

Eulogy for Sr Rose Shields sm

Delivered by Sr Gail Reneker sm at Rose's Funeral
26th October 2015

Rose was one of a number of early Marist Sisters whose vocation was fostered by Fr Nolan a popular confessor at St Patrick's Church Hill. Having discerned her vocation Rose joined the Marist Sisters in 1950, was received as a novice in July 1950 when she was given the name, Sister Stanislaus, and made her first profession on the 15th July 1951.

Her parish priest's reference that had accompanied Rose's application to join the Marist Sisters reads: "Rose is a girl that one admires not only for her piety, but for her generosity and good works. She has always been a faithful Child of Mary, and an active and effective Theresian, also a member of the Altar Society, and she has done all these works with a quiet and gentle ubotrusiveness". This could almost read as a description of our foundress Jeanne Marie Chavoin's life in Coutouvre before her call and decision to leave home to found the Society of the Blessed Virgin. Like Jeanne- Marie, having left home and committed herself to God as a Marist, Rose lived her life given to the Congregation and its mission and available to go wherever she was called.

Her ready response to the call of the Congregation took her to communities in Sydney, Melbourne and Queensland as well as to New Zealand. Rose did her teacher training at the Sisters of St Joseph's Training College at Mount Street North Sydney and her love for children found expression in the teaching roles she had in St Margaret Mary's Merrylands, Villa Maria Hunter's Hill, St Scholastica's Bennettswood, Star of the Sea Gladstone, St Therese's Karori, Sacred Heart Herne Bay and St Augustine's Keilor. In Burleigh Heads, Mudgeeraba, Auburn, and Blacktown Rose was provided the opportunity to serve in pastoral ministry, particularly to the sick, elderly and housebound. Within the Congregation itself Rose's yes to God led to her being called at a relatively young age to the role of Assistant Novice Directress at the novitiate in Merrylands and to participate in the formation of future Marist Sisters. Further she accepted the appointment to leadership roles in communities both large and small and in several schools. She was also elected to serve a number of terms as a Provincial Councillor in Australia and under three different Provincials was appointed to assume the additional role of Assistant Provincial.

Rose's natural bent however wasn't towards leadership. She never sought to put herself forward and didn't enjoy at all being in the limelight. She was by nature fairly reserved, even reticent, and at times reflected a certain lack of confidence. However Rose was obviously a woman who had the confidence of people. People knew they could trust her. She was genuine, discreet, responsible and had a warm regard for each person without being self-seeking. Her relationships were marked by kindness, respect and thoughtfulness for the needs of the Sisters and for people in general. Such qualities made her a wonderful support person especially to those she assisted in leadership. She was someone you could talk to, someone who would listen with sensitivity and objectivity and who would respond in her own wise and understanding way. She trusted her experience but knew her limits and never pretended to be other than who she was. A simple, unassuming, 'no frills' person, Rose was down to earth, had lots of common sense and a common touch which endeared her to others. People could feel comfortable with her.

Qualities such as these made her a wonderful Sister in community. Rose was easy to live with. A quiet person yes, but she enjoyed a joke, a laugh, a celebration. Aware and thoughtful of others she sought, especially as community leader, to make the community a place that was relaxed and homely where people could be themselves. (This was despite a certain penchant she had for rearranging furniture and things in cupboards, creating a certain conundrum when one couldn't find something in the old familiar place and had to hunt around for the new location!) However in the

main Rose's unassuming, no fuss style and presence and quiet regard for persons helped maintain a certain harmony in the community. This, together with her ability to relate to both old and young were very significant in quelling the natural anxieties and uncertainties that many were feeling at one particular time of transition in our religious life.

Rose had no malice in her and she wouldn't take any upset out on others. She wasn't a grumbler, or into gossip or criticism. Any difficulties she experienced were usually addressed by a good bout of gardening! Still if something needed to be addressed she did so constructively, presenting appropriately her views and opinions.

Rose was a homemaker. Her many domestic skills, sewing, cooking, gardening all served to give joy, goodness and beauty to the life of her Sisters and to others who might need or appreciate some little lift in their life. Visitors were welcomed warmly and Sisters speak of the appreciation felt by them and their families for the way in which Rose and her communities showed unstinting hospitality.

Sport was a strong interest which lightened her heart and which she shared with others. In particular she was a great devotee of the Australian cricket team and of major tennis events and was ready to give up sleep if need be to keep abreast of the scores and to encourage players. She participated herself in sport and showed herself to be a mean table tennis player.

In all circumstances of her life Rose's simple but profound spirit of prayer and gift of herself to God in Mary's way gave meaning, purpose and strength to her life. She appreciated opportunities, personally and with others, to develop her relationship with God, and sought nourishment in the Scriptures and good reading. Rose found in her Marist vocation a way of serving God and others which fostered the growth of the person she was called to be for the Church and the world. In a Provincial survey in 2001 she expressed her hopes/dreams for the future. She wrote: 'My hope is that I may continue to grow in Mary's spirit – and in so doing give birth to Christ in the hearts of many in our troubled world today.'

Rose's faithfilled approach to life was very much reflected in her patience in suffering and in her acceptance of the Cross in her life. That was so apparent in recent years when she was called to an increasing identification and union with the crucified Jesus. We can but guess her interior suffering as we increasingly lost touch with the Rose we knew and more and more rarely saw the responses she managed - a smile or even a tear in her eye. As three of us were privileged to sit with her in her dying moments I was conscious of the crucifix and the beautiful roses placed at the foot of her bed, a flower which true to her name, Rose loved. The song of Bette Midler 'The Rose' recorded some years ago came to mind and as Rose gently gave herself into the welcoming arms of God the last words of the song spoke something to me of the experience that Rose had been living and where it had now taken her – into the full flourishing of her person in the life and love in God that she desired and that God had created her for.

When the night has been too lonely
and the road has been too long
and you think that love is only
for the lucky and the strong
just remember in the winter
far beneath the bitter snows
lies the seed that with the sun's love
in the spring becomes the Rose.

Rest in peace Rose!