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Sr. Ignatius Reichert, OCD

Entered Eternal Life December 5, 2011

Eulogy by Sr. Patricia Scanlan, ocd. When a young woman entered Baltimore Carmel in 1941, she had never seen what lay behind the high red brick walls on the corner of Caroline and Biddle Streets. When received into the novitiate, the young woman was dressed as a bride, symbolic of the total gift of herself to God. In the picture inside, you see Martha Reichert in her bridal dress. With the Habit, she received her new name, Sr. Ignatius Loyola of God Our Lord, evidence of her close ties to the Jesuits.

Looking through some pictures and cards Sr. Ignatius had stowed away, I came across the sermon given by Joseph Dougherty, SJ at her Solemn Profession, on April 28, 1946. Fr. Dougherty had been her spiritual director and advisor so he knew her well. He prefaced his sermon with a story I had never heard. I knew she had gone to New York shortly before entering Carmel to make a retreat with a Cenacle Sister. While there she visited St. Patrick's Cathedral. For the rest of the story I quote Fr. Dougherty:

"Afterward she walked around to the residence, ascended the big steps, rang the bell. When the formal attendant opened the door, Martha asked: 'Is this the rectory?' 'No, it is over there,' he answered in a stern businesslike tone. So Martha went across to the other residence, ascended the steps, rang the bell, asked: 'Is Archbishop Spellman in?' 'The Archbishop does not live here, but over there,' pointing to the residence from which she had come. Martha went back, found the courage to mount the big steps, to ring the bell. The same formal attendant opened the door. "I would like to see the Archbishop.' 'Have you an appointment?' he said in the same stern tone). 'You cannot see the Archbishop without an appointment and besides, his Excellency is not at home now.' 'May I speak with one of the fathers?' The attendant, disappointed, reluctantly admitted the visitor, summoning a priest. Martha

told

the priest that she was about to enter the Carmelites in Baltimore and that she had come to ask the Archbishop for his blessing. 'You sit over here. When the Archbishop comes in, he cannot help passing you. Just go up to him and tell him what you want. I am sure he will be glad to give you his blessing.' After a while, two clergymen entered. Martha addressed the taller one. He said that he was the secretary. The Archbishop listened graciously to her story, gave his blessing, and promised that whenever he came to Baltimore, he would visit Carmel. 'Did you come all the way from Baltimore to receive my blessing?' 'No, but I did come all the way from the other side of New York City.'



In recent years Sr. Ignatius loved to recall her early life on the farm in Monkton. The youngest of a large family, Martha knew she was her stern father's favorite child. She loved her big brothers even when they were not exactly careful with their little sister. She recalled how they once put her on a horse before she was big enough to ride. Of course, she promptly fell off.

This incident did not dampen her love for her brothers or for horses.

Martha attended a one-room school house. Sometimes the teacher would entrust her with the first graders. Martha enjoyed the little ones and claimed they always behaved better for her than for the teacher. Poetry was her favorite subject. Memorization was easy. She often told us how she volunteered to recite a long poem that had been assigned to the class ahead of her when they could not recall it. (I suspect she was teacher's pet.) This appreciation of poetry remained with her. After getting in bed at night she liked to read a little scripture and then some poems before going to sleep. The Hound of Heaven by Francis Thompson was one of her favorites.

She always had a main part in school plays. Her friends predicted she would go to Hollywood and become a star. Instead she moved to the city and became a beautician.

Although she had been baptized as an infant, Martha had no religious upbringing but God's grace was at work in leading her to convert to Catholicism. The Jesuits at St. Ignatius Church became influential in her spiritual development. I assume it was Fr. Joseph Dougherty who introduced her to Carmel but the call to follow Jesus into Carmel comes from the movements of the Holy Spirit deep within the heart.

If the move from the wide open vistas of her father's farm into the center city was a major change for the adventurous young woman, then entering the strictly cloistered monastery was like going to the moon. Everything she had known was left behind. Adjustments to her new life were undeniably difficult. Her father did not approve of her decision and never came to visit. I never heard her mention him until more recent years when dementia gradually broke down protective inner barriers and the past merged with the present.



Ignatius brought with her into Carmel a sociable personality, a fund of common sense and an appreciation of nature as God's work of art. The rolling hills around her childhood home in Monkton remained etched in her soul. She was an avid gardener, even in the tiny plots we had on Biddle Street. The expansion of space here in Dulaney Valley surrounded by woodland thrilled her and gave new scope to her gardening. Thoughts of weeding, planting, and transplanting persisted even as her strength failed. During a ride to the doctor or on a short walk outside she admired each tree and flower. It seemed to her that she had planted them all herself.

For many years Sr. Ignatius was sacristan. Her artistic flower arrangements enhanced our liturgies and received appreciative comments from the congregation. Although she chose to continue wearing the habit, she did not hesitate to tell the rest of us if she thought we looked nice or not, according to her sense of style and color. She maintained her perfect posture and never

failed to remind us to stand up straight.

It was Sr. Ignatius' firm belief that everyone should be treated equally no matter who they were. She lived this belief during the years she answered the door and phone. In greeting those who came or called with genuine acceptance, she made many friends who turned to her for help in their troubles or wanted her to share in their joys. She did not hesitate to give frank advice when she thought it was needed, and it was usually accepted. She would approach people in the chapel whether she knew them or not and give them a hug and a royal greeting, wanting them to feel welcome.



On a scrap of paper I found some notes Ignatius must have made for a community sharing. They provide us some insight into how she saw her life. I quote:

"When I was young, I guess in my teens, I found a prayer called 'A Universal Prayer' that I said each day because I felt I was helping in some way each and every person in the world by that one prayer. I still think prayer is the most powerful thing in the world and can do more good than a million feverish works, the most learned treatise on the Trinity, bring more peace to the world than a thousand marches or rallies, and can move and change the hearts of statesmen from thoughts of war to peace. I think a prayer for a President can do more to change his heart than writing a thousand letters or any amount of criticism."

As she once persisted in her request for Archbishop Spellman's blessing, Sr. Ignatius persevered in her quest for Jesus after following him into Carmel 70 years ago. Jesus will not be outdone in generosity as He welcomes her into eternity. To return now to the sermon given by Fr. Dougherty, SJ at the time of her Final Vows: His conclusion with the picture it paints is quite apropos.

"We wish Sister a long, fruitful life; a peaceful, holy death. When that day comes, I can see Sister standing at the door of heaven looking in, to where Our Lord is seated at the right hand of His Father. Our Lord arises and looks toward the door. The Saints and Angels turn to follow his gaze and hear him say: 'Come Spouse of Christ, receive the crown which the Lord hath prepared for thee for all eternity.'"



Some thoughts on Sr. Ignatius Loyola of God our Lord

by Sr. Barbara Jean LaRochester, ocd

"Ig," as she was lovingly called, loved a good laugh, but what I found most natural to her was that she could laugh at herself and in the process get me or anyone around laughing with her. Sister Ignatius had a great love for her family and spoke often about her childhood in Monkton, and her home in Our Lady's Manor. She had a great number of friends, and enjoyed talking with them on the phone, or visiting in the parlor. Each person held a special place in her heart and prayers.



When she celebrated her 45th jubilee I asked her what she wanted the choir to sing. She very politely told me, "Oh, I'm having the men's choir from Immaculate sing for me." And they did!

Ignatius loved ice cream and would always have room to eat some at any time of the day, but what she loved best, whether candy or cake, was chocolate. We all enjoyed the different chocolate treats she would receive from her various friends. She loved to dress up for Halloween and we never knew what she would wear or how she would appear. Four years ago, she dressed up like Sarah Palin and was able to mimic Palin's now famous words -"you betcha!"

Many of you have been here during the Christmas holidays when the chapel tree is adorned with lights and crocheted snowflakes of different sizes and shapes. What you may not know is that most of those snowflakes were made by Sr. Ignatius over the years, and are about 30+ years old. When she could no longer help put the hooks on the stars to hang, she would sit and watch, calling our attention to any bare spot. She loved seeing them put on the tree.

I believe Sr. Ignatius had a taste of heaven in her child-like joy - she saw the beauty in creation, and the various flowers she planted and tended. When walking outside she would point to the colors of the smallest flowers, and loved the color of leaves in the Fall. When I was with her in the dining room she would always comment on the tables we sat at for meals, as if she were seeing them for the first time. I would hear "Gosh, these tables are beautiful!"

Without question, Sr. Ignatius will be greatly missed, but her indomitable spirit remains with us.

Reflections on Sr. Ignatius by Sr. Mary Fleig, ocd

Sr. Ignatius, Ig, Iggy, Girlfriend, Old Girl, Aunt Martha. We each had a different relationship with her. Many of you knew her longer or more intimately than I. I don't have exciting stories or memories to share of my time living with Ignatius as sister; my love for her was not borne out of deep conversations, great intimacy or even a profound mutual friendship. Ignatius simply was an important presence in my life at Carmel.

"Presence" is the word that keeps jumping out to me as I look back over my relationship with Ignatius. Her actual being spoke volumes to me; she was a steady force, a solid, stabilizing spirit. I was calmed to walk into the living room and see her sitting in her green chair; I was consoled to catch a glimpse of her in the refectory refilling the napkin containers; it nurtured my soul to hear her laugh at the dinner table. Her presence anchored me when I felt adrift. It was a presence borne not out of extraordinary doings, but day-to-day fidelity to our life of prayer and community - a discipline of showing up, being there for Lauds and Mass, for Vespers, for meals, and for work. *Presence.*



Ignatius was fully and totally herself. She was purely authentic. She was real. She did not try to impress anyone or be somebody that she wasn't. At a particularly difficult time during my formation, she came up to me completely out of the blue and said, "*Just be yourself. Don't you worry about what anybody thinks about you.*"

Along with her authenticity was a great humility and willingness to serve; it was not some meek or pious quality. She had strong and forceful opinions, and could be very direct. One of her habits was to come to the kitchen to offer to help the nun who was cook for the day, which usually meant washing lots of dishes. So, picture her at age

97, wheeling in with her walker and washing dishes, but then she would say, "*Why do you use so many spoons, I've never seen anybody use so many spoons. Why do you need to use such a big bowl? Isn't there a smaller bowl? You're working me to death.*" She never lost her quick wit. And when you would thank her for her help, she would say, "*I didn't do it for you, I did it for God.*"

Ignatius possessed a child-like wonder. Everything was new and amazing. If you ever had the opportunity to ride in the car with her you know she would read aloud the street signs and speak a commentary on all she saw. I have since learned that this is a trait of many a cloistered nun, but with Ignatius it was done with such awe and true appreciation, as if what she was seeing was a personal gift just for her. She loved beauty.

I have no illusion that I was as important to Ignatius as she was to me. She really treated everyone the same (except for Patricia; she was very fond of Patricia, who was her anchor). But for everyone else, she cared about us all equally. In fact sometimes she didn't even know who I was. One day she was walking through the house calling, "Fran, Fran." Fran was right in front of her, and said, "*Here I am Ignatius, I'm Fran.*" Without missing a beat, Ig said, "No, the *other* one." And by the end of her days, everyone was "a cousin" or somehow related.

I had the great honor of being with Ignatius during her final hours. I think you generally go to sit by the side of a dying person to be present to *them*, to console *them*, but I have to confess I went for myself also; I needed those last moments of presence. And even then, though she said nothing, and was not even conscious, I found being with her consoling and meaningful. And now, though she is changed, we believe that she is not gone; the essence of Ignatius' presence will continue to anchor me, and remain in my heart and the heart of the community, forever.