



Eulogy of Sister Betty (Florence Therese) Bowen, BVM

Caritas Studio, Nov. 19, 2020

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Betty Bowen.

Mary Elizabeth Bowen, the first child of Ralph and Florence Pfeifer Bowen, entered this world on July 31, 1940, in Fort Collins, Colo. She was followed by her brother Jim and her sister Terri. Betty's father, who was born in Indiana, was employed as a dairy worker while her mother, a Colorado native, cared for the children and their home.

Betty loved growing up in the shadows of the Rocky Mountains. She attended St. Joseph grade school through 9th grade and Fort Collins public high school for 10th grade before transferring to Mount St. Gertrude Academy in Boulder, Colo., where she met the BVMs.

During her early teen years Betty enjoyed square dancing and the colorful dresses the dancers wore. While in high school, Betty worked in a grocery store, taught catechism, and volunteered at a hospital as part of her service component as a Girl Scout.

Betty entered the congregation on Aug. 2, 1958, and received the name Florence Therese upon her reception on Feb. 3, 1959. She professed first vows on Feb. 2, 1961, and lived 62 years as a BVM.

Betty's avocation was health care. After her profession, she ministered as a nurse aide at Marian Hall. In 1965, she completed training as a licensed practical nurse (LPN) at St. Joseph Hospital in St. Paul, Minn., and returned to Marian Hall to serve as a floor supervisor and technician. Betty also worked as an LPN at Mercy Hospital in Dubuque and later in Chicago.

Other ministries included working as a counselor at the New Connection Center, a halfway house for adolescents, in St. Paul, at Homemakers Upjohn in Skokie, Ill., and St. Francis Hospital in Evanston, Ill. In 1986, Betty completed a bachelor of science nursing degree through the St. Francis Hospital nursing program and worked there as a registered nurse (RN) in the hospital nursery and skilled care units. She also served as an RN at Wright Hall.

In 2003 Betty joined the ministerial staff at St. Mary's parish in Evanston, Ill. As a pastoral associate, she spent a good portion of her time connecting with parishioners who were homebound, hospitalized, or recuperating at rehabilitation centers. She called and visited the hospitalized and then followed up with home visits after their release. Every visit provided an opportunity to bring Communion and, as an extra thoughtful touch, a church bulletin to keep them connected with their parish. She even informed relatives when she noticed something amiss or contacted a social worker when necessary. In addition, she served on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) team.

While ministering at St. Mary's, Betty led Communion services at a nearby nursing pavilion and assisted at Masses and anointing of the sick services at three other care facilities. Caring was always at the heart of a ministry that she thoroughly enjoyed.

Betty also enjoyed traveling. Her journeys included a trip to Germany with side trips to Sweden, Austria, and France, a Caribbean cruise, and a 2007 trip to Ireland with other BVM sisters. In later years, she liked doing crossword and word search puzzles and, more recently, playing Words With Friends on a cellphone or tablet with her BVM friend, Pat Nooney.

Betty loved rainbows, butterflies, and animals, especially cats. After Pat and Betty adopted their first two cats in 1991, they started an animal blessing held every October at St. Mary's in Chicago. Two more cats followed in 2009. It was very difficult for Betty to leave them when she moved to Mount Carmel in 2017 and she asked about them every day. If you wanted to see a smile and a sparkle in her eye, just ask her about her cats. She could tell fascinating stories.

Betty was a loving, generous and caring person. Both her family and the BVM community meant the world to her. Following the words of St. Paul, she "put on, as God's chosen [one], holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Col. 3:12)."

She brought joy, comfort and peace to so many suffering and lonely people, always with a profound belief that the Spirit directed her life. As we celebrate Betty and her life of service, we rejoice in Jesus' promise that "[her] reward will be great in heaven (Mt. 5:12)."