



Eulogy of Sister Jacquelyn Rice, BVM (Vianney)
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Jan. 14, 2022

Good morning. It is good for us to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Jacquelyn Rice.

Jacquelyn Ann Rice was born on April 29, 1933, in St. Louis. She was the fifth and youngest daughter of Edward and Mary Ellen (Dalton) Rice. She joined sisters Rosemary, Kathryn, Patricia, and Claire, all of whom preceded her in death.

Jackie completed her elementary education in St. Louis at St. Mark and St. Agnes schools and then attended St. Frances Xavier High School where she met the BVMs. She worked both the summer before and after her senior year to save money to enter the convent. She even passed on the opportunity to be a bridesmaid for the first wedding in the family to save money.

Jackie entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1951, and received the name Vianney upon her reception on March 19, 1952. She professed first vows on March 19, 1954, and celebrated her diamond jubilee last September. "The entire day was amazing, filled with the love of our BVM Community and Associates," she shared. "I thank God for 70 wonderful years as a BVM."

After her profession, Jackie completed the school year teaching at St. Raphael in Dubuque, Iowa. She was subsequently missioned at St. Dorothy and Holy Trinity in Chicago; St. Eulalia in Maywood, Ill., and St. Edmund in Oak Park, Ill. On her admissions form, she wrote, "I have long desired to teach little children about God and His kingdom." This is precisely what she did during her 25 years ministering as an elementary teacher. As a concerned and creative teacher, she listened to her students' needs and responded with personalized lessons long before this became standard practice. She did not limit her educational ministry to within the four walls of her classroom, but extended it to parents, to other teachers, and even to the priests. In time, the whole parish became Jackie's classroom.

Jackie completed a bachelor's degree in history in 1967 and a master's degree in religious studies in 1980, both from Mundelein College in Chicago, and a certification program in theology in 1990 at the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Mass. Her educational pursuits related to her changes in ministry.

For ten years Jackie served St. Clement Parish in Chicago, first as the director of religious education and then as pastoral associate. She valued parish life and realized that the faith experience of most Catholics is lived out within the parish structure. She would discern a need and was never afraid to respond in love. She offered a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, and words of encouragement and support.

In 1987, while still at St. Clement, Jackie received the Father Jim Young C.S.P. Phoenix Award in recognition for her "outstanding pastoral leadership and compassionate understanding in the ministry for separated, divorced and remarried Catholics." The parish loved her and she them. "It's hard to leave, but I'm moving on with really good feelings," she wrote upon her departure in 1990. "The experience of Church here comes the closest to what I believe Church should be with everyone working together. The people here have strengthened my faith."

After a sabbatical, Jackie accepted the position of pastoral associate at St. Ita Parish in Chicago. She later worked as office manager for legal services in the Archdiocese of Chicago. She also served the congregation as a regional representative from 1994 to 2002.

No matter where she ministered, Jackie's passion for social justice was evident. Sister Margaret Dolan beautifully describes this passion in her reflection for Jackie's silver jubilee celebration. "[Jackie was] a compassionate woman whose heart ached for the poor and powerless; a strong woman who was fearless in speaking out against injustice; [and] an honest woman who was willing to put her body where her mouth was. . . She was willing to suffer the pains of initiating change always with respect for and acceptance of those who were not ready. . . Her intelligent and persevering approach to the pursuit of justice was impressive."

The Syro-Phoenician woman in today's Gospel sought healing for her daughter who was plagued by unclean spirit – and she wasn't taking "No" for an answer. This Greek woman could have served as Jackie's role model. Jackie freely challenged what she didn't agree with, spoke with moral clarity, and argued her point cogently. She was a wise, well-informed woman who valiantly spoke on behalf of justice and called out injustice.

Social justice remained Jackie's focus even in retirement. She volunteered as an ESL teacher at the Westside Employment Education Center (WEEC) and served on its corporate board for 11 years until it closed in 2014. She also served on the board for Project IRENE (Illinois Religious Engaged in Non-violent Endeavors). She volunteered with the Southwest Chicago PADS, a homeless shelter that helps its clients find permanent housing. She was a member of the BVM Hunger Fund Committee that assists projects outside the United States that work for systemic change, alleviate hunger, or provide clean water security, especially where women and children benefit.

Jackie was a beautiful and generous person faithful to her convictions, her commitments and her friendships. She was a woman whose Christianity and mature sense of community have been inspirational. She was an ardent feminist and strove for equity and inclusivity, especially within BVM circles. Sensitive to the divisions in status between BVMs and associates, those within the congregation, and the church, she consistently and persistently sought to broaden the tent, widen the circle, and make room at the table.

Sister Margaret wrote, "Jackie [understood] that to live a full Christian life, we must be pilgrims – growing, searching, discovering Christ, living out the questions, expecting few answers." A banner in Jackie's room conveys a similar message: "Life is a mystery to be lived; not a problem to be solved." Jackie lived comfortably and engaged eagerly with ambiguity before God, who was for her, above all, Mystery. We can only imagine the joy she now knows fully enveloped by Holy Mystery!