

## Memories ... Gratitude ... Legacy

The month of **November** evokes memories of those who have died – those we have loved, those with whom we have worked and those who have left us a legacy which enables and inspires our lives today.

These memories can bring us a quiet joy, can still be quite raw or can be an inspiration and guide to us in our lives.

**November** is a precious month and as we encounter it, especially on the major feasts of *All Saints* and *All Souls*, we are encouraged to pray for those who have gone before us - family and friends, and those who have touched our lives. We are also called to pray for those who may have no one to pray for them. In this way we are joined to others in the Christian family and reminded that we are a wide community united in our belief in Jesus and his Resurrection.

We understand this as the *Communion of Saints* – the mystical Body of Christ. *Together the living form with the dead, one community of memory and hope, a holy people touched with the fire of the Spirit, summoned to go forth as companions bringing the face of divine compassion into everyday life.* (Elizabeth A. Johnson)



As we gather let us **remember** those who are precious to us ...

*Let us name them and perhaps light a candle...*

Let us reflect...

*For what are we **grateful** in their lives?*

*What has been their **legacy** to us?*

Catherine reminds us of:

... **Gratitude of the Heart** ...

*'The most acceptable return a benefactor can receive is a countenance testifying the gratitude of the heart'*

... Her **Legacy of Charity** ...

*'My legacy to the Institute is charity: if you preserve the peace and union which has never been violated among us, you will feel, even in this world, a happiness that will surprise you and be to you a foretaste of the bliss prepared for every one of you in heaven'*



**Gospel Reflection: All Saints Day**

**The Beatitudes – Matthew 5: 3-11 (NRSV)**

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account".*

As we journey through November let us not underestimate the **Legacy** of our lives for others as we strive to live the **Beatitudes**. Others make meaning of our lives from the ways in which we live each day (our witness) – God comes to us disguised as our lives (Rohr) and we respond by *'doing ordinary things extraordinarily well'*. (Catherine McAuley)

This daily legacy is reflected beautifully in the attached tribute by **Jim Quillinan** to the recently deceased **Sr Mary Duffy RSM** whom I also had the privilege of knowing. (*overleaf*).

# Along the track

## Life Has Changed

We meet many people throughout our lives but not many fall into the category of the Most Unforgettable Character. Mary Duffy certainly did. She had a great influence on the lives of so many of her students and fellow teachers, including me. She had an extraordinary ability to remember the names of both students and teachers even decades after she had left that school, not just names but what they were doing and all sorts of details about their lives. It was born from a great love of people, her most endearing quality. That was also born from a deep faith in the goodness of people and the potential that God had placed within them. She saw her role as fanning that flame for as long as she could, even after the school door closed or when others may have given up on them.

Mary Duffy joined the Sisters of Mercy in 1955. I guess it would surprise many now to hear that Mary was one of the first religious to be permitted to undertake tertiary studies (Melbourne University). She sometimes talked about what it was like to be the sole person in a religious habit on that campus. A ministry in education followed, as teacher and Principal in several Mercy Secondary schools in Melbourne and country Victoria. And it was a 'ministry' for Mary – she had a keen understanding of the role of Catholic education in the changing world and changing Church and that was no easy task working in some communities which were very resistant to change, including the bishop. Vatican II brought with it a new vision and vitality and Mary was very much a part of that. I still remember many of the younger priests beating a path to her door for spiritual direction and finding ways to persevere and implant that vision in a climate resistant to change. But she persevered with sensitivity and tenacity in circumstances which would have discouraged others.

She completed Theology studies at Regis College, Toronto, and it was no surprise to see that she was then appointed to create staff formation and development programs. She was very good at it because she had a rich understanding of the issues facing those in education and could bring her own authentic experience and vision to their lives. She could adapt to any audience, students or teachers, clergy and adult faith groups. She brought people along with her, even those who were initially sceptical, indifferent or challenging! Once again it was no surprise that she was asked back again and again to work with so many communities.

As principal, you worked with Mary not for her. She sought out your ideas and was a great source of encouragement and collaboration. I worked with her in a big school with well over a thousand students on two campuses, with around a hundred and eighty staff. On the day I started there, Mary had gathered the staff for a welcome and asked all the new staff members to stand. There were twenty-eight of us. She introduced each one of us and gave details about our teaching history, our families and what we would be teaching that year. She did not have a note in her hand! She prided herself that, by Easter each year, she could go out into the yard and call every student by their Christian name. Can you imagine how the students felt to be called by name by the principal! But ten, twenty years later she still remembered them, even in a chance encounter.

Mary was a woman who loved life, finding joy and goodness in large and small ways. She loved the arts, particularly classical music, but she was just as happy sitting with little children to hear their stories and listen to their songs. I heard her say more than once to the Year 12s on their last day at school that the best part of life is not just surviving but thriving. Go out and live with passion and compassion, with generosity and kindness, not taking anyone or anything for granted. But never forget humour, that makes life worthwhile.

In these last days she waited patiently for death to arrive. Before she went into hospital, she rang to say farewell. Even then she wanted to talk not about how she was but about us, what we were doing and all about our children and grandchildren. But that was Mary. When the final hours came, she still had one of the nuns send out messages until she began slipping away with eyes wide open to the joy awaiting her after a life of faith, lived out each day no matter what came, a life of love, compassion and loyalty. She was a great companion.

In these days when the news can be so depressing, it is worth sharing the story of one who made such a positive difference. We will miss her but never forget her.

Regards  
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