

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER PATRICIA BEST

July 18, 1935–August 1 2014



The gentle soul of Sister Patricia Best went peacefully to meet her God this past Friday afternoon. She once wrote, “I fell in love with God at an early age.” This love of God filled her life to overflowing with gentleness and kindness, impelling her always to study, to work, and to teach in God’s name.

Sister Patricia was born in Upper Sandusky, Ohio. Her parents were Robert Best, a baker by profession, and Gertrude Chartener. Later, a younger brother Bob and a sister Mary were born. Most of us know that our Sister Marie Cecily Chartener was her aunt and Sister Mary Carla Radermacher her cousin. Patricia attended the Catholic elementary school and public high school in Upper Sandusky, working in the bakery after school and during the summer when she was in high school.

At 18, Patricia wasn’t sure she was worthy to be a religious, but realized it was God’s call. She wrote that “the sisters’ work consists of nursing, teaching, and caring for the abandoned and needy. I think I might qualify for work of this kind.” Sister Patricia entered the Sisters of Charity September 8, 1953. She said that her parents supported her decision but found it difficult to see her leave since she was the first one to break up the family, as it were.

Sister Patricia earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education at Seton Hill University, and for 35 years, taught in elementary schools in the Dioceses of Pittsburgh, Greensburg, Altoona-Johnstown, Tucson, Phoenix, and in the Archdioceses of Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. During these years, she participated in many conferences and workshops regarding education, especially the teaching of religion. Sister Patricia served as principal of Holy Trinity School in Mount Pleasant. She earned a master of arts in theology at Saint Mary’s University, San Antonio, Texas, and in 1989, began her work in religious education. She said, “I enjoy teaching and sharing the good news of God’s mercy, love, and forgiveness with those who come under my care. I want the children to know how deeply God loves them.” She worked as director of religious education in Clarksburg, West Virginia, and at Immaculate Conception Parish in Irwin. In the Diocese of Greensburg, she ministered as a consultant for religious education and also as the director of early childhood and elementary catechesis. As a director of religious education, Sister Patricia was kind and patient with the catechists, visiting their classes and conducting workshops for them. She had handouts and excellent audio-visual materials. She spent 11 years at Saint Columbkille Parish in Imperial where she used her elementary teaching background as well as her theological education. At Saint Columbkille, she was director of religious education as well as director of the preschool! (I often wondered how she could do both!)

All of her study and work over the years bore good fruit during the years spent at Saint Columbkille. The enrollment for the preschool was large. In one letter, Sister Patricia noted that one particular year, there were 60 openings for three-year-olds. On the day of registration held during the previous fall, people were waiting for almost an hour before the doors opened. Sister Patricia received many expressions of gratitude and praise, not only from the parents of religious education students, but from the catechists who taught the classes. One family wrote: “You are rewarding for the Church and for the community of Saint

Columbkille.” Another said, “I know you have played a major role in my teaching and in my faith as a mother, wife, nurse, and teacher.” Another commented, “I have never seen you angry.” In 2003, Sister Patricia received the “Manifesting the Kingdom Award” from the Diocese of Pittsburgh for outstanding service to the Church. Sister Patricia was forward-looking in her thinking about religious education. In her early years of teaching religious education, she thought of adult education as a necessity. She asked, “Are we educating at the wrong end?” She was interested in family-centered religious education. An article in the National Catholic Education Association magazine made a play on her name and stated that she looked for the “best” in the children she says she is privileged to meet each day.

When Sister Patricia left Saint Columbkille Parish, she chose to take a sabbatical year in New England. She then moved to Greensburg, first to Doran Hall and then to Caritas Christi. For over six years, she was coordinator for transportation for sisters who had medical appointments, a difficult job requiring all the patience and gentleness Sister Patricia possessed. She did an excellent job. Many sisters have commented on her creativity in the house, her kindness to them, and upon her tremendous generosity. The first time she told me she had taken a sister to the Meadows on the way back from the doctor, I was surprised—how would they get all the way to the racetrack, which is rather distant, on the way home from the doctor? Then in her gentle way Sister Patricia explained that the Meadows is actually an ice cream place right in Greensburg.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton wrote once, “I am jogging on through fine air . . . some cares, some comforts—and always looking upward.” So Sister Patricia kept “jogging on” until her illness a few short months ago. As she had written that she fell in love with God at an early age, and saw her religious vocation as a call from God, she saw her illness as an invitation from God to begin a new life. She answered that invitation with love and trust. Sister Patricia was baptized August 4, 1935. Today, August 4, 2014 she is baptized anew into the Heavenly Kingdom.

Sister Patricia’s life of dedication, prayer, service, and trust is a concrete expression of the words of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton:

*The soul awaits thy will in certain hope,
pressing forward to eternity,
reaching out for the things ahead,
looking steadfastly upward.*

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Brigid Marie Grandey, SC
August 4, 2014*