

SISTER HOSANNA ALMAGUER

of the Cross



January 3, 1903 – June 11, 2009

Eulogy

At the age of 99, Sister Hosanna gave an interview and spoke these words: “When you die you don’t take things with you. You must share your gifts with others throughout your entire life.” This summarizes a philosophy and a spirituality that were born true in her.

What impressed others about her were her warmth, humility and the care she had for her sisters and all those she met. She was always interested in what was going on, and encouraging to others. When I was a new teacher, she told me, “Don’t worry about it. It will be okay.” She looked after us in so many ways with her great wisdom and good advice. Young sisters could count on her instruction and help.

Maria Prisciliana Luciana Almaguer was born in a small village in Mexico: Rancho Zacatón, Guanajuato on January 3, 1903 and was baptized four days later. Her parents Guadalupe and Paulina Almaguer had eight children: Soledad, Sophia, and Lucas were the girls and Alberto, Victoriano, Antonio and Juan were the boys that Sister Hosanna outlived. Life was always a struggle for the family and Sister Hosanna recalled her mother praying for others who were worse off than they. Her family survived by working together and caring for one another. She experienced the strength one finds in family, community and prayer.

As a young girl, Maria loved going to mass and wanted to sing in the choir, but the church was far away and the expense of travel too great. Her mother would get the children up at 4 a.m, and they would walk three hours to get to Mass. While they would wait for the church building to open, she could hear the sisters in the convent praying and singing, and this kindled in her a desire to become a sister. As she grew so, too, did her hope of someday being able to spend more time in prayer and serving others.

First contact with our sisters was when we established our school in San Miguel de Allende. She

entered our congregation on June 6, 1925 and Sister Hosanna of the Cross received the habit six months later on December 15. This was in the midst of the religious persecution in Mexico, so she fled the country along with Sisters Juana Bustamante and Veronica Landaverde and arrived in the United States. on August 26, 1926. She completed her novitiate and made profession on May 17, 1927 and six years later to the date pronounced her perpetual profession.

Sister Hosanna's life of ministry was as a cook and domestic. She shared that when she first arrived at the motherhouse as a cook, it was the German sisters who taught her how to cook the kind of food that the sisters here were used to eating. She did not speak German and the Sisters did not speak Spanish, but yet they were able to communicate and help her learn. She would be forever grateful to them; this was an early example of our internationality and sisterly bonds. In her 82 years of religious profession, sister had 18 assignments. Her first was to Immaculate Conception Priory in 1931, and her longest assignment outside the motherhouse was to Sacred Heart Convent 1980-1991, although her three times at St. Ignatius also add up to 11 years. She served three times as Infirmary cook and also ministered to the sisters at St. Elizabeth's, St. Mary Magdalene, Immaculate Conception Convent and St. Dominic's Priory in Portland.

She was still in good health and pretty independent, when she asked to move to St. Martin's in 1993; she seemed to desire a greater simplicity of life and more time for prayer. Of course she still helped out any way she could, especially working with Sister Theresita Kammermeier in doing the wardrobe for the sisters until the Fall of 2002.

Although she loved to study and read, she never had an opportunity for formal education. In her biography information, she indicated, "What I know I have learned with you." She was a student of life and learn-ed in ways that others of us envy. In 2001 Sister Mary Jarlath McGrath was concerned about Sister Hosanna's health, her rising at 4:00 a.m. to pray, and her retiring about 11:00 p.m. each night. Sister Mary Jarlath had a conversation with Sister Hosanna about these concerns. Sister Hosanna's response: "Sister Superior, please let me still get up at 4:00 a.m. I need to read and pray with Sacred Scripture as long as I can see....there will be a day when I am unable to see...so I want to have the Bible in my heart so that I may still pray with it when that day comes." In 2008 she finally conceded to sleeping in until 5:30 a.m!

She was full of common sense and a wisdom that comes from being close to God and attentive to people. She always wanted to help others. At Sacred Heart she loved feeding the homeless at the back door until she was asked to stop because it was considered unsafe for the students. In more recent years, no one entered her room at St. Martin's without being touched and somehow enriched for having been in her presence. She loved to talk, so one had to visit her realizing it would be difficult to keep it short, but her longing to communicate and stay connected was endearing.

She had a very real presence when you were with her, compassionate and other-centered. She would ask you about your family or what was happening in the congregation or the world. She was very committed to the Congregation, always keeping abreast of what was going on and eager to be involved. Not too long ago, Sister Cecilia Canales went in to visit her and shared that the Council was working on missioning for the year. Sister Hosanna started asking for the nurse so Sister Cecilia anxiously rang the call button. When the nurse arrived, she leaned over sister to find out what was the problem. She distinctly said, “I need an assignment!” The nurse was confused, but Sister Cecilia smiled and told her, “Sister, your assignment is to pray for us!” She was ever faithful to her commitment!

Sister Hosanna was a humble servant, doing whatever was needed; filled with gratitude, she never took credit to herself—“God did it or God knows,” so no need to praise her or to give her acknowledgment. Like our Mother Pia she also had a favorite phrase: instead of “God Alone,” she would say “Only God.” She was so clearly focused on God, and the Blessed Mother was an anchor for her. She counted on God’s mercy and always prayed for others, especially priests. People remember her as being very kind and *never* saying anything mean about anyone. Her one suffering these last years was why she was still here waiting for the Lord when younger sisters died—sisters *only* in their 80’s or 90’s!

In March of this year, Sister’s health began to decline—the diagnosis was a recurrence of cancer. In May she was no longer able to pray with her Bible in the morning, but she continued praying with her heart. The last six weeks of her life she was bedridden but still very alert and coherent. She became a living prayer, praying with her heart throughout the day saying the rosary, litanies, raising her mind and heart to God. Her breathing became more labored but she was ever gracious with her visitors, and her skin still so beautiful and smooth to the end. She slipped into a coma the last few days and went very peacefully and quietly to God at 6:50 p.m on June 11th when the rest of the world was celebrating the feast of Corpus Christi.

Sister, you have finally gotten the answer to your prayer of being completely united with the God for whom you gave your life, the love of your life, and we know that you will intercede for all of us as you were accustomed to doing. We are sure Dominic and Mother Pia welcomed you, their faithful daughter. May you enjoy the eternal reward you so richly deserve and may heaven rejoice with your loving presence!

--Sisters Cecilia Canales and Evelyn Casper, O.P.