

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Rosella Hess

(Sister M. Anthonita)

BORN: December 1914

ENTERED CONGREGATION: September 8, 1931

DIED: March 7, 2009

WE are here at this liturgy to celebrate the life of Sister Rosella Hess. One thing we know for sure is that she loved us—all of us. She radiated God's love for her, her love for God and her love for all of us in her God.

Rosella Louise Hess was the youngest of seven children born to Charles and Agnes (Gardner) Hess. She was born in December 1914 in Dayton, Ohio. Her six siblings—three brothers, Emil, Elmer and Charles and three sisters, Mary Magdalen, Helen and our own Sister Annette — have all preceded her in death. After having experienced the great Dayton flood in 1913, the Hess family moved to Piqua, Ohio. Rosella spoke fondly of her growing-up years and of her father's business, rewinding motors. She attributed her love of God to her parents and their love for her, especially her love of God as Father.

Rosella entered the Sisters of the Precious Blood on September 8, 1931. She had been educated by the Sisters of Mercy, but she chose a sisterhood with headquarters in Dayton to remain within traveling distance of the family. As a novice she received the name Sister Mary Anthonita. Rosella was in religious life for 77 years.

Rosella was educated at the Athenaeum of Ohio in Cincinnati where she received her bachelor's of science degree in Education. She went for higher studies to The Catholic University in Washington. There she received both her master's degree and a doctorate in American History. She often laughed at her doctoral thesis topic: The Effect of the Tobacco Industry in America's Rise as a World Power in International Commerce.

Rosella was missioned to Coldwater where she taught for two years in elementary school. It is hard to imagine

her teaching those small children. She taught many of us when we were aspirants, postulants or novices, as she spent 14 years teaching congregational members. In the early '60s Rosella taught at St Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana. She loved the teaching of and the interacting with those young men. Rosella was a rapid speaker; she could get a lot of history taught in a 45-minute class. The saying was, "Blink and you lose a decade; sneeze and you missed a century." The men at St Joe's would time how many words she could say without taking a breath.

We often wondered how the family gatherings went with Rosella, Annette and Helen all talking at the same time. Who was listening to whom?

In 1960 Rosella was elected to the general administration of the congregation as a councilor. Six years later she was elected as the major superior of the congregation. It was at this time (1966), that the title of the major superior was changed from mother general to president. Rosella, then Sister Anthonita, was elected as president of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. She often said she was so grateful for this change; she did not want Sister Annette calling her "Reverend Mother."

Following Vatican II, religious life went through many changes; [it was] from the cloister to the world. Those of us who experienced these changes credit Rosella with guiding us with her own sense of vision, her courage in making difficult decisions, her commitment to preserving the bond of charity among us and the spirit of prayer out of which she led. She often remarked as to how history would understand and interpret these times. She was aware that this period of time was real turning point and a new chapter of religious life in the Catholic Church.

Having served as president for six years,

Rosella opted out of leadership within the congregation and she joined the retreat team at Maria Stein Retreat House. There she served for 10 years, blessed years of enriching her own spiritual life and transmitting the fruits of that to the many retreatants she encountered.

In 1982 she returned to Salem Heights and served on the pastoral care team at the Maria Joseph Center. During this time she felt she was specially blessed in that she ministered to her sister Helen and felt there was a reconnection with her family members...

She retired from that position in 1987. She continued companioning the sisters of the house and shared her many spiritual and personal gifts with them.

Declining health necessitated her move to Emma Hall in 2001. She embraced this move as the next step on her way to her God. Throughout these years even as her mind slipped with dementia she had those moments of clarity, of recognition, of hitting the nail on the head with her remarks. Throughout it all she let us know that God was her love and she his.

It is difficult to describe Rosella: a multi-gifted lady who could make monumental decisions for the congregation but who had difficulty choosing the right buttons for her coat! She had few personal needs. She marveled at the wonders of science and she awed in her knee replacements. Oh, how she talked about those knee replacements! She had a simplicity and directness in her style. She was a woman of trust—in herself, her God and in others.

There are many stories to be told, and we can share them later. This we know: All of us who were influenced by this woman hold her in our heart. She loved us; we loved her.

—Sister Mary Garke