

## Vigil for Sister Rita Smith, OSB

August 28, 2010

We gather once again in this chapel for a very special celebration, today for Sister Rita Smith—to reflect on her death and resurrection. She has left us but she now enjoys the fullness of peace in the presence of the Lord whom she served faithfully for so many years. For her it is the eternity of rejoicing that she has begun—for us, we know this and we share her new happiness and yet our rejoicing is mingled with the pain of the loss of her presence among us. And for this we offer our sympathy to her brother Robert, and her sisters—Geraldine, Cathryn, Sister Colette, Margaret and Mary, to her nieces and nephews, friends, former students and all in our community, especially Sister DeMonfort who was her companion, friend and teacher always meeting her needs with greatest care—to all we offer sympathy at her going and joy in this peace-filled and new experience of the awareness of her presence with the Lord. She loved her family very much and was always interested in knowing how everyone was. On trips to Kansas City, perhaps to the doctor, she would always enjoy a side visit to one of the family in the area or close by.

When I first read the Scripture passages for this evening. I thought that these were very special words reflective of Sister Rita's lived experience. From Sirach we heard, "The spirit of those who fear the Lord will live, for their hope is in Him who saves them. Those who fear the Lord will not be timid for He is their hope. The eyes of the Lord are on those who love Him"--Sister Rita, who feared the Lord, who loved the Lord never hesitated "since the Lord was her hope--the eyes of the Lord watched over her who loved Him, was her powerful protector and strong support, her shelter, her guard and assurance. In her own words we read "I feel like things happen for a reason. God loves us, so whatever happens is for our good. He will take care of us. I have great confidence in God."

Sister Rita, born in 1917 was the eldest of the 8 children born to Francis and Mary Smith. In 1935 she entered Mount St. Scholastica Convent and later wrote, "this was much against my mother's wishes," but to that she added, "after a year or so my mother became reconciled and was happy about my life's choice." When she entered she joined five other young women who became Sisters Mary Matthew, Adella, Helen Buening, Everetta and Damian--all of whom excepting Sister Helen had preceded her in death and now welcome her home with them.

Sister Rita taught for 37 years in Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska and was a Principal and teacher for 8 1/2 years. Although she has said she did not enjoy teaching, she did love her students and their needs were her priority through those years. What she did enjoy was her time as Secretary/receptionist in the religious education office at the Chancery and as Librarian at Rockhurst College and Benedictine College and her work in the Development Office in Community. She also participated in the Friendly Visitor program and enjoyed calling and visiting an 88 year old woman here in Atchison. And now we recognize that with her work here on earth completed she followed the new call of the Lord to life with Him in eternity. After these last months especially in the lessening of her ability to communicate as she would have wanted and as we would have hoped, the awareness of her eternal peace already begun can only bring us new joy.

Her manner in life of relating to others in diverse situations was always the same. She looked for ways of positive interaction. Her many acts of thoughtful kindness will always be remembered. Many will also remember the times she would appear with a most delicious lemon pie whether it was for a Name Day, birthday, or just a time to share the fresh lemons that Sister Colette

had sent from California. She loved her community and loved sharing what made her happy with them. Any gift received that could be shared was shared for giving and receiving were a part of her life. In giving joy to others she witnessed a life to which we are all called.

In 1985 the Development Office of the community was created with Sister Mary Paul as the Development Director. Shortly after this, Sister Rita joined her forming the Staff of the office. Both had some question about their ability to worktogether since they were so very different in their manner of working but as time past they realized that this was a great team and they enjoyed working together for 15 years. In this office it was her careful and accurate manner of recording all the information that made it easy to approach her for information and her rapid response for needed facts was most appreciated .

Many may remember that before moving to Dooley Center, Sister Rita was always among the first to reach the Choir Chapel in the morning. She loved the Divine Office and the celebration of the Eucharist and her time in Chapel was a special part in her preparation for them. She wrote once that prayer was important to her parents and this was shared with and learned by the children. She also loved to read and in the days she was yet able to come to the library she would find an interesting biography, history or fiction book and spend hours in the library reading. If she thought it was a good book, she would recommend it to many for their reading. When she was no longer able to come to the Library, she found that the Schirmer Room offered the same reading possibility.

Sister Rita was present at all the events in Community but she did not always voice her opinion. However when she did her thoughts were founded in fact and she was clear in the manner of conveying that information. In addition to her lemon pie, hers was a special way of celebrating feasts by the decorations she provided for her living group. She liked decorations that were different as were the fiber optic figures she found and used for such occasions.

In the passage from St. Matthew that we heard this evening we recognized the fact that Sister Rita's light was one that was not hidden but did shine to others and so in seeing her good works others were led to give praise to God. And now she has gone from our vision-- from time into eternity -- from this life of caring so much for others and meeting their needs as she felt she could to her new environment of intercession for all and now finds herself able to continue meeting needs as we may ask her or as she thinks may be needed. We may have to be ready for her manner of responding to requests--to include surprises we may not expect..

Thank you Sister Rita for all you have done for me in the years of our working together and for all the days that followed. Thank you for all you have done for our community and for others. May you now rest in the peace of the Lord sharing that joyful presence together with your parents, your brother Harold, your classmates and all your family, and friends who have gone before you and are now with you. Eternal rest and peace be yours.

Sister Noreen Hurter, OSB