

Eulogy (Life Reflection) for Sister Francis Therese Woznicki

Like St. Francis, our one and only Sister Francis Therese, heard God speak in the depths of her soul and made it clear to her that she must live the life of the Gospel. As she herself reflected on the occasion of her diamond Jubilee in 2012, "My vocation was sparked when I encountered a compelling hunger for love in a group of at-risk teenagers at Parmadale." She felt that only God's love could fill their needy hearts but in the depths of her being she desired to say yes to the call of unconditional love. She knew as clearly as St Francis did in the Porziuncola over 812 years ago that: "this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart."

On August 10, 1952, Mary Jane Woznicki was invested as Sister Francis Therese and became a Sister of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis.

I understand that after the Saturday Mass here at Blessed Trinity, on this past 10th of August, Frannie was joyously signing letters, prepared by Fr. Doug, to lawmakers concerning the nation's gun violence dilemma and she shared how "ecstatic" (her word) she was to be celebrating the 67th anniversary of her investing and to be taking action on an issue that so concerned her and many others.

The Curriculum vitae of Sister Francis Therese reads more like that of 10 people than a single soul whose life's work touched the lives of so many varied people and places. She graduated from Marymount High School in Garfield Heights, Ohio in 1949. She studied at St. John College here in Cleveland and graduated from Ursuline College in June of 1956. Her ministries through the years were richly varied.

From 1956-1959 she was a teacher of science, English and Home Ec. at Marymount High School. After making her Final Vows she was sent to Rome from 1959-1962 along with two other of our Sisters, for studies at Regina Mundi, the first Pontifical Institute of Theology for Women in the world. Sister was privileged to be present at the solemn opening of Vatican Council II, an international event that marked a significant historical moment in our church and in the soul of Sister Francis Therese.

Where is one sent after 3 years of such studies in Rome? She was named Directress of Postulants, of course, from 1962-1964 in Garfield Heights, Ohio and from there to Directress of Scholastic Novices from 1964-1967 in Bartlett IL.

Sister's ministries were as varied as the flowers she loved to grow wherever she lived and she did so with the same discernment and intensity that she relied upon in all areas of her life.

Francis Therese served as a First Councilor of the Congregation from 1968-1972 in South Bend, Indiana and then was elected Provincial Director of Marymount Province from 1972-1975.

As in any life there are those pivotal moments of significance that are surely Spirit-led. This was true for religious congregations and in particular Franciscan Third Order Communities. In 1968, 12 women's communities formed the beginning of what would become the Franciscan Federation. Sr. Francis Therese was appointed to a committee to prepare a spiritual document to serve as a resource for all the Franciscan communities to use in their renewal efforts. Sister Francis Therese was the principal writer of: *Go to My Brethren, A Spiritual Document for Apostolic Communities of Franciscan Women* which proved to be seminal in the development of The Third Order Rule which was being prepared and soon approved in Rome by Pope John Paul II in 1982.

Her retreat work blossomed and her ministries led her to Koinonia Home, Tabor Consultation Center, the then Ascension Parish (now Blessed Trinity) and the Franciscan Center at Marymount which she founded and whose direction she shared with Sr. Jean Ehasz.

But many of us remember our dearly beloved friend as listener, spiritual companion and animator of souls. Anyone who has been to the holy ground of her small office at the Franciscan Center remembers the rocking chair of love that faced Frannie's own chair where God's love shown in her countenance. We know that she was able to be attentive to our souls because of her own unfailing attentiveness to the voice of God within her. I was privileged to see a paper upon which she had typed "My Daily Practices of Prayer"

Morning or pre –dawn

On Waking: Offering to the Sacred Heart and the Angelus both of which are a renewal of my Consecration through Each

Sung prayer with Francis. Franciscan office. Memorial funeral cards (which she saved and prayed with on the anniversary of that soul's passing), the day's Missalette Readings, the Prayer of Abandonment of DeFoucauld and her own personal renewal of Vows.

And that was just the morning! In bold letters across the middle of that page of Daily Practices she typed: A SIGNIFICANT PERIOD OF CONTEMPLATIVE/CENTERING PRAYER OF PRESENCE IN GOD'S LOVING PRESENCE.

Sister Francis Therese was a living prayer! She would be the first to pipe up and say I was not a Saint. Anyone who ever had to wait for Frannie because she had just one more person that she had to see, or one more note that needed to be written, one more call to be made or one more change in the time she would ask you to meet her- knows that there were those moments when all we could do was to practice the holy art of waiting. However... there is hope for all of us, as Frannie was a Franciscan through every fiber of her being and deeply believed in the On-going conversion that marks our unique Charism.

Today, August 21, 2019 would have been the 87th earthly birthday of Sister Francis Therese and so here we are to celebrate the Spirit of God at work in that life. We also celebrate with her as she entered into eternal life, no less on the Feast of St. Clare, at peace in her home, coffee cup on one side, prayer book on the other, soon to be surrounded by many of the sisters who loved her.

Every one of us who knew her surely has a eulogy in our own heart to honor and remember Sister Francis Therese. I believe she would encourage us to gaze into the faces of our brothers and sisters here gathered and see the child of God that each one of us is.

It is only a Fitting Response that Sister Francis Therese's own words written at the time of her 60th Jubilee lead us into our celebration of life this morning. These are **her** words to us today as well.

Francis urges:

"Let the sisters and brothers always be mindful that they should desire one thing alone, namely, the Spirit of God at work within them."

As I continue trying to do this day in and day out, I fall in love, over and over again. I close with an excerpt from a prayer written years ago for the Franciscan Federation in *Go To My Brethren*:

With Francis, I want to praise and love and worship YOU, O God, urging others to do the same and making of them, brothers and sisters, as I go on my way.

When I have tried to sell all and follow you, give me the grace of true discipleship with the peace and joy of the Beatitudes, the kind of love-touched happiness that knows no abating—only overflow.

And before my eyes close in death let me know that I have traced the loveliness of your face in the lineaments of those I have tried to love and serve and sanctify in Your Truth.

Life Reflection (Eulogy) offered by Sr. Jane Blabolil, SSJ-TOSF