenn and Mother Claudia Glenn visiting in Masontown and was attracted by their simplicity.

Eleanor entered the Sisters of Charity July 2, 1942, received the name Sister Mary Gerard and spent many years teaching elementary school, high school Latin, English and Journalism, at schools in the East and at Salpointe and Seton High Schools in Arizona. She was a good teacher, an accomplishment in itself, and was popular with her students. At least three of her students asked her to sponsor them to become Sisters of Charity: Sister Diane Temple, Sister Mary Price, and Sister Mary Lucilla Wertz.

In 1969, seeking to become active in social concerns, Sister Eleanor asked for a leave of absence from the Sisters of Charity and later returned to life as a lay person. Once she said to me, “Sometimes you have to give up what you love most.”

From 1969 until 1981, Eleanor followed many paths, working as a proof-reader for a scientific magazine in New York, and for several years as a private school licensing specialist for the state of Pennsylvania. She worked in drug and alcohol rehabilitation and in emergency response. And she published her novel *IN A GLASS DARKLY*.

But again she had to respond to God’s call, no matter what the cost. She asked to return to membership in the Sisters of Charity. This was not an easy decision nor an easy action to take. But Sister Baptista Madden, the Major Superior, stretched out her hands, quoting a line from a Seton Hill University song: Welcome daughter, home returning! Sister Gertrude Foley was Sister Eleanor’s mentor at that time and Sister Eleanor found her “always affirming.”

A Sister of Charity again, Sister Eleanor worked in the Publicity Office at Seton Hill and with Catholic Charities. She then accepted a position at Catholic University, Washington, D.C, as an administrative assistant. After several years she returned to Greensburg where she initiated and was involved in prison ministry to women for at least six years, until illness forced her retirement.

Sister Eleanor continually sought justice for all. Dorothy Day who worked with the poor was her heroine and model. Sister Eleanor stated that she would support “any movement which worked for the recognition of humans.” One contribution to the cause of justice was her “adoption” of a child living in a third-world country by sending money every month for the child’s food and clothing.

Sometimes Sister Eleanor makes me think of Cervantes’ Don Quixote who “dreamed the impossible dream” and tilted with windmills, but who made a lasting impact upon a world seeking peace, love, and justice. Sister Eleanor has left a lasting mark on all of us. May she always look upon us with grace and favor as we continue to struggle to accomplish her ideals, willing to sacrifice everything for the love of God and for what is right and true and beautiful.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Brigid Marie Grandey
November 24, 2008*