

# VOICES of Hope



. . . BRINGING HOPE TO THE HUMAN JOURNEY.

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**We are continually looking to improve our publication as well as for topics/themes suggestions for future issues. We encourage you to forward any questions/comments or suggestions.**

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## Letter from the Editor

A few weeks after the first issue of Voices of Hope was delivered to you, our friends, families, co-workers and other associates, the Publications Committee gathered to evaluate our efforts. We took into consideration the feedback and suggestions that we had received from our readers and will incorporate some of these suggestions into this issue. We appreciate your feedback as it helps us to create a more readable and meaningful publications.

As we considered the theme of this current issue we chose to explore the "Communion of Saints" for two reasons. This is an important part of the Helpers' charism as you will see in the articles written by the sisters of the U.S. Province. We also planned to publish this issue by November 1st, the Feast of All Saints. We hope that as you read the articles in this issue you will discover new ways of thinking about saints. Yes, there are many wonderful men and women officially recognized by the Church who lived lives that are inspiring and courageous, but in the articles we are also invited to consider the many saints that we meet in our daily lives who also live inspiring and courageous lives. It is our hope that as you read these stories, you will think about the "saints" that are part of your lives, people both here and beyond that inspire us to deepen our relationship with God and reach out to those around us.

Finally, I would like to welcome to the Publications Committee Leigh Hartley who brings with her energy and skills. I thank our editorial team Nora Gruenberg, Theresa Viramontes and Leigh Hartley and our layout and design person Ramiro Hernandez for the talent, time and commitment to the Helpers Publications Committee.

God Bless,  
Sister Jean Kielty



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Communion of Saints. It's the Church's way of telling us we are connected with one another. Connection exists as a powerful reality, something we long for, something we cherish, perhaps, at times, something we fear. Ultimately, experiencing connection can be a healing experience for when we are alone or afraid, desolate, feeling forgotten or overlooked. The Communion of Saints challenges the barriers of time and space and affirms that we are connected to one another.

For Mary of Providence, the intensity of her 18th century spirituality was a way of knowing that she was connected to those who were longing to see the face of God and yet were powerless to achieve it by themselves. A woman of passion, she was restless to address this longing. She believed and understood that she was not powerless to alleviate their condition. As a woman of compassion, she understood this suffering as a common thread linking human persons across all the distinctions and differences we are capable of creating.

As we approach the late fall, you and I are invited to become more aware of the conscious and not-so-conscious connections that exist in our lives. We can take some time to notice and to nurture our reality as we savor those who hold a place in our inner affective world. We can pay extra attention to the people we feel easily connected to – friends, family members, children, colleagues, those whose words are etched forever in our memory, those whose examples sustain us. We can ponder how to reconnect relationships that have been prematurely severed. We can even discover connections beyond our immediate awareness and deepen our appreciation of them. Somehow, affirming that we are connected across time and space opens our horizons and helps us embrace a much wider world.

"Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being."  
Black Elk Speaks, by John G. Neihardt

# An Experience of Being in Communion with a Saint

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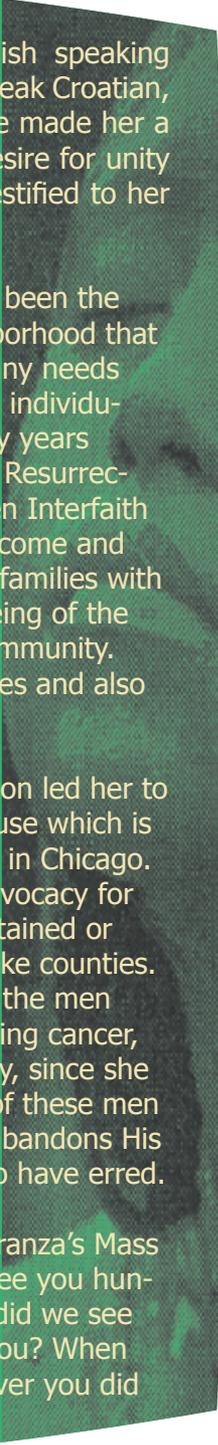
When I was asked to write an article on the Communion of Saints, I thought about what I wanted to share. I thought of how important the Communion of Saints is for us as Helpers. How could I share this aspect of our charism as I experience it in my life?

A good friend of mine, Esperanza Godinez, passed away on July 6, 2009 after losing a battle with cancer. It was at her Funeral Mass, as I listened to the readings, the homily, and the eulogies that I realized the reality of the Communion of Saints.



Esperanza, whose name means “hope” in Spanish, was a woman who dedicated her life to her family and to serving her community. Her desire to serve led her to take a leadership role in organizing the Living Way of the Cross every Good Friday on 18th Street in Chicago. This traditional way of remembering and “walking” with Jesus is a powerful event that extends for about 20 blocks in the Pilsen neighborhood. Esperanza’s bilingual skills were put to good use as she rode in the procession van and lead the rosary in English and Spanish. For about 20 years, Esperanza devoted herself for months in advance of Good Friday to recruiting, training and ultimately executing this faith-filled event.

Esperanza had a vision of being for others, bringing people together, and building bonds that strengthened the community. Holy Trinity Croatian was her home parish. Her ministry worked as a “bridge”

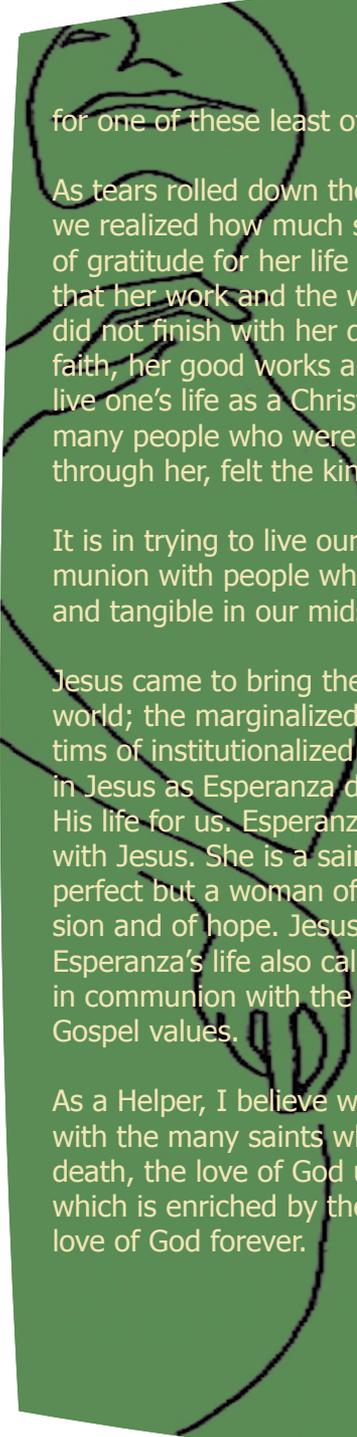


between the English speaking community, the Spanish speaking community, and the Croatian community. She did not speak Croatian, but her easy going and friendly attitude towards people made her a person that connected all three ethnic groups. Her desire for unity and commitment to different ministries in the parish testified to her love for her parish community and the Church.

Pilsen is a neighborhood in the city of Chicago that has been the port of entry for many ethnic groups. It is also a neighborhood that is believed to be one of the poorest in the city. The many needs in the community are part of the dialogue of concerned individuals such as Esperanza and community groups. For many years Esperanza was a member of the Advisory Board of The Resurrection Project. This organization was founded by the Pilsen Interfaith Group with the purpose of developing numerous low-income and affordable housing units and residences in the area for families with financial difficulties. Esperanza's concern for the well being of the families kept her involved in the development of the community. She often spoke at public events on behalf of the families and also about issues of safety and peace in the neighborhood.

Esperanza was a compassionate person. That compassion led her to volunteer in the Prison Ministry carried out at Kolbe House which is based at Assumption Parish near the jail on 26th Street in Chicago. This ministry provides direct services, education and advocacy for all those who are now, have been or are likely to be detained or incarcerated in the correctional facilities of Cook and Lake counties. In her visits, she listened, prayed with and encouraged the men to have hope and not to despair. As she lay in bed battling cancer, she would say how much she missed her prison ministry, since she found so much faith in the men she visited. The faith of these men strengthened her own faith in God who she felt never abandons His children, and who forgives and has mercy on those who have erred.

It was no coincidence that the reading chosen for Esperanza's Mass of Resurrection was Mathew 25:31-46. "When did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you? ... Whatever you did



for one of these least of my brothers, you did for me.”

As tears rolled down the faces of many of us who knew Esperanza, we realized how much she had tried to live this Gospel. A sense of gratitude for her life and her witness filled my heart. We knew that her work and the way she had touched so many people’s lives did not finish with her departure from this earth. Her spirit, her faith, her good works and magnificent example of what it means to live one’s life as a Christian would not die. She was a saint for the many people who were touched by her kindness and faith and who, through her, felt the kindness and care of God in their lives.

It is in trying to live our lives as true Christians that we live in communion with people who, like Esperanza, make God’s love visible and tangible in our midst.

Jesus came to bring the Good News to the most abandoned of this world; the marginalized the impoverished, and those who are victims of institutionalized injustice. When we put into action our faith in Jesus as Esperanza did, we are in communion with Him who gave His life for us. Esperanza believed and lived her life in deep union with Jesus. She is a saint in a true sense of the word. She was not perfect but a woman of faith, of courage, of kindness, of compassion and of hope. Jesus invites us to be in communion with Him. Esperanza’s life also calls us to be in communion with Jesus. We are in communion with the saints who live their lives trying to live the Gospel values.

As a Helper, I believe we are called to live our lives in communion with the many saints who have lived before us. In life and after death, the love of God unites us all. This is our ultimate calling which is enriched by the life stories of those who now live in the love of God forever.

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# Communion



I think we are all on our way into the communion of saints. This mystery makes me think of my experience with dying children in a hospice in the Italian Alps. (Great place to die!) I was having dinner with the resident psychiatrist and we were talking about the wide range of the children's capacity to cope. He remarked that the children who had a sense of interiority, a sense of the

beyond, were more at peace. He sensed that these were children who had lived in situations where they were encouraged to enjoy music, dance, art, silence and the things that nurture the spirit. The children who had a hard time were those who lived outside themselves. They needed more medication.

I have taken this exchange to heart and tried to provide a similarly enriched atmosphere for others and myself. As we celebrate All Saints and All Souls Days and as I reflect on my experience of the communion of saints, I am reminded that we have the capacity to hold close the presence of those we have loved, those who keep our hearts company.

# Community of Sa



We are all called to be part of the Community of Saints through our daily lives.

Our faith is our humanity. In order to respond to this call, it is necessary to personally be in relationship with the author of Communion. We go to prayer with a surrendered heart so as to contemplate the presence of God in our lives and the history of the people who struggled with and continue to resist all forms of injustice. It is a life where the contemplation of God's divinity is not separate from the contemplation of the humanity of our brothers and sisters.

Henri Nouwen said, "Thus, the prayer of the Christian saint is a prayer with open hands to the world around them in order to find the presence of the Living God in every situation of life." It is prayer and a life of spirituality that makes it possible to live in daily life what was heard in the

silence of the heart. Furthermore, it is simply a life focused on change, conversion and liberation from sin to salvation, from selfishness to love, and from isolation to Community.

Responding to our call to participate in the Community of Saints means that we are always ready to give testimony of our faith by the way we live our daily lives. We need to ask ourselves: What do I do? How do I live my life? How does my life manifest who I claim to be as a disciple of Christ? Why do I live the way I do, or do what I do? What are the challenges in my daily life in responding to the call to be a part of the Community of Saints today?

The call to sanctity is for everyone. There may be different paths to achieve sanctity but only one universal manifestation of it, which is love. The Community of Saints is not an option but an integral part of our vocation as Disciples of Christ to be leaven in the world for the building up of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of love and justice. Sanctity is guided not merely by the Commandments (the don'ts) but equally by the Beatitudes (the dos).

# Saints in Daily Life

The Community of Saints here on earth is not built up solely within rituals and devotions, but rather through the integration of the love of Christ in daily life. The call to sanctity requires the coherence of the Community of Saints in the concreteness of our daily lives, whatever this may be. This is what makes our faith life the fulfillment of Christ's mission to bring abundance of life into the world.

Communion is the fulfillment of God's will in our lives.

Each day we strive to discover what God wants from us and calls each of us to do. We need to desire it, to nourish it, and to protect it. We persevere in our journeys in Community with others who desire the same, who live the same values, and who need our support as much as we need theirs.

The Church offers everyone the means to sanctify themselves in daily life: the Word of God in Scripture,

Sacraments (especially the Eucharist), personal and communal prayer, service to others, and the grace to put all these elements into practice in our daily lives. We are holy because we are of God and we are continually being made into the image and likeness of God – whether we eat, sleep, dance or work, we are the Lord's! This is what is required to become, nourish, and maintain our call to be the Community of Saints today in the here and now.



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## The Journey Into the Mystery



I have been a Helper for over fifty years. The charisma with which Mary of Providence gifted the Society she founded has deepened within me over the years. As I have engaged more with the world and contemplated the universe, the mystery of the Communion of Saints has become more present in my life.

I have stood in awe at the magnificence of creation and wept as I watched Mother Earth cry out in anger and in pain as destructive forces from all sides beat down upon her chest. And, I have seen cherry trees in full bloom where an atomic bomb had raped a city. I have witnessed the horrors of war and the resilience of its victims who transformed suffering into joy.

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I have stood in awe at the magnificence of creation and wept as I watched Mother Earth cry out in anger and in pain as destructive forces from all sides beat down upon her chest. And, I have seen cherry trees in full bloom where an atomic bomb had raped a city. I have witnessed the horrors of war and the resilience of its victims who transformed suffering into joy. I have accompanied friends and family members approaching death, gifted with the grace of letting go and embracing the passage into the unknown. I have been mesmerized by the images scientists have offered me of a universe more encompassing than I could ever have imagined.

These experiences have given me a tiny insight into the meaning of the great mystery of the Communion of Saints. I have felt myself to be more at one with the universe, one with the sea, the sky, and the earth, and present to those who have gone before and those still on this planet whom I have never met or who look, speak and live differently than I do.

It is my heart that knows we are all one, that in some mysterious way we all touch one another and that we all carry the sea, the sky, and the earth in our hearts whether we live on this planet or in the beyond. Not only are we in communion, but we become communion in embracing our oneness.

# Seeing the Goodness of Others Fosters a Journey of Growth

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I entered the Society of Helpers, which I love deeply, six years ago at the age of thirty-three. I looked forward to responding to my inner call to commit myself to Jesus Christ and to deeply integrate spirituality, community life, and mission into my daily life. A new journey began with excitement and joy, and at the same time with uncertainty and fear. Can I live this life? How will it affect my being? Am I able to be in nourishing relationships with the other women? These were only a few of the questions that I pondered.

When I look back I can say that this step to enter a religious congregation was huge for me, but I was relieved to have made my decision to begin this life. However, it was a challenge to move out of my own apartment, to enter into a mutual formation process, and to redefine myself in a new group. I experienced uncertainty, which prevented me from trusting my sisters completely. I struggled inside, because I was drawn to religious life, yet making the transition was not easy for me.

At this particular time the Saints, and especially the women who lived our Helper life before me, were very important for me and my journey. I needed to hear from sisters who still knew them and their life-stories, joys and struggles, ways of living, life questions, and their passion for having been a Helper. I began to sense their presence in



my heart, and I entered into a spiritual relationship with them. I developed a sensibility for their presence. To my surprise, I began to be aware that I needed them so that I could find trust for my sisters inside of my self.

# Communion of Saints

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Who do you consider to be part of today's communion of saints and why? Would you want to be a saint? These two questions have continued to pervade my thoughts and bring me to a new appreciation and understanding of the saints and how they are present in my life.



I first came to know "Ray's" story while listening to a piece on National Public Radio. Ray was arrested because he had illegally mobilized a group of parents whose kids had been killed in an earthquake. They were asking, "Why did the school building collapse?" According to Ray's wife, his imprisonment due to illegal activity prevented him from receiving any medical care for his Hepatitis B ailment. However, Ray wanted to shed light on the matter in spite of the illegality of his activism. *La vérité libère*, truth liberates. Yet in his case, the search for truth landed him in prison because truth could jeopardize the careers of officials in power.

Ray spoke out at the cost of his own life. I presume he was being attentive to an inner call that made him fearless of the political machine which could crush him. He stood luminous in his powerlessness and reflected the image of Jesus who had taken the sides of the wronged during his own brief lifetime on earth. While Ray was Christ-like, ironically he may not have known Jesus well himself.

At a more personal level, there is an alumnus/teacher who visits some of his students who are in jail serving sentences for drug-related offenses. While the law is just in reinforcing rules to protect society, William brings to the inmates the humane face of this same society. Compassionate and caring, it is perhaps his willingness to reach out and affirm their humanity that heals these convicted criminals more effectively than the laws.

Recently, we heard about the demise of Eunice Kennedy Shriver who founded the Special Olympics. However, her merits go far beyond that one act. Thanks to her relentless efforts, laws were passed to ensure the respect of human rights for the physically and mentally handicapped. Mental and physical disabilities are part of life. Society must acknowledge this simple fact and adjust accordingly and appropriately. Eunice helped make the American society more humane through her efforts. Many parts of the world struggle with human rights issues, and I hope they can continue to learn from Eunice's example.

In reflecting on my own "sainthood", were God to ask me, "What have you done worthwhile on earth?" I would respond, "My adoptive brother had mental retardation. I defended his rights the best I could in a country which made no provision for the physically or mentally handicapped and which despised them." The mystery of the Communion of Saints unites all those living the Beatitudes today and those who have gone before us on this path.

I will conclude with one personal anecdote: Many years ago I was left alone at the hospital with my mother who was in a coma due to a stroke. The whole night I begged, "Bernadette, hold my hands." Sr. Bernadette Fontaine had died a few days earlier in Chicago thousands of miles away from Mauritius where I was. On that memorable night, Bernadette supported me and connected me to the Communion of Saints. Through Bernadette's intercession and the grace of God, my mother survived that stroke.



# One Body

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*"What day is today?"*

*"Whose feast is today?"*

These are two questions I would get most work day mornings from a 104 year-old Jesuit who yearned to be connected to his faith and the people who brought his faith alive.

A woman appeared very calm, peaceful, and was always fully present in each of my encounters with her, including a time she was to be somewhere and her ride was late. Like Jesus and His people or shepherds and their sheep, she had an awareness of the importance of each being.

Trying experiences came up unexpectedly, and this man calmly accepted what happened, 'like water running off a duck's back.' This man was grounded firmly in his faith.

There are many living saints making a difference in our world today. Above are the stories of three saints I have walked with in chronological time and have been blessed to know.

In the more traditional sense, my favorite Saint whom I call upon frequently is St. Paul the Apostle. Paul had a passion for doing the right thing. That 'right thing' in his earlier life was to kill the Followers of the Way and to stop a movement he believed to be dangerous.

God took Paul's passion and turned it around to be used in another 'Right Way.' "Whatever you do to others, you do to me." My personal intercession to St. Paul is to give others a conversion of heart – the suicide bomber, the young woman considering abortion, people who steal, those who kill for drugs, and their stories go on . . . I pray that

they redirect their passions, turn away from harming themselves and others, and instead strive to give new life to themselves and others.

A great desire of Blessed Mary of Providence, foundress of the Helpers, was to give thanks to God for giving her so much. When I take time to seriously reflect upon her vision of how to accomplish this desire, it is both profound and awesome to me. How do you give a gift of gratitude to the One who has everything and is everything?

During her lifetime, praying for the souls in Purgatory was a key movement in the Catholic church. However, Blessed Mary of Providence's vision went beyond the act of prayer. She had an awareness of the connectedness of all people and things. This awareness pointed firmly toward the idea that we are one body, and because of our connectedness, our intentions and actions influence the one body united in Christ.

Just as Mary of Providence knew that lovingly serving those in need worked through one body, today's saints strive to carry on this tradition, to help others to love and be loved, rejoicing in the fullness of God's glory. By witnessing the everyday saints I have encountered in my life, as well as St. Paul and Blessed Mary of Providence, I am constantly reminded of the call and importance of being united with the many parts of one body.

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## The Street Sweepers

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Morning is filled with rituals for me on my way to work. Finding a parking space remains a challenge Monday through Friday. Often I can count on a four- to five-block walk once I find a space. Along the way I expect to (and look forward to) being greeted by a small group of men who track me and check on whether I have



chosen the correct side of the street on which to park. They ensure that where I leave the car that I am not at risk of a parking ticket. So far they have saved me three times from \$100.00 summons.

Each of them, Sean, Tony and Mohammed, are usually swinging their brooms in the streets as I walk by assuring that the two blocks proximate to the office are swept clean. I am welcomed with questions addressed to how I am, and wishes for a good day. At times I am able to offer them shirts or pants which I have received as a donation and for which they are very grateful.

The other day I asked Tony if he was losing weight. "Yeah," he said. "Two weeks ago, I went to the doctor who told me I had diabetes." It made me feel sad to hear this. Tony continued, "Don't worry, Sister. This is not difficult. I am a Christian. When I am told the right way to live, I follow it. The doctor told me to change my diet, no more soda; and that is what I did. What is more important to me, more than anyone, is what Jesus Christ means to me. He is my Lord."

Mohammed was walking along with me one afternoon as I headed to the parked car. He was on his way to the mosque. We spoke of the meaning of Ramadan, and how he keeps his fast. I smiled when he explained that Christians abstain by taking half their amount of water and half their lunch whereas he takes nothing of food or nourishment from five in the morning till eight in the evening. He was glad for this challenge which helps him remember what is important in his life. The goal of this month is his own purification.

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## Maria de la Cruz Aymes Memorial

July 14, 1919 - April 25, 2009

Sister Maria de la Cruz, Maria Margarita Valentina Aymes Coucke, was born in Mexico. She joined the Society of Helpers in the United States in 1938 because there was no Helper community in Mexico at the time. Maria returned to her native Mexico in 1947 to open the first house of the Society of Helpers. From 1948 until 1955 she conducted the free clinic for the poor people of the surrounding villages of Mexico City and did extensive catechetical work among children and their families.

Recalled to the United States in 1955, she studied religious education at the Catholic University, liturgy at Notre Dame University, sociology, religious

education, and theology at the University of San Francisco. These studies prepared her for the mission the Lord had in store for her. It was while Archdiocesan CCD Supervisor for the Archdiocese of San Francisco from 1955 until 1966, that Maria came in contact with four renowned catechists who would inspire her, guide her, and lead her in her mission of contributing to the catechetical renewal after Vatican II. Johannes Hofinger, S.J., Josef Jungmann, S.J., Dr. Joseph Goldbrunner and Alfonso Nebreda, S.J., guided her in writing the original ON OUR WAY SERIES between 1956 and 1962.

For almost 30 years, Maria authored in English many religious textbooks for parochial school and religious education programs: ON OUR WAY, NEW LIFE, LORD OF LIFE, and GOD WITH US, published by W.H. Sadlier and translated into 13 foreign languages. The last eight years of her catechetical ministry centered more on Hispanics. Not only did she write many educational materials in Spanish, but also helped produce TV programs in Spanish for the Hispanic Telecommunications Network in San Antonio. Maria lectured in all 50 states and widely in Europe and Asia, participating in international catechetical congresses, and was appointed to the Coordinating Council at the Synod of Bishops on Catechesis in Rome in 1977. Maria is considered to be one of the most important religious educators of the twentieth century. However, they were not so much her accomplishments that Archbishop John Quinn lauded at her Memorial Mass in San Francisco, but her fidelity as a disciple of the Crucified Jesus.

"For Sister Maria de la Cruz, the life of discipleship about which she wrote and taught so effectively, fidelity to the Crucified One came to mean fidelity in an imperfect Church where some are missing, some doubt, many fail, many fall short. Such fidelity took deep roots in faith, unshakable faith. And while today we rightly call to mind her splendid, life-long services to catechetics, for our own consolation and instruction we must not fail to see as well, that she persevered in the Church which the crucified and risen Lord placed in human hands when he gathered one last time with the eleven on a mountain in Galilee ... It is fitting, then, in our remembering Sister Maria de la Cruz today, to ask the question, "What made her persevere in faith in the trials and challenges of a lifetime?" The Song of Songs gives the answer: "Love is stronger than death."





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