



Eulogy of Sister Anita (Felicity) Montavon, BVM

Caritas Studio, Dec. 10, 2020

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Anita Montavon.

Anita Claire Montavon and her older twin sister Miriam “Mimi” were born on Jan. 16, 1938, in DeKalb, Ill. They were the first two children of eight, five girls and three boys, born to Paul and Marie (Pitzen) Montavon. Her father of French ancestry was a grain and dairy farmer and, in Anita’s own words, “the closest thing to God.” Her mother of German ancestry was the disciplinarian in the family who only later in life shared with Anita how she struggled to raise eight children. The Montavons experienced deep sadness when Anita’s two youngest brothers died in separate farm accidents: Paul Thomas in 1952 at the age of 3, and Leonard in 1966 at the age of 15. Her eldest brother Jerry died of cancer in 1992.

The entire Montavon family loved music. Both parents sang in their church choir and all the children took music lessons. Anita and Mimi played duets and were both altos in choir, as well as being on the debate team and in 4-H. Anita loved classical music like Mozart, Brahms, Mendelssohn, but also enjoyed Gershwin. As a novice, she was thrilled to be selected as an alto for Schola.

Anita’s parents emphasized strong family values and the importance of work, religion, and education. Many of Anita’s siblings pursued the traditional caring professions of nursing and teaching. After attending Catholic grade school and two years of public high school in DeKalb, Anita transferred to and then graduated from Our Lady of the Angels Academy in Clinton, Iowa.

Numerous vocations to religious life and the priesthood can be found on both sides of Anita’s family. When Anita entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1956, she was following in the footsteps of seven family members: her aunts: Sisters Mary Alice, Mary James Paul, and Mary St. James Montavon; and cousins: Sisters Mary Placidus and Mary Henry Joseph Montavon, and Sisters Miriam and Joan George. “It was not easy to have three BVM aunts in the community,” Anita shared. “They were *perfect* . . . and a bit prim.” Anita received the name Felicity upon her reception on March 19, 1957, professed her first vows on Feb. 3, 1959, and lived 64 years as a BVM.

Anita taught in elementary schools for 16 years. Her first mission was to Immaculate Conception in Butte, Mont. “Pop thought I was being ‘put in exile’ by the BVM community,” she recalled. “Butte was unique. There was a closeness among the sisters.” Missions at St. Anthony in Missoula, Mont.; Sacred Heart in Boulder, Colo.; St. John in Seattle; St. Anne in East Moline, Ill.; and St. Joseph in Rock Island, Ill., followed. Anita considered her self very fortunate that her early missions combined her love for rural settings and service to her community and church.

Anita ministered as the religious education coordinator at St. Matthew Parish in Gillette, Wyo., and as pastoral minister at Ravenswood Hospital in Chicago, which was her favorite mission. She served as librarian at Our Lady of Lourdes School in Chicago and as a library associate at the Chicago Public Library and the River Forest Public Library. The latter offered the opportunity to read to the blind and tutor English in their adult literacy program. Anita also worked with BVM sisters Letty Close and Mary Gene Kinney as receptionist and office manager for Education and Intervention/ICAP. Working as a receptionist and an office manager at St. Eulalia School in Maywood, Ill., volunteering at the Misericordia Home and serving as a field advocate for the Archdiocese of

Chicago marriage tribunal rounded out her Chicago area ministries. She retired to Wright Hall in 2006 and moved to Mount Carmel in 2008.

Anita loved to read, as did the entire Montavon family. It was an activity strongly encouraged by her father, who had a master's degree in English, and her aunt Sister Mary James Paul, who was a librarian. Reading was such a popular pastime while growing up that the threat of "No more books" usually put a quick end to unruly behavior. However, if the punishment was doled out, the Montavon children had a plan: They hid their library books in the peonies!

Anita enjoyed reading multiple genres including fiction, New York Times best sellers, biographies, social history, and even mysteries. She relished a good conversation about the happenings in the community and in the world and had a genuine interest in the lives of others.

Movies were another favorite pastime. Anita had the opportunity to attend a Bergman film festival and greatly enjoyed it. She even frequented offbeat theaters while living in Chicago. Traveling was another favorite activity. She described both a train trip through the Copper Canyon in Mexico and a tour through Alaska's Inside Passage as exhilarating. She was particularly touched by the natives in both regions. Anita was also a self-proclaimed chocoholic.

Anita suffered severe pain and loss of motor ability for a long time before being diagnosed with a disorder of the nervous system. Yet, through it all, she remained gracious and grateful. It was always a pleasure to spend time with her. She found her strength in the words of Julian of Norwich, "All shall be well and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

Anita's faith was rooted in the enduring hope and deep trust reflected in the Scripture for her memorial service: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us" (Romans 8:18). "I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3:8).

Anita shared that through all her experiences, both the good and the difficult, "I have come to know God a little better and love His presence in this world." We celebrate the earthly life of our dear Sister Anita and rejoice that she now lives forever in the glorious presence of God.