



Eulogy of Sister Catherine Dominick, BVM (Michael Ann)

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, June 16, 2022

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Catherine Dominick.

Catherine Eileen Dominick was born in Chicago on Feb. 28, 1929, to Thomas and Mary (Houlihan) Dominick. Her father sold “nickel and dime” insurance policies making weekly visits to the policy holders to collect the premiums. Her mother organized the home life—preparing the meals and then cleaning up while supervising the children as they did their homework at the dining table.

Catherine was the fifth of eight children. All eight attended Our Lady of the Angels Grade School at the same time. Her eldest brother John, better known as Jack, was charged with keeping the other seven in line during their walk to and from school. Catherine was especially close to her sister Bernadette who often helped her with difficult homework. Bernadette’s death from polio at the age of twenty-seven was especially hard for hit Catherine. “In those days polio was not understood,” she commented. “They feared preparing her for burial . . . [and] I was not allowed to see her.” The youngest sibling, Joan, was born on Christmas Day. Catherine shared, “I thought of her as my own Christmas present. I wanted to do everything for her.”

During her junior year at Cathedral High School, Catherine worked as a salesclerk at a discount department store. She shared, “I thought, ‘I don’t want to be a salesperson. I do know what I want to be! A nun!’ I returned from work and asked Mother if she would mind if I entered the BVMs. She was thrilled. She thought it would be a family blessing.” This reaction was not surprising since her mother’s sister was Sister Mary Illuminata Houlihan.

Catherine entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1948, and received the name Michael Ann upon her reception on March 19, 1949. She professed her first vows on March 19, 1951, and lived 73 years as a BVM. During her Diamond Jubilee interview, she stated “I’m a Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and I am very proud of the fact the Lord has chosen me to do this job.”

Catherine taught in the primary grades at Our Lady of the Angels Academy in Clinton, Iowa; Holy Cross in Chicago; Immaculate Conception in Clarksdale, Miss.; and Sacred Heart in Maquoketa, Iowa. She served as the convent cook at St. Patrick in Cedar Falls, Iowa, and at St. Anne in East Moline, Ill.

Catherine enjoyed sharing stories from her different missions. One of her favorites took place at Holy Cross in Chicago. In preparing Christmas, “Pat [Potok] went out to every butcher to get white feathers to make decorative wreaths for the Christmas holidays.” Catherine recounted, “we collected these feathers, put them in a pillowcase and put them through the washer. Afterwards, we put them on a bed in one of the big rooms. Well, someone mistakenly opened a window and all the feathers ended up all over the floor. We *all* had to pick them up.”

In 1976, Catherine moved to Wright Hall in Chicago. She did clerical work for Montgomery Ward, Northwestern National Casualty and, eventually the American Dental Society. This last job led to a staff position with the Joint Commission on Health Care Organizations. Besides general office duties, she worked on special projects and coordinated packaging and filing. Catherine claimed that this was her favorite mission; she remained there for 20 years.

Catherine retired in 1999 and moved to Mount Carmel in 2003. She called the activities at Mount Carmel “the sum and substance of this marvelous place” and participated as fully as possible. She joined the Knit Wits, a group of BVMs who knit or crochet items for various worthy causes. One of her favorite projects was creating warm scarves and hats from infant to adult sizes for the homeless and poor in Dubuque, Chicago, and other communities where BVMs are missioned. “It’s not charity. It’s love,” commented Catherine. “I know in my heart that some person is going to be able to keep warm during the winter . . . That gives me so much joy.” She also joined Joanne Schneider and Helen Thompson, who knitted green hats for a group of young people who were advocating to secure the legal right to a safe climate.

Last year, Knit Wits made hats and prayer shawls for Meals on Wheels clients in New York. In her Christmas letter, she commented, “I believe that I have completed 61 hats this year.” She also made pillows for Hospice of Dubuque patients. Catherine found enjoyment in other ways as well. She delighted in her stuffed animals. Her three stuffed dogs were named Bruno, Len, and Carrie Ann after the panelist judges on “Dancing with the Stars,” one of her favorite TV shows.

The stained-glass windows created during the 2017 BVM summer gathering were very special to Catherine. “Every time I [see them], I have a greater understanding of how one person can touch another person . . . I have been deeply touched by this experience. It has changed my whole perspective. It was an intense, spiritual reunion . . . It was phenomenal!”

One evening when Kate Hendel and Catherine were visiting, Catherine excused Kate saying she needed to get to supper early as it was poker night. Catherine was an avid member of the Poker Club that meets weekly. She shared that they play for nickels and was quick to assure me that if one ran out of funds, she could continue playing and repay the pot at a later time.

And then there is her Set of 1948, aka the Carefree Little Birds, a title taken from a song they sang in their early days. “We had to learn to fly and go out and spread the word of God,” Catherine commented. She was always an active member of the Carefree Little Birds, attending set meetings, contributing to lively discussions, sharing humorous anecdotes of the novitiate days, and enjoying set reunions. She called celebrating their Diamond Jubilee “by far THE event of the year,” adding, “We do love to party!”

Catherine dealt with health challenges in the last 20 years. She lost her leg to diabetes on Good Friday of 2004. “I have a great devotion to my Guardian Angel. When I was undergoing and recuperating from the amputation, I sensed wings around the stump keeping the pain away.” She also had a deep devotion to St. Ann, the mother of Mary, and regularly prayed to her. As a special ministry later in life, Catherine requested Masses to be said for departed loved ones of the BVM sisters and staff.

As for so many of us, 2020 was a most difficult year for Catherine. “I thought I couldn’t take any more,” she wrote. “The confinement to our rooms, not being able to see family or each other, all our deceased sisters, not being able to hug. Then, when I was at my lowest, through God’s word to the Apostle Paul, to my unanswered prayer, God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Catherine was grateful for all the small kindnesses she received during those days, during all her days of her life. “I have stayed strong so I could convey my thanks and happiness . . . You are all remembered in my daily prayers.”

We have been blessed by Catherine’s ministries and her prayers and are confident of her continued intercessions for us as she is of ours. Rest in peace and love, dear Catherine.