

## **Mass of Resurrection -Sister Mary Frances Schermerhorn, OSB**

**July 13, 2021**

**Reflection by Sister Jane Smith, OSB**

**Wisdom 3:1-6,9; 1 John 3:14,16; Matthew 25: 31-40**

About a month ago we were thinking about celebrating 70 years under vow for Sister Mary Frances. She and I did some reminiscing together. Since she is celebrating in heaven, I want to eulogize a “little” bit about that jubilee.

With the exception of Peggy, Nan and Dick, I do not know how many of you know some of what I am about to tell you. As Sister Pat Coughlin, our resident guru, would say: “every time we repeat these stories of the past, the individual telling the tale has a tendency to edit it” - so, take it for what it is worth.

At the turn of the century, Margaret Farrow, Marian Seek and Sue Prindiville lived on Giddings Street in Chicago. They were very good friends in childhood. Margaret Farrow married Harry Schermerhorn, Marian Seek married William Smith and Sue Prindiville married Ken Bichl. This group remained close throughout the early days of raising their families. My mother died of cancer after an extended illness in January of 1947.

Margaret had been very involved at Scholastica’s Fall Festival a few months before. As always, her effervescent personality convinced my father that I should go to Saint Scholastica where Dolly would be a senior and Peggy, a freshman like myself.

Mary Frances Schermerhorn was someone that I watched to learn the ups and downs of SSA. She was an athlete and well-known for a wide-dimpled smile. She sewed well enough to make her own school uniform skirt. After graduation from St. Scholastica she enrolled at The College of St. Theresa in Winona, MN. One of her friends in school at that time was Claire Schondell to whom she introduced her brother Jack. After the first year at St. Theresa, Mary Frances tells me that she is going to enter the convent and she did. Although Margaret would tell me what was happening in Mary Frances’s life, I did not think that being a nun was on my future agenda at that time but obviously the seed had been planted.

It is difficult to describe what convent life was to us in the beginnings of time. We struggled to get a degree, to be certified as teachers, to help in the household chores and to do whatever we could if asked by the Superior.

Mary Fran whose name in religion was Sister Ellen Marie began her teaching career at Queen of All Saints and like most of us, was moved from parish to parish every couple of years to gain “experience”.

Sometimes those “experiences” were not too easy. For Mary Fran the task of closing the parish school at St. John Nepomecene and later delivering the news to St. Lambert’s parishioners that the Benedictine Sisters would no longer be staffing the school were not what I would consider “easy”. Mary Fran handled those two episodes well. Mary Fran’s teaching experiences included math at St. Scholastica High School. Moving from teaching math to the Treasurers’ office in both Canon City and in Chicago were natural transitions ending as the Finance Officer of the British Infant School.

At one point in our religious lives, our transitions to ministry intersected. It was a time when Sister Colette, as prioress saw the need to alter the staffing of services at the Monastery. The household was efficiently run by a group of Sisters who did their jobs well, but they were becoming less and less able because of their age. Mary Fran and I were each finishing an assignment and were ready to move to another. The Prioress made a request of each of us separately asking us to be responsible for two areas of the house: the kitchen and the infirmary. Out of respect for the leader and with a willing sense of obedience each separately agreed. How we were supposed to do this was up to us to decide. Sister Colette told us to spend a day or so at the lake house to come up with a plan, a job-description, management diagram or whatever fits. The plan evolved from the wisdom of Sister Mary Frances. Essentially, we would work at the tasks with the existing staff and decide what should be done as we saw the need. Mary Fran decided that each of us would take one area. She took the kitchen, so I inherited the Infirmary. The year for that experiential adventure was 1974. What we planned – worked.

Active in community ministry until June of this year, Mary Fran was still chalking up “experiences”.

None of what Mary Fran did in community would have been possible without the graces that she received from her fidelity to the exercises of religious life. After a long life as a Benedictine Sister, I found the words we heard read from the Book of Wisdom this morning most appropriate:

“Those who trust in God shall understand truth,  
and the faithful shall abide with the Divine in love:  
Because grace and mercy are with God’s holy ones,  
and God’s care is with the elect.”

Be at peace Sister Mary Frances!