

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER ANTONINE FORBECK

September 6, 1921–August 12, 2014



Sister Antonine's soul went peacefully to God this past Tuesday. A woman of utmost faith in God, she emulated Mother Seton's words, "Do all in God's way." Sister Antonine lived her life "Doing all in God's way!"

Mary Helen Forbeck was born on September 6, 1921. Mary was the youngest child of Joseph Forbeck and Anna Walter Forbeck. Mary had three older brothers and two sisters—Maurice, Eugene, and Joseph, and Katherine and Mildred. In one of Sister Antonine's notes she states that she was born into the world from good Christian parents. She was named Mary in honor of the Blessed Mother; and Sister Antonine believed that the Blessed Mother protected her throughout her life.

Sister Antonine attended St. Joseph School in Verona, Pennsylvania, and was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, whom she greatly respected. However, Sister Antonine was introduced to our community through her older sister who was studying nursing at Pittsburgh Hospital. When Sister Antonine expressed an interest in religious life, her sister encouraged her to see if she would be interested in our order. She was and entered the Sisters of Charity on September 8, 1939.

Sister Antonine shared with many of us that her pastor, Father Duwell, was a priest of very few words. This was confirmed by his letter of recommendation of Mary Forbeck to the community which reads, "Mary Forbeck is to be commended in every way. Signed... Father Duwell, Pastor."

On January 1, 1940, Sister received the habit and her name, which means little Anthony. We all know how much devotion that Sister had to Saint Anthony; and, I must add, Saint Anthony answered her every request.

Sister Antonine was a talented artist and earned a degree in art as well as sociology from Seton Hill. She used her talents as she taught primary grades in Pittsburgh, Johnstown, California, Arizona, and of course, Greensburg. She particularly loved to prepare second graders to receive our Lord for the first time in the Eucharist.

In 1944, the very young Sister Antonine became seriously ill and was hospitalized for quite a long time. Sister relayed a humorous story that when she returned to Seton Hill, she was placed in the Fifth Admin dormitory. She became quite bored so she began to jump from bed to bed. At that point, the major superior came into the room and proclaimed that Sister Antonine was quite well and should return to her duties.

After 30 years of teaching in elementary schools, Sister Antonine moved into religious education and pastoral ministry. She had found another ministry that she loved. This ministry took her to Huntingdon, West Virginia; Preston, West Virginia; Sedona, Arizona; Imperial, Pennsylvania; and finally to Connellsville, Pennsylvania. In Preston, West Virginia, Sister Antonine was involved in hospital work

and radio ministry. She especially enjoyed the radio ministry which was an ecumenical venture. Sister Antonine received many expressions of gratitude for her work. One read, “With sincere warm thanks for deepening my faith with your spontaneous prayers, personal sharing, and insightful talks, and especially for your love.” Another person from Quebec, Canada, whom she met on a retreat, wrote “Your references to our Blessed Lady were indeed a help to my own faith.”

I had the honor of living with Sister Antonine in Connellsville from 1996 to 2007. She enriched my life through her deep spirituality. As she visited the shut-ins and prepared and presented bible study classes, her deep love of our Lord was ever present.

Of course, Sister Antonine also loved to play cards, visit with her family whom she dearly loved, plant a vegetable and flower garden, design cards with her beautiful calligraphy, and be involved in various art projects. She was a woman of many talents and was always willing to share her talents and time. All of the sisters who lived with Sister, including me, benefited from her great generosity!

In 2007, at the age of 85, she decided to come to Caritas Christi; however, she did not retire, but used her talents to beautify our chapel with flower arrangements of various assortments.

Finally, her health began to fail and she had to truly retire—but never from her prayer life, her family, and playing cards with her many friends.

When I think of Sister Antonine, Mother Seton’s words come again, “Do all in God’s way.” Sister did just that. No matter what ministry, no matter what she was called to do, she did it in God’s way—willingly, reverently, and, above all, prayerfully.

I would like to end with a poem that Sister Antonine wrote in 1953. It is titled “Farmer God” and it reads:

*You planted me carefully in a God-fearing family
You watered me with your grace and the sunshine of your presence
You watched me sprout as I became aware of union with you in prayer
You were delighted and excited as I grew in your grace.
When weeds of failure and sin attempted to choke me
You painstakingly pulled them out by the roots
But weeds have a way of growing again
And you patiently tilled and toiled and waited
For new growth and signs of the fruits of your labor.
Farmer God, you continue to plant, toil and weed
Until the Kingdom of God spreads through me
And I am harvested in eternity!*

Dear Sister Antonine, God has seen his work in you. We will miss you, but we know you are with the Farmer God, who loves you so completely!

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
~Sister Catherine Meinert, SC
August 16, 2014*