

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Gladys Marie Lowe

(Sister Mary Bernetta)

BORN: May 1914

ENTERED CONGREGATION: September 4, 1930

DIED: January 5, 2018

Thirteen years ago at age 90, in celebration of 75 years of religious life as a Sister of the Precious Blood, Sister Gladys Marie Lowe stated: "If I had my life to live over again, I wouldn't do anything different. I've been so blessed in my life; I've loved every place I have been and have been so happy." It is evident from reading through the many letters, certificates, and write-ups from newspapers and organizations that those whose lives Sister Gladys has touched would say that they have been blessed to have her in their lives. Everywhere she has been, she has been loved, and she has left a trail of happy people that stretches almost from coast to coast. Today we gather to celebrate a life given by a good and gracious God, a life lived in service to God's people, especially the little ones, and a life that has been called back into the embrace of the God whose face Sister Gladys has longed to see.

Gladys Marie Lowe made her way into this life in May 1914, the third of four children born to David Lowe and Mary Gordon Lowe. Gladys' young life was no easy road. When Gladys was 2 years old, her older brother David died at the age of 7. After the birth of her younger brother, John, and the death of her father, Gladys' young mother sought help with her children, taking Gladys and her siblings to live at St. Joseph Orphanage in East Dayton. The children would return home when her mother remarried. After giving birth to her fifth child, Gladys' half-sister, Frieda, Gladys' mother died from pneumonia. Gladys and her siblings were once again entrusted to the care of the Sisters of the Precious Blood serving at St. Joseph Orphanage.

Gladys was enamored by the lives the Sisters led. She was inspired by their kindness and care for the children and was drawn to the prayer they shared with each other. Gladys remembered "sneaking out of bed into the choir loft at the orphanage" to observe and listen to the Sisters praying and singing night

prayers. When asked by one of the Sisters what she wanted to do with her life, Gladys without a moment's hesitation answered: "I want to join the convent." So at age 16, she formally entered the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood on September 4, 1930. Gladys became known in religious life as Sister Mary Bernetta. She professed her perpetual vows on August 15, 1939.

Sister Gladys Marie engaged in 61 years of active ministry to God's people. She spent a total of five years working in the domestic arts at Immaculate Heart Seminary and St. Thomas Seminary. She ministered in the healing arts at Kneipp Springs in Rome City, Indiana, for 19 years, but Gladys' true love and calling was to God's little ones and the poor. Gladys returned to the orphanage to care for "her boys" for a total of 15 years.

Once Gladys made it to San Luis Rey, California, she stayed put for more than 20 years, making a lasting imprint on the hearts of the young women at San Luis Rey Academy and, later, the young children, parents and faculty of the Old Mission Montessori School. When Gladys was not moving about the grounds at San Luis Rey with a line of little people following her, she was busy collecting, sorting and giving away food, clothes and furniture to help those who came from near and far looking for help from St. Vincent de Paul, known by the locals as "Vinné Boutique." Gladys also organized a white elephant booth that helped provide funding for the Montessori School and the parish social concerns committee. People came year after year to shop from what has now come to be known as the "Sister Gladys Booth" in her honor. Before moving back to Dayton in 1994, the parish hosted a retirement potluck to honor Sister Gladys. Father Michel, then pastor at St. Luis Rey Mission Parish, in his invitation to the potluck wrote about Sister Gladys: "If this little bundle of dynamite ever lit your fuse, you'll want to be there to thank her and wish her well in her retirement!"

Arriving at Salem Heights, Gladys, as is the case with many Sisters, was not ready to embrace a life of rest and relaxation. She became an invaluable help to Sisters here at Salem, as well as Sisters in Emma Hall by accompanying them to doctor appointments. She had a real gift for this ministry in her ability to grasp what doctors were saying and knowing questions to ask. Gladys also lit a fire under the recycling effort that was already in place at Salem. She collected and sorted recyclables and lovingly reminded others to do their part. Gladys loved to play cards, especially "Nickels." Leaving Mass on Sunday morning, Gladys would head for her apartment to collect her "Nickels Bag" before making her way to the dining room for lunch followed by Nickels. Gladys was also a very skilled Bingo player, often calling out that magic word and collecting her prize of laundry soap, lotion or Kleenex, which she generously shared with others.

For her 75th Jubilee, Gladys wrote, "I try to live my life simply. At daily Mass I love hearing 'Take this ... my body; drink this ... my blood'; this brings me very close to Jesus and he stays with me throughout the day." More recently in a Christmas letter dictated by Sister Gladys in 2014 at age 100, she stated, "Prayer is the real focus of my days. I keep each of you in prayer every day. God is so good to me; I hardly know how to thank him enough." Before moving to Emma Hall in the spring of 2017, Sister Gladys would often be found sitting in the aviary, rosary in hand, quietly watching the birds or activities in the courtyard, especially if there happened to be a dog out there. Last Friday evening, with two of her Sisters sitting on either side of her, Sister Gladys laid in her bed, her CPPS cross resting on her chest and rosary in her hand, waiting as she had her entire life to see the face of her God. With the words "Gladys, we will stay here with you, but it is all right if you go with Jesus," she closed her eyes, relaxed and peacefully slipped into God's arms.

— Sister Patty Kremer