

## SISTER CATHERINE LABOURÉ MC CANN

April 7, 1916 - February 22, 2011



Tonight we gather to celebrate a long life well lived and to praise God for the many gifts and lessons we have received over the years from this remarkable and most complex woman.

Mary Agnes McCann and her twin sister Frances McCann Horner, were born prematurely on April 7, 1916 in Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh. At the time the family was residing in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania. Her first association with a member of the community began that very day. Since the incubators at Allegheny Hospital were in short supply and Frances was the frailer of the two, Mary Agnes had to share an incubator with a baby who was getting close to discharge. Mary Wilhere, born January 4 of that year, and later known as our Sister Paul Gabriel resided together in the incubator. Over the years the two would share many experiences in common.

Mary Agnes, known to her family as Marie, had two brothers, Joseph and Martin, and three sisters, Catherine, Winifred, and her twin, Frances. We are fortunate this evening to have with us the children of her brothers Joseph and Martin and her sister, Frances. Last evening their happy, joyful stories of the experiences they had with Sister Catherine Labouré gave us another picture of her life among us.

Sister Catherine Labouré received her early education at Saint Stephen school in Hazelwood , went on to complete high school at Fifth Avenue High school in Pittsburgh and at age 18 she entered the Sisters of Charity on September 8, 1934.

Reverend Philip Dugan wrote to Mother Evelyn on June 4, 1934, “ I am happy to recommend Mary Agnes McCann as a Candidate for your Community of Sisters. I have known Mary Agnes for the past fifteen years. She is deeply religious. I feel she has a vocation to the religious life.”

After completing her novitiate, Sister Catherine Labouré was sent to be educated as a registered nurse at Pittsburgh Hospital. She graduated from the Nursing School in 1938 and, in a sense, spent her entire ministerial life at the hospital. It was there that her skills blossomed and she seemed to be a presence everywhere in the hospital. Known to her family as Marie or Aunt Marie, she became known to the nurses, doctors, aides, etc., as Kate, Sister Kate, or sometimes Kitty Lump Lump. ( A name celebrating her rather large size.)

It seemed that there was nothing that Kate couldn't do if she decided to master it. She spent hours in the delivery room and assisted the arrival of numerous babies to this world. She tramped the halls as Night Supervisor and seemed to always be there when an emergency arose. She was up with the 5 o'clock rising bell or before because she was often the sacristan for the 6 a.m. mass. Her days were spent in the operating room giving anesthesia. In addition to her registered nurse license, Sister was also a certified nurse anesthetist for many types of surgery. In all of these roles she was able to convey to her patients and the doctors a sense of calm,

confidence and gentleness. She once said, “Nursing brought me close to God and patients. You see so many miracles occurring.” Often Kate was God’s instrument in these miracles.

It was good to hear the reading of the healing of Jarius’ daughter this evening. When I was in the operating room with Sister Catherine Labouré, she had no time for the shenanigans of young nurses or aides who would try to restrain a child. Her blue eyes would blaze and she quickly let them know that their conduct was unacceptable. Gently, she would pick up the crying child, place him on her lap, and talk or sing to him. Then very gently she would wave the mask with the anesthetic around him and as he began to get drowsy she would lay him on the table and begin to seriously prepare him for the surgery. No child she anesthetized went away with the terror of being held down.

Tonight we remember our sister. We think of the hundreds of times she crawled out of bed for emergencies in obstetrics or surgery. We are grateful for all of the persons she saved because she had an uncanny ability to find a vein where no one else could. We are grateful for the times she filled in for the switchboard operator or the pharmacist, the housekeeper, or even the doctor, who did not arrive in time for the delivery of a baby.

We remember also that Sister “Kate” always had time to visit a friend or acquaintance who was ill, to pay respects to anyone she knew who was dying, to chauffeur other sisters to appointments, and to enjoy a ball game with her nieces and nephews. We remember her wonderful friendship with Sister Maura Walsh and their visits to bring cheer, love and God’s good words to those who were sick or dying or were mourning the loss of a loved one. We remember her faithfulness to the liturgy and her radiant smile as she received the Eucharist each day.

Those of us who lived with Kate over the many years give thanks for her honesty in keeping us true to ourselves, for her red-haired disposition which sometimes caused us to reevaluate ourselves or our relationship with her and for her kind heart which she often hid under a barrel for fear one would realize what a soft touch she truly was.

So Kate, as the Irish of our area are preparing for what they term “the High Holidays,” we your sisters, your family, and your friends, bid you a fond farewell. On Tuesday, you slipped gently and peacefully into the arms of Christ and we say with this Irish blessing:



*“Deep peace of the running wave to you.  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.  
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.”*

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection  
Sister Louise Grundish, SC  
February 25, 2011*

