

SISTER MARY FABIAN RODGERS
October 17, 1915 - April 12, 2006



*I saw the Lord ever before me,
with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.
Therefore, my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted . . .
You have made known the paths of life;
you will fill me with your presence.*

This quote of David's psalm, from the Easter Monday reading of the Acts of the Apostles, takes on special meaning as we pray it this evening for Sister Mary Fabian Rodgers. "I saw the Lord ever before me . . ." I am quite certain that Sister Mary Fabian always saw the Lord before her as she discerned her vocation to become a Sister of Charity of Seton Hill, and in her many roles — highly respected English teacher of junior and senior high students, conscientious reading specialist, dedicated telephone relay communicator, and faithful computer "nun on the net!"

Eleanor Annette Rodgers, the fourth child of William H. and Mary Annette Eckenrod Rodgers, was born October 17, 1915, and she grew up with her three brothers, Kenneth, Harold, Cyril, and her two sisters, Kathleen and Eileen, in her beloved Johnstown. When she was 18 years old, Eleanor decided to enter the Sisters of Charity on September 8, 1933. Her pastor, at Saint Patrick Parish, Father Michael O'Connor wrote, "I know nothing that would compel me to advise Miss Rodgers against her desire to be a Sister of Charity. Her character is good and also the standing of the family is what we like to recognize when making statements for such a serious undertaking."

While Sister Mary Fabian pursued her "serious undertaking," she also enjoyed reading a good novel or a mystery, regular shopping trips with her sister, Eileen, and snorkeling during her family vacations. Her career in the classroom spanned over half a century, with a major portion of that time at Sacred Heart elementary and high school. Janet Ruth Bender Jacoby, was one of the fortunate students taught by Sister Mary Fabian in 1966. Since she is unable to be with us tonight, she wrote about her memories of those days: "Because my seat for freshman English and Religion was in the first row and first seat near the door, I would always open and close the door; she nicknamed me JR and that name continues today." Janet's love for Mother Seton began early when Sister Mary Fabian showered her with medals, relics and literature about Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton's life.

Always a teacher, Sister Mary Fabian provided parenting support for Janet and many of her students. JR took advantage of Sister's English expertise and sent copies of her children's essays, term papers and other educational requirements so that Sister Mary Fabian would proof and return them with suggested editorial changes. JR writes, "she thrived on the college papers and writings of my children while she prayed for and reminded me of God's protection for them, especially Joyana who is a missionary in Mexico."



JR concludes by saying, “She was young in spirit and always had a word of wisdom . . . and I knew she would remind me of the love of the Lord and the importance of spreading the word about Elizabeth Seton. Sister Mary Fabian was probably the first woman to begin to ‘nurture me’ in a way that I so desperately needed; then by the grace of God, other Sisters of Charity picked up where she left off. She was always there for me to share my joys and struggles in my ministry as a chaplain, my life as wife and mother and through electronic mail, our relationship deepened and strengthened Sister’s devotion to her sister, Eileen, was inspirational. Eileen was probably Sister Mary Fabian’s link to life and now they enjoy resurrection together.”

No matter where the setting or what the conversation, it is evident from testimony of family, friends, colleagues and former students, that Sister Mary Fabian was always cognizant of the total development and needs of each person. JR’s husband, Leo, describes Sister Mary Fabian as “pixilated — a special Irish woman with a different bent on life.” We know she was the “unique connector” for many of her students and for the Sisters of Charity. She provided addresses, postal and electronic, so that her former students could continue conversation with each other, as well as with her. Little did they know that she opened her e-mail by logging on with her password: “funnun.”

Sister Mary Fabian loved to decorate and bring joy to all who visited her on the third floor in Caritas Christi. One would be welcomed into her room with a seasonal wreath on the door and a clever door stop which kept the door ajar for visitors. When her creatively decorated scooter was “parked” in the lounge, I knew she was available for conversation. The short and long telephone relay messages to announce “news” to our sisters, were frequently completed before I arrived. She would welcome me, point to her calming dish garden and say, “sit down and rest while you enjoy the quiet sounds of the flowing water and lights of the fountain.”

We all know that Sister Mary Fabian endured multiple physical disabilities over the years, but she believed, as did Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, “The affliction of this life is but a moment, while the glory in the life to come will be eternal.”

The strife is o’er, dear Fabian, and the victory won. By your life as devoted teacher and mentor, faithful Sister of Charity, loving sister and gracious woman, you showed us how to seek peace and joy. Go now, and enjoy decorating heaven with Easter flowers as you experience true resurrection in the message from the Acts of the Apostles:

*I see the Lord ever before me,
with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.
My heart is glad and my tongue exults;
You have made known the paths of life;
you fill me with your presence.*

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Grace Hartzog
April 18, 2006*