



Eulogy of Sister Virginia (Justinian) McCaffrey, BVM

Caritas Studio, Dec. 18, 2020

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Virginia McCaffrey.

Virginia Ann McCaffrey was born on Feb. 11, 1925 in Seneca, Kan., to Ralph and Mary E. (Baker) McCaffrey. She was later joined by her brother, Keith. Her father was a salesman who, before Virginia graduated high school, moved his family from Seneca, Kan., to Omaha, Neb.; St. Paul, Minn.; Kansas City, Mo.; and Fort Smith, Ark.

At the time of her diamond jubilee, Virginia shared, "As I look back over my life and my family's 'Depression moving' from job to job that necessitated my moving from school to school, I am so grateful that it was my school days that eventually brought me into contact with the Sisters of Charity, BVM for my freshman and sophomore years in high school [at St. Vincent Academy in Kansas City, Mo]. Though I had also been taught by members of three other religious communities, it was the BVMs who inspired me to enter their religious community."

Virginia was one of the BVMs interviewed by Sister Kathryn (Kitty) Lawlor for her book *From There to Here*. The following excerpt describes the Mount Carmel arrival of the Set of 1942.

The twenty-seven young women who traveled to Mount Carmel on September 8, 1942, carried with them ration books for sugar and meat, which were required even for those entering the convent. They had learned to bring their ration stamps wherever they went because the austerities caused by World War II followed those of the Great Depression. The hardships they had endured during their youth had caused them to mature beyond their years. (Lawlor 12)

Virginia received the name Justinian upon her reception on March 19, 1943, and professed first vows on March 19, 1945. She lived 78 years as a BVM and was most grateful to be part of a community "whose life is active in its concern for so many social issues and where I am able to participate in so many ways."

She completed a bachelor's degree in 1950 and a master's degree in 1962, both in education and English and both from Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles.

Virginia was an elementary school teacher for 27 years with missions at St. Mary's in Riverside, Iowa; St. Vincent in Chicago; St. Anne in Santa Ana, Calif.; St. Robert Bellarmine in Burbank, Calif.; and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Tempe, Ariz. She also served as principal at St. Charles Borromeo in Oklahoma City, Okla., and was delegated with the closing of that mission. Even as a young teacher, Virginia ran a relaxed but controlled classroom where learning was fun and fulfilling. She treated every student with respect, kindness, and affection. Her students were charmed by her gentle manner and loved her dearly.

Virginia ministered as a visitor to the elderly of St. Anne parish in Santa Ana, Calif. She served as the director of religious education at St. Matthias parish in Huntington Park, Calif., then the largest Catholic parish in Los Angeles. She later worked as an office manager for the parish.

Virginia moved to the Mount Carmel in 1990 to spend a year of service at the Motherhouse and Marian Hall. She assisted with bringing the gift cart to the sisters' rooms. "Being in this surroundings was a great opportunity to return to my BVM roots," she commented.

In 1991, Virginia joined Sisters Joan Condon, Paulino Crabb, St. Eleanor Flynn, Margaret Mollan, and Mary Jeanne Stopper to form an intentional community at St. Philip's convent in Pasadena, Calif. Sister Mary Jean Ferry joined them a few years later. Together they envisioned all aspects of daily life together. During this time, Virginia worked for the parish in the school office and library. She loved to gaze at the San Gabriel Mountains located just north of Pasadena. One of her most treasured possessions was a photo that captured their beauty. Her return to California lasted 14 years until she moved to Mount Carmel.

Almost immediately after arriving in Dubuque, Virginia joined the Prayer Pal program at Clarke University. By pairing a resident assistant with a sister, Clarke hoped to connect students with Clarke's BVM heritage. Virginia was paired with Ashley. The two remained close for 15 years until Virginia's death. "I never imagined that I'd continue to stay in touch over the years," Ashley commented, "or that she'd ever meet my daughter! I'd often run into her as I was at Mount Carmel visiting my great aunt [Sister Anita Therese Hayes]. We would catch up, laugh, and always end our visit with a hug. It's been a blessing to stay in touch with Sister Virginia and continue our prayers for each other."

Virginia enjoyed handicrafts and needlework, especially counted cross stitch, reading, crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, and bowling courtesy of the Nintendo Wii. She was adept on a computer and really had fun experimenting.

She *loved* to play cards and played whenever possible. Her poker game was the highlight of her week. Back in Pasadena, she'd play for pennies, but at Mount Carmel she upped the ante to nickels. Virginia enjoyed both collegiate and professional sports. She admired the University of Notre Dame football program and even owned a blanket with the university's insignia. As a basketball fan, she cheered for the LA Lakers. She also had a great sense of humor and enjoyed both telling and hearing a good joke. She was easygoing, blended in everywhere she went, and certainly knew how to relax well.

Virginia was devoted to her friends and was always ready to offer support. She had a great affection for her brother Keith, who died last year, as well as for her sister-in-law Dorothy and their five sons. She spoke often of her family as a happy group.

St. Paul wrote, "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks" (Thessalonians 5:16-18). Virginia was fundamentally a happy, playful, joyful, and grateful person. The smile that never left her face reflected her inner spirit. She was gentle, genuine and loving to the core. She was dearly loved and will be deeply missed. Yet we rejoice for Jesus has taken her home to the place prepared for her. Now her joy is complete. (John 14:2 & 15:11).