

SISTER ESTHER MARIE PHILLIPS
May 13, 1937–February 14, 2013

**Reflection Given at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish,
Phoenix, Arizona**



When I think of Sister Esther Marie, the words, “Goodness and kindness shall follow you all the days of your life,” come to my mind. Sister Esther Marie gave us these gifts – goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and a beautiful calmness all the days of her life. Sister gave these gifts to her family, to all those with whom she ministered and especially to the Sisters of Charity. Our community was so blessed to have her as one of us.

Sister Esther Marie recently told the story of how she entered the Sisters of Charity. As we all know, Sister Esther Marie was not always Sister Esther Marie. She was first and foremost the daughter of Wilbur and Esther Phillips and baptized Joan Phillips. She had two darling little sisters, Joyce and Lyn, and they grew up in Tucson, Arizona and attended religious education classes at St. John's Parish in Tucson.

Now when Joan and her sister Joyce were in high school, Joyce told the sisters that she was interested in religious life. Well, our Joan recounted that very soon Joyce was receiving first class mail every day and Joan became envious of this. She wanted to receive first class mail, too!

So Joan told the sisters that she, too, was interested in religious life. She wanted that first class mail, also. Now, not only did Joan receive first class mail, but the sisters began to invite her to pray with them and become part of them. It seems to me that God played a trick on our Joan. She entered the Sisters of Charity in 1955 and became Sister Esther Marie. Her sisters Joyce and Lyn married and have wonderful families.

Sister Esther Marie loved her many ministries as a Sister of Charity and worked tirelessly through our community for the Church. She worked in many dioceses, but Arizona was always her first love. Sister Esther Marie served as secretary of our congregation for eight years and then returned to her beloved Arizona in 1993. She was happy to be close again to her family and friends.

Her love for the parishioners of all the parishes in which she served was so evident as she spoke of you. It seems fitting that we come together here in Arizona to bid our gentle, faith-filled Sr. Esther Marie farewell. Her faith and love of Our Lord has been an inspiration to all of us. If she were physically here, she would say thank you to all of you, her family, friends, priests, the ministers of care and all those who loved her. She would also remind us to stay close to Our Lord as we journey through this life. God bless each of you.

*Sister Catherine Meinert, S.C.
February 18, 2013*

**Reflection Given at Caritas Christi,
Greensburg, Pennsylvania**

Sister Esther Marie was born in Hammond, Indiana, and was baptized Joan Barbara. Her mother, Esther (Kielman) Phillips and her father Wilber moved their young family to Tucson, Arizona in the 1940's. Esther was devoted to her family. She would say, "I am proud of my family. They have encouraged me and supported me throughout my life." Her love for her sisters, Joyce and Lynn, and their husbands, Jerry and Alan, her nieces and nephews and grandnieces and grandnephews was unconditional. Esther's funeral celebration in Arizona was indeed a gift for her family and friends who live there.

Esther met our sisters at St. John's parish in Tucson and at her 50th Jubilee she expressed, "When I entered the Sisters of Charity, I was strongly motivated by the desire to do something for God and to follow the sisters who ministered in my home parish. They were so happy and comfortable with each other and did very good work in the parish and community. I am awed by the realization of what God did for me in calling me to religious life."

She lived this call in a gentle, kind and steady manner. In her oral history she spoke of enjoying teaching and discovering her gift of having good classroom discipline. She also told this story which may give some insight into how she approached life. When Esther arrived at St. John's in Tucson to teach eighth grade Sister Marie Louise(Hunnell) announced to her that she would be coaching the girls' volleyball team. Esther said to herself, "I have no idea of how to do this but somehow I'll make it work." The team won first place in the city CYO league! (By the way, as a Sister of Charity she did become an avid Pirate and Steeler fan.)

Then in 1985 Esther was called to serve as secretary of the congregation. Moreover she used this time “in the East” to develop rich connections with the sisters at Assumption Hall as well as in the congregation at large. Her gift of letters and her gracious gratefulness are legend among us. How she delighted in preparing luncheons in the hall of DePaul Center! We all got to see what students must have seen in her and what Elizabeth Seton encourages in us; “Love God with your whole heart, give God the true *Service of the heart*. ”

When she returned to Arizona in 1993 she ministered at Resurrection parish as office manager. Then in 2000 Sister Laverne (Cassidy) encouraged her to consider moving into the Ministry of Care where she ministered until her retirement in 2011. Her kind, gracious and peaceful manner endeared her to the many volunteers with whom she worked.

Are we surprised to find that when she celebrated 25 years in the community she said: “The meaning of my religious profession remains the same – growth in relationship between Christ and myself. Since my entrance into the congregation I have grown more able to look through externals in order to center on the real value of each person, myself included – the true Presence of God’s life and love. It is out of this belief that I encourage others to make their response to God’s love.”

Elizabeth Seton, we commend to God and to you this daughter who has suffered since her retirement and lived to the end your encouragement “Love God with your whole heart, give God the true *Service of the heart*. ”

Mary Ann Winters, SC
February 21, 2013