

Sister Genevieve Blanchfield

Phil 4:4-7, Jn 15:14-17

Our sister Genevieve has gone home, the candle of her life burnt out. Over these past months as we accompanied her on the final lap of her journey, we saw the light slowly flickering until finally, on Monday, she gave her last breath, quenched the flame, and slipped away into the waiting arms of Christ. This is the great consolation of our faith, so that even as we offer our sympathy to you, her family and her friends, we do so with this strong hope, a hope assuring us that Genevieve's life is not ended but changed into something so glorious that only the heart can intuit its beauty. "Rejoice," Paul insists in the first reading, and "Rejoice" is what Genevieve is saying to us here today.

'Do you not know Christ is in you?' Paul asked the fractious Corinthians. He would not have had to put this question to Genevieve. Her whole life was focused on the Lord with a single-mindedness that never wavered. The compass of her long journey was fixed on him. Her *satanav* was his word, his life, on which she meditated and prayed each day with great love and deepening faith. Pearl, as she was known to her family, knew that she had indeed found the pearl of great price, a treasure to be shared with others wherever she happened to be. Whatever her ministry, whether in the US or the Philippines, or latterly in this community, she lived out her motto, the words of Jesus engraved in her heart, words that are at the core of all of our lives: "Love one another as I have loved you."

As a teacher Genevieve inspired her students whether in California or later in the Philippines. Those who worked with her speak of her creativity in the classroom. Her students responded, whether the children of immigrants in California or college graduates. She was an artist who enjoyed helping others and knew how to draw the best from her young scholars. When, for example, some of them struggled with maths, Genevieve took them in hand, put aside the text books and taught them how to play chess which in time gave them the confidence they needed for the figures.

When after 30 years in a fulfilling ministry in the United States, she was sent to the Philippines she went gladly, eager to share her faith and her knowledge with the people. "For me," she said, "the message of Christianity is the great dignity of the human person, made in the image of God and loved by him." And in Ozamis, in Manila – wherever she was, this was the light that shone through all she did. Although she was a fairly private person, her natural simplicity made her approachable and was, no doubt, one reason she was so successful in teaching English as a foreign language to many Asian students in the Philippines. She had a good number of detective novels, Agatha Christie, Perry Mason and others of that genre, which she enjoyed. And we can be sure they were part of her adult students' curriculum too.

"Whatever Genevieve did she did wholeheartedly," one of her community told me. For example, when, in the early nineties, the Sisters withdrew from the Immaculate Conception College in Ozamis after more than 50 years of service, our sister, Genevieve oversaw to the last detail carefully and thoroughly, with help from the community. The hand-over of the

College to the de la Salle Brothers, which took years of careful planning was in the end satisfactory to all. This was due, in no small measure, to her patient, painstaking work .

A bigger transition for her was leaving her beloved Philippines, her fruitful ministry, the people who had become her friends and coming to this house after so many years abroad. But she came, with her characteristic smile – Genevieve was a great smiler – and without complaint or murmur she settled into the rhythm of this community. As well as charming all of us with her simplicity, she showed herself to be a real card shark! Every evening as supper ended she would be up, intent on enticing us to join her in card games. And, need I say it, she almost invariably won. A good thing there was no betting!

Of course the ‘real deal’ of anyone’s life is known to God alone, a beauty we can sense now but will only fully know when we meet again. As the author John McGahern wrote, “The best of life is lived quietly where nothing happens but our calm journey through the day where change is imperceptible and the precious life is everything.” The inestimable value of a life, especially a life lived out with such unwavering fidelity as Genevieve lived hers, is precious beyond words. Her peaceful presence, her lovely, constant smile, her quietness, her acceptance of whatever came her way is what lingers in our memories now, the gift of this woman of prayer. “Well, well, well,” she’d say with a smile, letting us know, that truly, no matter what our situation, we are in God’s hands and, as the gentle Julian of Norwich said, “All will be well”. And we can believe that now, for this good and faithful woman, all is abundantly well in the house of the Lord.

Redempta Twomey
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