Eulogy for Dorothy Dwyer, OSF

Memorial Mass - July 17, 2021

Dorothy was already blessed among women when she entered the Allegany Franciscans in 1987. Her southern hospitality, graciousness, and compassion endeared her to all of us privileged to live with her.

Very sociable and VERY outgoing, Dorothy was fun to be with, interested in everyone and everything. She was intelligent and loved to read and study. If she wasn’t praying, working, or gardening, she could always be found with a book in her hand. Her desire to learn and grow spiritually and in every other way was insatiable. She didn’t just read books, she absorbed them!

During her Novitiate Year, Dorothy was a high extrovert living in the midst of a bunch of introverts. That wasn’t easy for her! But in time, as she grew in her love and desire for God, she also grew to appreciate the silence.

She was quick-witted and, if she chose, could easily have the last word in discussions or arguments, but rarely would she go that route. Rather than put others down, she would do her best to lift them up and encourage them.

I never, and this is quite amazing, I never remember experiencing Dorothy being self-centered, moody or, acting out. That perhaps can be explained by the fact that before entering Religious life at the age of 53 Dorothy had already been married and had raised 2 adult children. No one needed to teach Dorothy how to love, how to let go, or how to live and sacrifice for others. LIFE ITSELF and HEARTBREAKING SUFFERING had already taught her.

Dorothy’s dearest love, after God, was her family. In the Novitiate she always spoke fondly of her parents and younger sister Ruth. Through Dorothy’s sharing we grew to know and love her daughter Alliston. We even got to hear stories about Alliston’s boyfriends. Of all of them, Dorothy’s favorite just happened to be the one Alliston chose to marry! Soon after, Alliston and Bill had their first child and Dorothy became a grandmother. Well, there was no holding her down. Her enthusiasm went sky-high. The ‘sun rose and set’ on Baby William. To the Sisters, he became known as “The Prince” or “Prince William”. Whenever Dorothy saw us approaching OUT would come the pictures. Later, when the twins were born, well that was the icing on the cake. And out came the pictures again, only this time, a dozen more!

Before entering, Dorothy was already well educated; having received a degree in psychology and accounting. She had also become a licensed CPA.

Dorothy’s ministries in Congregation were many and varied. Her greatest love, however, was to work for and with people suffering from poverty or illness. Peace and justice issues were a high priority for her as she served the homeless both in Philadelphia, PA. and in Tampa FL. She also worked as a patient advocate at St. Anthony’s Hospital and served on St. Anthony’s Mission and Integration Team. An accomplished artist, Dorothy founded Allegany Art in 1997 and worked with other writers and artists to create beautifully illustrated Advent and Lenten booklets.

Though Dorothy officially retired in 2011, she continued ministering for 7 more years to her beloved poor at Sacred Heart Parish, as well as, volunteering with Catholic Charities and The Ministries of Mercy.

In 2018, after some serious physical injuries and bouts with Parkinson’s, Dorothy was warmly welcomed back to Allegany where she could receive medical attention. Around this time, however, she who had loved books was quickly losing her sight and gradually becoming blind.

Through all these happenings, Dorothy rather than complaining remained grateful, other-centered, and full of joy.

There seemed to be a subtle change in Dorothy when she returned to the Motherhouse. Besides being an older and wiser Dorothy, she seemed freer within, and almost empty of self. Her life experiences and sufferings rather than making her bitter, seemed to have widened and deepened her heart so that, as the heart of Jesus, she could take in the suffering and love of the world.

She entered Eternal Glory on January 1st. The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God.

Carol Kenyon, OSF