

Sister Mary Agnes Lanthier, O.P., of Jesus

One day during recess at Notre Dame Grammar school in San Francisco, Mary Elizabeth, a second grader, went to the Sisters' chapel and prayed the Stations of the Cross in this unique way: "The First Station, Jesus, please make me a Sister; the second station, Jesus, please make me a sister", and so on to the fourteenth station.

This child, destined to have a lifelong trusting relationship with Jesus, was born to Joseph and Margaret Lanthier in San Francisco, California on July 5, 1913. Sister Agnes describes her mother as a "very holy person." Sadly, her father died in an accident when Mary Elizabeth was fifteen. With her siblings, Joseph, Margaret and Evelyn, she grew up in the Mission District of San Francisco. The Mission and its neighboring districts abounded over the years with numerous religious vocations. But Mary Elizabeth's plea that Jesus "make" her a sister was put on hold until her senior year at Immaculate Conception Academy, when she again became convinced of her call. She entered the Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose on October 4, 1931. Her brother Joseph and her sister Margaret married, while her sister Evelyn first entered with the Carmelites and then became a member of Our Lady of the Way, a secular institute.

Mary Elizabeth received the Dominican habit on June 29, 1932 and was given the name Sister Mary Agnes with her chosen title, Jesus. The Dominican Saint Agnes of Montepulciano was given as her patron, although she would have preferred the French Dominican, Agnes of Languedoc, whose life and spirituality she greatly admired. Sister made her first profession of vows on July 1, 1933.

One of Agnes' greatest joys as an elementary school teacher was preparing children to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. She delighted in sharing with the little ones her devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. This devotion continued throughout her life; she regularly attended Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament with the Motherhouse community. Following the completion of her more than half a century of classroom teaching, sister felt privileged to become a minister of Holy Communion to shut-ins in the neighborhood.

Through her studies and opportunities to visit France and Quebec, Canada, Agnes became fluent in the French language. Her high school students benefited greatly from her proficiency. On a trip to Paris with a group of them, many of the local people remarked on the fluency of these

young girls from far-off California. Less fluent were a few of sister's reluctant community members whom she gathered together one evening at recreation to perform the French version of "Cinderella" for the rest of the community.

Sister Agnes was very close to her many family members, enjoying their company whenever they visited her. Just a few years ago she completed a family genealogy, sending a copy to each of her relatives. Before her untimely fall, she had signed up for a day at Marywood with some of her family who would be vacationing in the area. That day was to be tomorrow, September 20!

Friends too played an important role in Agnes' life. Faithfully over the years she kept in close contact with them.

It might be said that, in spite of her 98 years, Agnes was ageless. Her keen interest in the latest news, her eagerness to be actively involved in all aspects of Congregational life, her keeping her mind alert through reading, studying, composing preachings, corresponding, playing cards and scrabble with her sisters, and much much more kept her ever young. A deeply spiritual woman, Agnes never wavered from the most important thing she said she learned in her Novitiate: what it means to be a true contemplative—and that she was!

Speaking of "forever young," at age 85, Agnes joined the small community at St. Therese convent in Portland, Oregon and ministered as a parish volunteer. Although she had never needed to cook for a community, she insisted on taking her turn. Her community affectionately called her Julia Child. Whenever she needed advice, Agnes felt free to call on the community's next door neighbor and good friend, Vera Korchinski. One day, Vera received such a call and heard Agnes say in her distinctive voice, "Vera, this is Julia. I'm having a culinary crisis; do I peel mushrooms?"

A true Dominican in every way, Sister Agnes had a great love for liturgy, including the Eucharist and the divine office, and for the Rosary, which she prayed daily with her community of St. Martin's or quietly in her room. Most strikingly, in her early nineties she wondered, in her own words, "why God awakens in me the call to be a preacher so late in my life." But believing it to be a true call to "preach the Word," Agnes added her name as an internet preacher on our Mission San Jose website. For three years, she contributed her insights on the Sunday readings, focusing strongly on the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels.

Sister Agnes dearly loved and prayed for each of her sisters. Sister Jennifer, Prioress of Saint Martin's Community, relates that each night she would hear from her room a whirring sound, followed by some moments of silence, again the sound----silence and on and on. Finally, one night Sister Jennifer observed Agnes in her squeaky scooter Monty stopping at each sister's door to pray for her; after finishing on the first floor she and Monty would go to the second floor and do the same.

Considering it a graced moment to be present at a dying sister's bedside, Agnes was right there whenever a vigil was held, ready to bid farewell to her beloved sister. How fitting it was when her time came that she was surrounded by so many of her beloved sisters who, following Sunday Eucharist the morning of Sept.11, assembled to say their goodbyes to her. Sister Gloria Marie Jones, Congregational Prioress, and Father Carl Seewald, Motherhouse chaplain, were preparing to pray the prayers for the dying when it became apparent that Sister Agnes, very peacefully, had breathed her last. The assembled group bade farewell to their Sister by singing the traditional Marian hymn, "Hail, O Queen," trusting that Mary already had shown to our dear Sister Agnes the "blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus."

