

## REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER ANNE FLYNN

April 17-1930—August 28, 2020



The announcement sent out on Friday, August 28, began “Sister Anne Flynn missed the Elizabeth Seton birthday party this evening. . . .”

Anne loved a party, especially if it had some Irish connection or casino entertainment. Still, we were not surprised to find that she had slipped into eternity on the birthday of Elizabeth, her loving saint companion since childhood.

Anne Eileen Flynn was born on Holy Thursday, April 17, 1930, the seventh child of young Irish immigrants Lucy M. Murphy, from Cork, and John J. Flynn, from Kilkenny. She fell into the middle child position with two sisters and four brothers born before her and two sisters and four brothers after her. Anne, in her oral history, remembered that her mother organized the household so well; the children took responsibility for each other, and so George born before her, became Anne’s, guide. When the time came, he took her by the hand to Resurrection School to the first grade of Sister Macaria, who became a great lifelong friend of Anne’s. Childhood was a fun time for Anne, with her brothers, sisters, on Woodburne Avenue in a house surrounded by 12 cherry trees and open to the little ones of the neighborhood. But when Anne was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, the family moved to Liberty Avenue, to a much bigger house that her mother, Lucy Murphy Flynn, had bid on at an auction. The move was a good one, but Anne wanted to keep in touch with her Lutheran friends from the old neighborhood even as she added new friends from Liberty Avenue.

Before long, it was time to make a decision about a high school. Of course, Anne wanted to go with her brothers and travel with them to St. Justin, but Mrs. Flynn wanted her daughter to attend the new Elizabeth Seton High School. Anne turned to her father who was sympathetic. It was almost Labor Day with no decision. Then a determined Lucy Murphy Flynn sat down with a compromise for her strong willed daughter. Anne need only go to Elizabeth Seton for one year, if at the end she was unhappy she could transfer to St. Justin.

Of course, the rest is history. Anne loved Elizabeth Seton and especially the Sisters who taught them to dance as well as to speak French, debate, conjugate Latin verbs, and so much more. And at the end of four years, much against the wishes of her brother-mentor George, Anne decided to enter the Sisters of Charity with Sister Marie de Sales as her sponsor.

In September 1948 Anne with four other members of her class, Alice Ruane, Ruth Bosco, Joan McGinley, Aileen Connelly, became postulants at the Seton Hill. In the novitiate Anne took the name Mary de Sales. It seems she was chosen for the name by Sister Alacoque who had guarded the name of her beloved friend and companion for just the right postulant. She finally found that person in Anne.

The novitiate was truly a time of happiness and growth for Anne with regular college classes that stimulated and enhanced the regularity of religious life. Under the leadership of Mother Maria Benedict Monahan, Anne's group remained in the novitiate for the full two and a half years. By the mid 1950s, this group was ready for graduation from Seton Hill University.

Because of the need in high schools, Anne was asked to move from the field of social science to that of biology immediately after graduation. This change marked her work and mission for the next 20 years. There is no doubt she excelled in this field. Then in 1964, she was sent to George Washington University in Washington, D.C. where she obtained an M.B.A., but she also experienced in Washington the movement for civil

rights and the presence of Martin Luther King during those years. Here began her journey of faith in social ministry. Returning to Pittsburgh, she spent three years at Pittsburgh Hospital and assisted in developing the Homewood-Brushton Health Center.

When she left the hospital, she was hired by the Community College of Allegheny County. There she served as chair of the department of allied health and directed five programs in the department. She excelled in her ability to train and inspire young students.

An unforgettable experience 1976-77, is how Anne often described the year in Canada at the Divine Word Center, London, Ontario. There she studied, prayed, meditated on Sacred Scripture. For the rest of her life this experience stayed with her. The year in Canada was followed by work at Mundelein College in Chicago where she earned a masters' degree in Religious Education. The pieces of her education were fitting into place as she moved into pastoral leadership first in West Virginia, then in Maryland, Charleston South Carolina, Ohio, and a good six-year stretch in the Diocese of Greensburg. These were happy years for Anne.

In 1997 she published a book, *Dare to Believe, Dare to Act*. In the preface she explains: *Dare to Believe, Dare to Act* is my guiding motto as I walk the journey of faith in social ministry. . . . In 1987, as a pastoral associate at St. Joseph Parish in Cockeysville, Maryland, I was uniquely blessed to be responsible for social ministry in the parish. It was here that parish ministries of service, word, and worship blossomed." She began to put it into writing her reflection and action paradigm with the encouragement of the parishioners who with Anne reached out to the poor and vulnerable. In the new millennium Anne began six years of ministry in the Greensburg Diocese, taking her social ministry "salt and light" to every parish in the diocese.

As she reached the age of 76, the prospect of transition was a challenge. "Retirement is a tough decision," she remarked in a newspaper article, and then she took off for Arizona where she became part of the parish

ministry team at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Scottsdale. Finally in 2008, she moved back to Pittsburgh, living at Elizabeth Seton Convent, then Doran Hall, and then finally to Caritas Christi Center in 2012. But she continued to teach and to minister—now by working with University of Dayton as designer and facilitator in their special on-line program for parish ministry.

Here at Caritas Christi, we all remember how she skillfully organized the work at the reception desk, and how she tenaciously held on to serving there until she was no longer physically able to do so.

As I prayed in Anne's room during her last illness, I noticed the pictures; they tell us something of her loves. High up on the combination dresser/TV stand were pictures of her family. One especially stood out with Anne, her sister Alice, and her brother Mike, taken one year ago at their now regular family reunion. These were begun by Anne, her brother Mike, and niece Barbara. They called the family together in 1989 to meet with the families from Cork, who had come to visit as a result of contact made by Anne and Mike when they visited Ireland in 1988. That is how it began. Anne loved everything related to the family. She worked hard on family genealogy in summer and traveled a number of times with Mike to Ireland where they could look at records and birth/baptismal certificates and visit with family in Cork. She loved getting together with the family in Pittsburgh (especially for the Irish festivals) and visits with Mike and family in Ohio whenever possible. Alice and her husband Jack, from Milwaukee, brought Anne great pleasure and love when they visited her in the fall of 2019. Yes, family was a central love in Anne's life.

Then I noticed a picture of Elizabeth Seton on the right of her bed and those well-known words of the prophet Micah in a frame on the left. Anne had been inspired by Elizabeth from the time she was in Resurrection Grade School, and her love and admiration for Elizabeth had grown at Elizabeth Seton High School, leading her to the Sisters of

Charity. That love linked her to those prophetic words of Micah, for she had certainly tried to live and to teach others her “dare to believe, dare to do” motto “to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

On the occasion of her 50<sup>th</sup> jubilee, she expressed her love in this way, “I have been singularly blessed as a member of the Sisters of Charity where I was formed in the spirituality of Mother Elizabeth Seton. This spirit of charity enabled me to go forth in ministry to serve with and to a variety of people in varied circumstances, particularly those in need. I thank God each day for this privilege and this blessing.”

Anne dear, you are our “Blessing” today, and so together:

*May the Road rise up to meet us,*

*May the wind be always at our back,*

*May the sun shine warm upon our faces,*

*The rain fall softly upon our fields,*

*And until we meet again, may God hold us in the palm of his hand.*

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection*

*Sister Gemma Del Ducca*

*September 1, 2020*