



**REMEMBERING SISTER CATHERINE WEIBEL, IHM**  
Sept. 6, 1933 - Feb. 6, 2009

The unusual Scripture reading you heard proclaimed was occasioned by a novitiate experience of Sister Catherine. One morning while at Mass in chapel - feeling homesick, lonely and close to tears, she was returning from Communion. The words of Peter to Jesus in response to Jesus' question to his disciples, "Do you also wish to go away?" came into her mind. Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life." That seemed to her an answer. Life would still be difficult and lonely at times but the words were an assurance and decisive for her.

The roots of Christian faith were beautifully shared by caring parents. Our Dad, the youngest of four children, was orphaned shortly after birth to John and Catherine Weibel on March 12, 1889. He was named Joseph Louis and raised by his two brothers, Theodore and Edward, and his sister Emma. They worked to support the family; he was cared for by a German housekeeper. Dad's relatives came from an area where German, French and Swiss borders come together.

When able, Dad started selling encyclopedias and then was attracted by opportunities for work in the automotive industry and settled in Flint, working first for AC Spark Plug Company and then for General Motors until his retirement.

Our mother, Viola Agnes Rosselit, was born to Anna and John Rosselit, in Cecil, Ohio, on May 14, 1888. Her relatives have their origins in Germany. The family moved to the little town of Shepherd, Michigan. There she lived with her mother, father and brother Harry. Just a few miles north was the Central Michigan Normal School in Mount Pleasant from which she graduated. Her next move was to Flint where she taught seven years in the Flint Public Schools. Introduced by a mutual friend they were married on Aug. 23, 1923, and from their union Mary was born on Nov. 21, 1925. Joseph was born four years later on July 29, 1929, and last came Catherine on Sept. 6, 1933.

Good family relationships of love and mutual help made these happy days. They received the benefit not only of an IHM education at St. Michael School but also the prayerful and loving support of the IHM Sisters at the time of their Mother's serious illness. At St. Joseph's Hospital where she was cared for during her long recuperation, when she was at the point of death, she was anointed. An elderly sister who had worked there told Dad that she had never seen anyone so ill survive. The anointing service was the turning point of her recovery.

The power of prayer demonstrated in that incident was also encouraged by our parents' example at home and at church.

Later, in Catherine's high school years, her calling to religious life became evident and on Aug. 22, 1950, she entered the postulate, fulfilled the basic requirements of spiritual formation, was received as a novice and given the name of Sister Louis de Montfort. After that, Sister Catherine's education requirements were completed at Marygrove College, Monroe Campus, in 1954.

Then, in the fall, she began teaching in Detroit, the second grade at Gesu (1 year), and at St. Raymond (1 year). Next she taught grades one and two at St. John Vianney School in Highland Park for three years - a small mission where she felt at home. Her next assignment was Sacred Heart, Roseville, where she taught the second grade for one year and the fourth grade for

one year. Next she was assigned to St. Gregory School in Detroit where she taught seventh grade for one year. In 1962 she was sent to Sacred Heart, Dearborn, to teach Latin in the high school.

Her affiliation with Marygrove College in Detroit really began in 1963-64 when she was sent to the University of Notre Dame in Indiana to obtain a master's degree in theology in preparation for teaching theology at Marygrove, which she did in the fall of 1964. Her first experience was challenging, to say the least, but also rewarding in the relationships formed with some IHM Sisters and also some students.

She taught during the year but in summers she was sent to the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Finally in 1968 she was sent to study there full time. In 1969 she returned to Marygrove for fulltime teaching - both theology and religious education - until June of 1973 when she left because of curriculum change and necessary budget cuts.

At that time another opportunity opened up for her – an invitation to participate as a learner and also as a facilitator in retreats on the Gospel of John the summer of 1974 and 1975 and in 1976, the Gospel of Matthew. They were offered at Mariandale in Ossining, NY, by Rev. William Mountain, a Jesuit priest. These retreats were a tremendous blessing to her - to listen to and pray over the whole gospel, hearing individual sections as part of the whole. Not only did his approach incorporate the best of scripture scholarship in his search for truth, but his humble, ever patient, gentle, respectful manner was a lesson for life. Differences of opinion were handled in a respectful way, never argumentative. Hearing and acting on the Word became a life-giving experience for her.

Another blessing of this retreat was Catherine's meeting Sister Therese Torzewski, an IHM she scarcely knew. They teamed up to minister together wherever that might lead them, which was to Queen of the Holy Rosary Parish in Saginaw, Mich., in the fall of 1975 - a parish that consisted mostly of Polish parishioners although there were a few Hispanics. The pastor who first welcomed them, Fr. Edward Konieczka, was looking for a religious educator willing to use scripture in teaching programs. Sister Catherine worked with the children. Sister Therese, being Polish, was a wonderful asset - interacting well with parishioners - in ministering to the homebound, and before Lent adding the personal gift of making paczki (pronounced punski) for parishioners (using her mother's recipe).

When Fr. Konieczka left in 1977, Father John Sarge was assigned part time to Holy Rosary. From that arrangement, the sisters became part of the pastoral team and handled many of the regular parish activities. This worked well and summer neighborhood outreach programs were initiated. After six years when Fr. Sarge was transferred, Sister Catherine was appointed parish administrator. Therese, in addition to continuing her ministry to the homebound, also contributed her valuable skills of supportive listening and ideas to parish programs and her prayerful support. She also ministered at the jail, teaching crocheting and yoga to the women and yoga to the men. After 15 years at Holy Rosary, Sister Catherine sensed it was time to leave and her decision to do so was prayerfully made. Her ministering with Therese at Holy Rosary Parish was a special gift and her happiest ministry.

Sister Catherine then asked for and received permission to take a sabbatical year – to visit people with whom she had either made retreats and had not been in recent contact or with parishioners who had moved and asked her to visit. This journey eventually brought her to Madison, Conn. Since Sr. Catherine had promised to pay her own expenses, she was searching for a way to do that. She met a Mercy Sister who was working for the Visiting Nurse Association as a home health aide who shared with her that she found this ministry valuable and an opportunity for spiritual ministry if the person indicated a desire for it. Thus began Sister Catherine's entry into working as a home health aide. After completing a course of training, she took on the duties specified by the client's doctor and visiting nurse. This indeed became an extension of parish ministry outreach into homes. It also enabled her to pray with people she had made retreats with who lived in the area when her work schedule permitted.

From 1989 until 2007, though she moved to different states and eventually permanently to Michigan, she continued this ministry.

When in February of 2007 she was visited with illness, she was welcomed to the Motherhouse Health Care Center for care and treatment. Because of that excellent care and prayerful support of many, she was released and became a regular resident on Sept. 10, 2007.

This time became for her an opportunity for prayer and deepening insight into the Gospels and of prayer for others. It also provided the opportunity to be closer to family, her brother, Joe and his wife, Marguerite, their seven children and to her unmarried sister, Mary.

There is so very much to be grateful for, including the love and prayerful support of family, the love and prayerful support of IHM sisters who gave much encouragement and prayer, including that of her Soujourner Mission Unit, and also for the excellent nurses and nursing aides who cared for her and those in the Pastoral Care Office.

In addition, she appreciated the Mercy Memorial Hospice of Monroe Team who provided excellent care and added to her quality of life during her extended illness.

Also, the five people who had participated with her in the Scripture retreats that remained in contact all through the years deserve a big thank you.

Let us then conclude: Thanks be to God for everything. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever.

Amen.

Written by Sister Catherine Weibel, IHM  
Read by Sister Laetitia Lariviere, IHM  
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