



Sister Theresa Rizzo

BORN: February 1937

ENTERED CONGREGATION: April 15, 1961

DIED: March 7, 2022

A former Sister, Brenda, who lived with Theresa Rizzo wrote that she “thoroughly enjoys surprising others in little ways — having donuts and hot chocolate on a cold winter night or fixing that piece of furniture everyone’s been tripping over for weeks. Theresa works best alone rather than as part of a group but likes to do things for the group.” For many years, Theresa served others by providing nourishment for their health and well-being, either in the form of altar bread or delicious meals.

Theresa Rizzo was born in February 1937. She was the daughter of first-generation Italian immigrants and was the oldest of four children born to Joseph and Nicoline Rizzo. Both of Theresa’s parents immigrated from Italy at a very young age and met and married in Cleveland. She recalled to one Sister that they were hard working but often struggled to learn the American system. Sister Theresa attributed her religious formation to the Italian Sisters in her parish. She remembers wearing out her Catechism so much and having to get a quarter from her mother to purchase a new one.

During her high school years, Theresa worked as a package wrapper at a department store and as a cashier at a grocery store. In her late teens or perhaps when she was 20, one of her girlfriend’s biological sisters was a Sister of Charity. From that connection, Theresa began to think about religious life. In time, she

would be referred to our Congregation.

In her 50th Jubilee article, Sister Theresa tells the story of her first visit to the convent. She said, “At first I did not tell my parents about my desire to enter the convent. Because I was working and had my own money, I was able to visit without my parents knowing about it. But I had to manage to make the trip to Dayton and back all in one day! I took a half hour plane trip to Dayton, then took a cab to Salem Heights. There Sister Edwardine showed me around and Sister Mary Nufer said I could enter in October. Then it was another cab ride to the airport and home again. When I got home, my Dad asked, ‘Where were you all day?’ I said, ‘I was out with my girlfriends.’”

Subsequently, on January 6, 1959, Theresa entered the Postulate of the Sisters of the Precious Blood at the age of 21 years. Upon investiture as a Novice she received the name of Sister Mary Nicoline, honoring her mother and her Italian heritage. On reflecting about why Theresa wanted to be a Sister, she said that adoration and prayer were the two things which drew her to religious life.

Theresa professed Temporary Vows on August 15, 1961, and Final Vows on August 15, 1964. Upon First Profession, she began her life of service to the community in the Altar Bread department at the Motherhouse in Dayton and food service in various locations such as Maria Stein, St. Charles in Carthage, and Fatima Hall in Dayton. Upon taking up residence at Salem Heights, hav-

ing taken a geriatric nursing assistant course, Theresa performed various services as a geriatric assistant to the Sisters. Referring to her time at Salem Heights, Theresa said, “I really enjoy my present ministry. I can serve on a person-to-person basis.” At Salem, her most recent ministry was as a volunteer driver and companion to Sisters when making their appointments.

When Sister Theresa was in residence at Salem Heights, Sister Mary Garke was the central regional coordinator. Mary recalls that several Sisters in the Congregation who had not completed their high school education were offered the opportunity to get their GED’s or take more classes to receive their high school diplomas. Not all chose to do so. However, Sister Theresa did, and she chose the harder route of taking the additional classes, some at night, to receive her high school diploma. Later, Theresa also chose to learn how to drive which enhanced her ability to care for our Sisters by providing transport. Mary also recalls that Theresa was very cognizant if a Sister was in need of assistance and would consistently alert her of this need. This was an example of doing a little thing for someone and not expecting recognition.

Therefore, Theresa, we recognize you now for the little things you did for others. We know that you are now, still, doing little things for others in complete freedom from physical limitations. May you rest in God’s eternal peace! Amen

— Sister Marla Gipson