

SISTER ROSE CECILIA SIMEONE

May 22, 1922 - February 25, 2011



Seventy-one years ago, on September 8, 1940, five young women from Saint John the Baptist Parish in Pittsburgh, along with eleven others, entered our novitiate at Seton Hill. Helen Simeone, one of those young ladies, was recommended by Father Davin, who wrote: "Helen has all the necessary qualifications for a candidate for your community. You will find her dependable, most decent and with good moral character." Tonight, as we hear how Sister Rose Cecilia lived her life with us, I think we will agree that Father's words were correct.

Helen was born to Luigi and Maria Simeone on May 22, 1922. Ralph, Joseph, Albert, Norman and Margaret, all now deceased, make up the remainder of her family.

Sister Rose Cecelia was a quiet, humble, unassuming, hard working, exceptionally creative person. She never expected praise or adulation for anything she did. She had a lovely singing voice, sewed beautifully and she always made her own clothes. She was very artistic, delving into various types of art. She entered the community with all these gifts. She also had a hearing impairment which never hindered her from living a fully active, successful and often exciting life.

In 1943, after she made first vows, she was sent to DePaul Institute to serve children who were also hearing impaired. She diligently set about getting her education because this was so important to her. When applying for permission to pronounce her final vows, she wrote, "I love my work at DePaul. My only sadness is that I don't know enough about teaching a deaf child. If I could only learn enough to be able to teach him to know, love and serve God, then I would be perfectly content". Over the years her desire to learn more was fulfilled and she taught many children to know, love and serve God. She earned a master's degree and went on to earn Pennsylvania certification in Special Education, one as teacher of the deaf and another in Speech Correction. She lived and worked for thirty-three years at DePaul School. Her co-workers describe her as a talented, competent teacher who had great empathy for the children.

In 1976, Sister left DePaul Institute and was sent to Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Scottsdale, Arizona where she tutored students who were experiencing difficulties with their studies. It was in Arizona that her whole life changed. She fell in love with Arizona, with its Arizona mountains that prompted her to request "Sing to the Mountains" as one of her funeral hymns. "I sing that to myself when I think of those mountains," she told me. We sang that hymn last evening. She was excited about everything, even the hot weather. At DePaul, the convent was large with many sisters living there. She enjoyed the smaller Our Lady of Perpetual Help Convent and preferred living with fewer sisters. She always said, "It is so homey. I love it here".

It was during this time that the Church was very much involved with implementing Vatican Council II directives. She was excited that she was able to be involved in these changes. She loved the Mass being prayed in English. The new rituals and new hymns being introduced and the increased lay participation thrilled her. She even joined the Parish Liturgy Committee and did her part to make the Liturgies more prayerful and special for the congregation. In her file, I found a copy of a clipping from the Scottsdale newspaper with a picture of Sister Rose Cecilia carrying a large fan of palm, leading the Palm Sunday outdoor procession at the 11:00 liturgy. Sister Miriam Ellen was the principal at the school in Scottsdale when Sister Rose was sent there. Sister is one of the five who entered with Sister Rose Cecilia from Saint John the Baptist School in 1940. Incidentally, Sister Miriam Ellen went to school with Sister Rose Cecilia from grade one through high school and then entered the convent with her. That adds up to seventy-three years they have been friends. That is a long time.

Sister Miriam Ellen told me that Sister Rose Cecilia was a very creative teacher and made her remedial classes so interesting that the children loved going to them. They would be upset if the schedule had to be changed and they missed her class. The children made excellent progress with her help and were often able to continue in a regular classroom without the extra help.

Occasionally, she and Sister Miriam Ellen would come to Tucson on the weekend to visit me. Rose would want to see everything. We would be gone from early morning until we were too tired to continue and we would go home. Sister loved to sight-see, and never tired of the desert. We laughed a lot and enjoyed one another's company. She had a delightful sense of humor. I think Arizona was a gift that made her free. She enjoyed Arizona for five years, when she returned to Greensburg, where she became part of the staff at Doran Hall Retreat and Renewal Center and found she loved it there, too. Last night you heard Sister Maureen read Sister Sara Louise's poem describing what a gift Sister was, using her many talents to create beauty at Doran Hall.

In 1988, Sister was assigned to Saint Columbkille Parish in Imperial. There, she spent twelve happy years ministering to senior citizens and participating in other parish activities. Over those years she added another group of people who loved her. When she left, the parishioners surprised her with a party they called, "A Salute to Rose." Those who attended report it was a wonderful salute to her with accolades, speeches and delicious refreshments that were described as "refreshments to die for."

In the late 1990's Sister began to have health problems. In 2000 she decided it was time for her to retire to Caritas Christi at her beloved Seton Hill. She may have retired, but she was never idle. Over these years she was assistant sacristan; she visited the sisters who were in the infirmary; read to them; wrote letters for them and, at their request, sang and prayed with them. She was a Eucharist Minister at the Masses and took Communion to the sick. She helped with the stamp ministry and in the sewing department. The sisters loved it when she was the prayer leader. I often heard sisters tell her that they loved it when she was the leader because she prayed loudly and slowly enough that they could participate better. When Sister Barbara Ann was our music director here, she asked the sisters to volunteer to serve on a Liturgy Committee at Caritas Christi. Sister Rose was the first one to sign up. She was a productive member of the committee bringing good ideas of her own and some from her experiences in Phoenix. During her years here she spent many hours praying in the chapel. If we were looking for her we knew to check the chapel. However, these past years were difficult for Sister. It was frustrating to give up the things she had been so happy doing. She was often too tired to take part in anything. A week or two ago she told me, "I'm too tired to do anything, even to pray. Why doesn't He take me home?" The last few days of her life while she was still conscious, she would pray over and over, "Take me home, Jesus. Take me home."

Some time ago when I was visiting her she told me she had five loves, her God, her Mother Mary, Saint Theresa, her family and the community, especially her group. As a member of her group, I feel honored. We will miss you, Rose. I will miss you.

Sixty-five years ago, in her letter asking for permission to pronounce her final vows, Sister Rose Cecilia wrote, "Mother, I promise, with God's grace, to live as a true Sister of Charity, to observe my vows and to strive to acquire the spirit of the Sisters of Charity." This kind, gentle, simple lady, who gave much and expected nothing, was surprised when she heard her God say, "Well done, Rose. You have been a faithful servant as you promised; you have lived as a true Sister of Charity; kept your vows; and acquired the spirit of the Sisters of Charity. Come now and live with me in my home forever."

You will be happy with all your loves now, Rose. Don't forget the three of your group you left behind. Rest in peace.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Harold Ann Jones
March 2, 2011*