

Reflections on the Life of Sister Janet Neider

Funeral Mass at Caritas Christi, March 27, 2023



Last Friday morning, the 24th of March, 2023, Sister Janet Neider, almost 85 years old, broke through the mystery of her long, long illness, her many, many days in the Elizabeth Seton Memory Care. She broke through earthly limits. She broke into the heaven of eternal health. She broke in to the eternal present – where there is no need of memory.

Janet and I, Sisters Lorilee and Mary Lou, here today, entered the community together in September, 1957.

What I felt upon hearing of Janet’s last illness and death was clear – relief, and of course, a smile that I felt throughout my whole being. Janet was free. After all those years of a kind of imprisonment, she was free. And then I knew more than relief. It was faith. In those last moments of her illness, Janet, the romantic, was getting

ready to walk into the loving arms of God. Romantic that she was, she may well have danced into the arms of God.

One time, when I visited Janet in the memory care, she was sitting calmly in her usual chair. She was holding a red jacket. She said it wasn’t hers, and she didn’t know what to do with it. She said, “I don’t wear it. Nobody wears it.” You can guess the rest of the story – if you can see the very red jacket I wear today. I wear it in Janet’s honor.

Another time was in April a few years ago. I reminded Janet that her birthday was coming up – May 24th. And I asked what I thought was a safe question at our age – how old would she be. She didn’t know. Then I reminded her that Sister Colette’s birthday was in May also, May 4th and I asked how old Colette would be. Janet looked at me as if to say, “Where have you been?” What she said to me was so logical, “If I don’t know how old I am, how do you expect me to know how old Colette is?”

In the powerful stories of these last two Sunday Gospels, we’ve heard about the man born blind and Lazarus’ illness. Both men were in circumstances that seemed unfortunate, blindness and fatal illness. Jesus speaks so clearly about both of these men — that these seemingly bad events are in truth “for the glory of God. These are so that the glory of God may be made more visible through them.”

Janet was ill in different ways for many years. We didn't understand. Many of us, perhaps most of us still don't understand. In pondering her long illness, we search with the eyes of faith and hope to see how the glory of God shows through the circumstances of Janet's life — these many years of confusion and memory loss.

As Janet's belongings were being gathered last week, someone who knew Janet and appreciated her in a special way, perhaps one of the staff, asked if she could have a book of Janet's poetry to keep. The staff in memory care lived with Janet and cared for her every day, week to week, month to month, maybe for some year to year — saw her calm each day, her steady, pleasant manner, her ease in moving from one part of the unit to another — these women might well be the ones who understand Gospel ways — that in Janet they saw an everyday simplicity, a refreshing opposite to the discouragement and duplicity one might encounter in other parts of life.

Through the years, we've experienced Janet's effervescence about the beauty of nature, of God, of the spiritual life in the books she prepared; poems and essays, many of them. That takes a lot. A lot of energy and time; a lot of working and re-working; devotion and dedication to bring forth the product Janet dreamed of in her younger years. And then there was all the arranging of the printing and binding. Janet also published several articles in religious magazines. One must note here that Janet's younger sister, Regina, did all the typing of these works. These creative pieces were for Janet, her generous gift to God and her readers.

She dedicates her book: *To the God . . . who formed me . . . poet . . . in my mother's womb . . . and continues . . . to call me . . . spouse.*

And in the book I have here, hand written on the title page: *Sing always . . . All Ways . . . God's song.*

Let us take some silent time to pray today for Sister Janet's family. Let us pray for her sister Regina who now living in AZ isn't able to be with us today. Let us pray for Sister Janet's deceased parents, Gertrude Ruffner Neider and Bernard Neider whom many of us knew, working in his friendly way in maintenance at Seton Hill; and for her truly beloved brother Bernard. (A brief silence to pray for Janet's family.)

From her several years in primary grades to her ten years at Seton Hill College to her 18 years as a play therapist in Tucson, Janet was through and through, one of us. There was her religious habit in our early years and then her symbol — she wore these proudly. Janet always saw herself and presented herself enthusiastically as a Sister of Charity,

In her journaling about her new mission as a teacher at the Rosalia Manor in 2004, Janet wrote. "For me to experience each girl individually with humility, simplicity, and genuine love leavened with any skills that I may have will mark my service with the DNA of the Sisters of Charity."

In conclusion, I recall June 29, 1959 – the first day after we had completed our white tie novitiate. It was the feast of SS. Peter and Paul. The Introit as we called it in those pre-Vatican days, now simply the Entrance Prayer began with two words. Janet noticed the two words right away and soon shared them with us. The two words were – in Latin, *nunc scio*. In English, Now I know. Sister Janet picked this up quickly. Our novice year was over. We had learned a lot. We had made it through. We were real sisters now. How naively, we very young sisters, after one year of religious life, thought we could say -- Now I know.

As Sister Janet entered eternity last Friday morning, after many years of living, ministering and suffering, she could look our Lord in the eye and say, *Nunc scio*. Now I know.

Sister Mary Clark SC