



Eulogy Sister Marilyn Thomas, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, June 7, 2019

Good morning and welcome to the celebration of life of our Sister Mary Marilyn Thomas.

Florence Adele Thomas was born on April 11, 1916, to Albert and Florence Mullane Thomas of Davenport, Iowa. She was the eldest of four children and was followed by siblings June, Dorothy Mae, and Albert Jr. When Florence was in fifth grade, she began attending the newly opened St. Paul Elementary School, where she was introduced to the BVMs, and later went on to graduate from Immaculate Conception Academy.

Florence was drawn to religious life and wanted to enter the congregation after graduation, but her non-Catholic father, who raised his children Catholic and paid for their Catholic education, was adamantly opposed to such a direction. So instead, Florence enrolled at the Women's Division at St. Ambrose College where she majored in history and minored in French and English. "I studied music," Florence wrote, "but never as part of my major, although I played all during . . . high school and college. . . I play by ear; I played for a dancing studio during my college days especially because it helped me buy books . . . My father played the violin and was very strict when I accompanied him."

After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree, Florence went to business school and then found employment at the Bettendorf Company where she remained for five years. By that time, her father and her sister June, who was a diabetic, had both died and Florence no longer thought about entering the religious life, although she remained involved with her parish and the BVMs. One day her pastor told her that she might as well be at Mount Carmel because she could be doing at Mount Carmel what she was doing in Davenport. After praying about it for several months, Florence sent her letter of application to Mother Josita in which she expressed her desire to "dedicate my life to the service of God if I am found worthy of such." She entered the congregation on February 2, 1945, and received the name Marilyn upon her profession on August 15, 1945. She professed first vows on August 15, 1947, and lived 74 years as a BVM.

Marilyn taught music at Immaculate Conception Academy in Davenport for eleven years. She started teaching piano, organ, and glee club and accompanying for the choral teacher. She ended up teaching French, English, business math, shorthand, typing, and bookkeeping prompting Marilyn to comment, "I taught almost everything in high school." In 1958, Marilyn began her 60 years of ministry at Mount Carmel where she graciously served in a variety of positions. During her first year, she taught French and music to the novices while serving as secretary for both Helen (Consolatrice) Wright and Roberta Kuhn. Later she served as secretary to the president at Clarke University. In 1969, Marilyn began providing secretarial and financial services at Marian Hall, duties which gradually expanded to the role of treasurer for the entire Mount Carmel Complex. On the occasion of her Golden Jubilee, the Office of the Treasurer honored Marilyn with a breakfast. She was presented with a "basket of memories" filled with notes, cards, songs and tapes from coworkers, former presidents, officers, and even the tellers from American Trust and Savings Bank.

During this time, Marilyn also taught at Visitation Academy for three years, all the while continuing to work on accounts and assigning lectors for the Motherhouse liturgy. Throughout the years, however, most of us remember her for her gift of music and organist for Mount Carmel. She thrived on playing liturgical music as well as music for Benediction, novenas, and Marian devotions. She was more than just a pianist or organist, she was an accompanist, a talent that not every pianist or organist possesses. In her autobiography, she commented, "I have a gift for accompaniment, and I know that. It's very hard to teach that, I've tried and it's very difficult."

In recounting her many diverse ministries at Mount Carmel in the welcome for her 100 birthday liturgy, it was noted "no matter the task, no matter whether she liked the role or not, she worked at it until she became a 'fit instrument'—the very definition of faithfulness."

And faithful she was! Marilyn's devotion to Catholic faith in its sacraments, practices (rules), devotions, and teachings was outstanding and truly faithful. Her principal devotion was to Eucharist, Jesus present, at Mass and Benediction. She also was devoted to Holy Hours, Rosary, Office, private prayer, and not to be forgotten, car prayers! She was devoted to Mary and Joseph, and kept a painting of the Holy Family showing Joseph tending to the baby and Mary resting in the background. She was completely faithful to all of these for as long as she could be.

For Marilyn, the changes in the Mass were accepted. Even though she missed the older rituals and Latin hymns and prayers, the advantages of having the celebrant facing the congregation and having English or the peoples' language used were obvious to her.

She kept a Community Prayer Book and used it at times. It was her daily practice to pray for all of the students she had ever taught, some by name. One such student wrote, "thanks to you for such a firm foundation in life, in values, in my faith!

Through health issues, she was quiet, accepting assistance, but determined to recover, and return to serving wherever she was needed at the time, always with common sense, always as a woman of faith, and always trusting in "what God wants." On Wednesday, our loving God returned to take Marilyn home. We recall all the gifts God lavished on her, that in turn she has shared so generously with us. We give thanks that for her the future has now been revealed; her faithfulness has led her to see God as he really is. Marilyn, may you accompany the songs of the heavenly host, making joyful music for your God forever! (I John 3:1-2).