

CATHERINE REILLY
1916 - 1994

Catherine Reilly was born on March 30, 1916, in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, the daughter of Henry A. and Catherine (O'Neal) Reilly. She had three sisters and four brothers and eventually nineteen nieces and nephews. After finishing her schooling and having had some experience of domestic work, she entered the Society at Kenwood on September 7, 1937. She made her First Vows there two years later. She remained at Kenwood a few years and then went to Eden Hall, returning to Kenwood to make her Probation and then her Profession on November 17, 1945. She then spent short periods of time in several houses until she went to Elmhurst in 1950 and to Stone Ridge in 1955. From 1961 to 1975 she was at Newton College and after that at Newton Country Day School, living in the Upstairs community. In all these houses she did various kinds of domestic work and carried ever greater responsibilities with the passing years.

Perhaps the happiest time of her life was the nineteen years during which she served both her community and the guests of the Country Day School with a generosity and kindness which won the love and esteem of those who came to know her. It was during this time that Catherine received a signal grace which, it appears, came to her through the reading of THE WAY OF DIVINE LOVE. She had previously shown herself ill-tempered at times but her strong faith had kept her going in spite of difficulties. After what could truly be called a spiritual conversion, she was uniformly gentle, considerate of others, able to smile at the foibles of human nature, and devoted to serving Jesus in others. We have many testimonies to the beauty of her character in this long last period of her life.

One of the Children of Mary who had been coming to the convent for many years wrote that "life on this earth is diminished by the death of our beloved Sister Catherine Reilly. I feel her loss! She served us so graciously and so humbly that she made every meeting of the Children of Mary a beautiful, special memory." Other women spoke of her devotedness, especially in her last years when illness made the work difficult for her. They appreciated the care she took that everything at their teas or luncheons would be perfectly arranged. They saw, too, the trouble she took with the sacristy work and her quick and gracious adjustment to whatever circumstances might arise. Those who knew her only in these last years might not have realized what virtue was deployed in her carrying out of the myriad tasks that she undertook so generously.

Within the community, one saw the same devotedness and kindness. Catherine did her share of the cooking, preparing the meal with much skill and care, and at the grace she used to say "and let us thank the dear Blessed Mother for preparing this meal." When someone asked her what books

she liked, she mentioned THE WAY OF DIVINE LOVE and added: "any book on Our Lady." With all her deep-rooted piety and her fidelity to prayer, she retained a delightful dry humor and a realistic outlook on persons and things. Sister Jean Ford who was fortunately in the Boston area at the time of Catherine's death gave a wonderfully real and touching eulogy at the funeral Mass. Some excerpts will give the flavor of it.

"Some in her community think she had a premonition of her death. She asked to do rather unexpected things like having dinner at Jimmy's Harborside [a famous restaurant] and wanting to buy a black dress to wear at funerals. She bought a dress [a very attractive one] and she is wearing it today for her burial.... Hers was a life, faith-filled, a faith that deepened over the years and was reflected in the loyalty she had to her family, to her friends, to the Children of Mary, to her Sisters in the Society. She was a faithful friend and faithful to any responsibility given to her.... Strongly independent, she was unassuming, did not make demands on people, but was always ready to take part in life, life in the community, in the school, to be included, to accept a ride to Waltham, to the Dedham Mall, or to take the bus. She never "missed a trick." Keeping her own counsel, she knew what was going on.... She was uncomplaining; the physical ailments of the last few years never ruffled her, at least exteriorly. Just as during a difficult period many years ago [she had a nervous breakdown from which she recovered very well], the suffering she experienced seemed to strengthen her and develop her own inner freedom and happiness.... We have all lost a friend. Hannah has lost a sister and a friend, Kevin, Kathleen, Catherine and Kim an aunt and a friend who loved them dearly and prayed for them always as she did for all her family.... As we thank God for Catherine's life and her gift of friendship, let us rejoice with her. She is home. The final words of today's gospel (Matt. 11: 25-30.) seem particularly apt for Catherine on this occasion: 'Come to me all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me that I am gentle and humble of heart'."

Catherine's death came very suddenly on August 27. After dinner in the evening she asked to be taken to the hospital and by 2:30 the next morning the Lord had come for her. The Mass of the Resurrection was celebrated on August 29 by two old friends--Fathers William Leonard, S.J. and Thomas Fleming, S.J. The chapel of the Country Day School was filled with members of her family, many members of the Children of Mary and the Parents' Association, a large number of the lay faculty of the school, the members of the Society in this area and other friends. She was buried in St. Joseph's cemetery and the last moment of the ceremony was fittingly marked by the singing of the Salve Regina.