

From the Foot of the Cross



The Passionist Nuns of Saint Joseph Monastery in the Diocese of Owensboro KY

Spring 2009

**"I'm so happy because Our Lord told me
He was coming for me.
He has been telling me this for a week."**

Sr. Mary Bernadette spoke these words on November 7, 2005. Her "lamp" was burning bright, but it would be three more years until the Divine Bridegroom would take her to Himself.

By 1999, Sr. Mary Bernadette, always active and energetic, began to show signs of failing health, forgetfulness, confusion and minor falls. However, with the help of a walker and the watchful care of the Nuns, she maintained a healthy independence as she continued on with community life.

Within a year, however, she suffered a more severe fall which required her being moved to our monastery infirmary. Mother Mary Agnes who was then superior, assigned Sr. Mary Dolores and Sr. Therese Marie as her primary caregivers. For the next five and a half years, these two Sisters, along with Sr. Mary Magdalen as needed, gave Sr. Mary Bernadette generous and devoted care. In order that these Sisters might take part in as much of the prayer life of the community as possible, Stella Higdon was hired to cover some of the daytime hours. Stella's nursing skills were well known to us since she had assisted two others of our foundresses in our monastery infirmary. Loretta Bailey also generously stepped in to help when needed.

Although Sr. Mary Bernadette's condition continued to decline, she was for a while still able to attend Mass and other community activities. When this became impossible, she was able to view the Mass, Divine

Office and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament through closed circuit TV. Throughout her years in the infirmary, Sister was enriched by watching various videos. She seemed never to tire of her favorites: the Stations of the Cross, courses on the Mass, and footage from Pope John Paul II's visits to the U.S. and Mexico. Stella once remarked that she had seen these videos so many times she knew them by heart!

Sr. Mary Bernadette's serenity and uncomplaining acceptance of the daily cross during these years was a powerful witness to

our community and her other caregivers. Words of wisdom frequently came from her lips as she spontaneously responded to questions. To someone asking "How are you today?" her usual response was, "**Just as good as the Lord wants.**"



Sister Mary Bernadette of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

~ Theresa Mary Rohling ~

November 9, 1912 - October 16, 2008



Sr. Therese Marie and Sr. Mary Dolores
with Sr. Mary Bernadette enjoying the outdoors

To another who asked, "What is the best way to become a saint?" she responded unhesitatingly, **"Try to do God's will all the time."** On another occasion someone asked her, "What is the most important thing to do in life?" Sr. Mary Bernadette responded, **"Saving souls and fidelity to God."** And to a novice, she said, **"Keep working toward your future. You still have a lot of things to improve on. Let Mary show you how to love Jesus."** A postulant asked, "What is it like wearing the holy habit?" to which she answered, **"It is the next best thing to heaven."** Once when a Sister found her with her eyes closed, she said, "Do you pray always?" Sr. Mary Bernadette's answer was, **"I hope to. I hope to be praying always and staying in the presence of God always."**

Sister's Passionist Spirituality

Throughout her religious life, Sister was known for her tender devotion to Jesus Crucified and Our Mother of Sorrows. She also had an outstanding love for and understanding of the spirituality of St. Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionist Congregation. Having studied his charism, she knew how basic is union with God's will to true devotion to Jesus Crucified. Sister knew many a struggle to be faithful, but she never wavered in the ideal. To be a "bride of the Crucified" meant that a price had to be paid, the price of a total self-gift to Jesus.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in her increasing helplessness, dependence and weakness, Sister fed her soul on the Divine Will as a true spiritual daughter of St. Paul of the Cross. Her vocation to be with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, at the foot of the cross in total surrender to the Father's will, was coming to its full flowering.

Even before being moved to the infirmary, Sr. Mary Bernadette must have realized something of what was to come. In March of 2000, when she was 87 years of age, she told a Sister, **"I forget so many things....I'm losing my memory....All that is important is the**

present moment and I want to give all of it to Our Lord." Again, **"It is not always easy to go on moment by moment....I want to give everything to Him."** Even In the midst of her infirmities, however, Sister's profound love for Our Lord continued strong. One night, she remained praying after Night Prayer in our darkened chapel. Not realizing that another Sister had also stayed behind to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, Sr. Mary Bernadette went up close to the tabernacle and said, "I'm going now, but I'll be back." Needless to say, this touched the other Sister deeply.

Sister is moved to Carmel Home

More than five months had passed since Sr. Mary Bernadette said Our Lord told her He was coming for her. Now on Palm Sunday, April 9, 2006, He suddenly came, but not yet to take her to her eternal home. On the day that is a doorway to the holiest week of the Church year, Sister's health took a turn for the worse and she was rushed to the emergency room. Sr. Mary Bernadette, bride of the Crucified, thus spent Holy Week in the hospital. After a week of tests and treatments, the doctor said that for a 93 year old, Sister was in a stable condition but she needed nursing care around the clock.

As this was more than the community could provide, Mother Catherine Marie and her council decided that Sr. Mary Bernadette needed the skilled care of a nursing home. So, on Easter Monday she was moved to Carmel Home, a facility owned by the Carmelite Sisters of the Divine Heart of Jesus. This excellent facility is the center of Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration in the Owensboro diocese. Words cannot express our gratitude to Sr. Francis Teresa, administrator of Carmel Home, and the



Sr. Mary Andrea, Sr. John Mary and Sr. Mary visit with Sr. Mary Bernadette



Bob and Paul Rohling so faithful in visiting their beloved sister

four younger brothers made up this good Catholic family, all of whom remained dear to Sr. Mary Bernadette throughout her religious life.

It was in high school at LaSalette Academy in Covington that Theresa received her call to become a religious. While not feeling called to an active Order as were some of her classmates, Theresa was uncertain where her aspirations seemed to draw her, so she sought guidance from Fr. Louis Driscoll, a Passionist serving (at the Passionist community) in Cincinnati, Ohio. As Theresa's spiritual director, Fr. Louis gently guided her to discern God's call to the Passionist Nuns of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

other Carmelite Sisters for welcoming Sr. Mary Bernadette into this "home away from home." The proximity of Carmel Home to our monastery afforded us the opportunity to visit Sister and keep in close touch with her.

Sr. Francis Teresa's warm and cheery greeting, brought forth a confused look on the face of their new resident. In a somewhat characteristic way, Sr. Mary Bernadette asked, "Who are you?" With experience and delicate charity, Sr. Francis Teresa simply smiled and replied, "I am a Carmelite Sister." Sr. Mary Bernadette probably thought she was still at our monastery and wondered why a Carmelite Sister was inside the cloister.

As she settled in at Carmel Home, Sr. Mary Bernadette did not fully comprehend everything, and most likely did not try to figure out how long she would be there. We ourselves, knowing Sister's long years of fidelity to God in Passionist life, saw in her serene acceptance of her new situation the mystery of God's fidelity to her. Yes, she had been faithful to Him, but now it was His absolute fidelity that sustained her in this major change in her life. The fidelity of God endures forever!

Theresa's generous response to God's call

Theresa Rohling was born to Theodore B. Rohling and Stella Heger Rohling on November 9, 1912 in Covington, Kentucky. An older brother, Leonard, and



Front l to r: Theresa (Sr. Mary Bernadette), Bob, her mother Stella;
Back l to r: her father Theodore, Leonard, Paul, Walter & Gerald

Theresa wrote to the community's superior who was one of the original five foundresses who came to the US in 1910 from the first monastery of Passionist Nuns established by St. Paul of the Cross in 1771, in Corneto, now Tarquinia, Italy. Theresa was accepted but was advised, possibly by Fr. Louis, to remain at home after graduation, to help her mother care for the four younger brothers, Gerald, Walter, Paul and Bob.

After two and a half years at home, Theresa was at last able to leave for the monastery. On November 19, 1932, she and her father arrived at the door of St. Gabriel's Monastery in Scranton, tired from an all night train ride, but happy that their destination was reached.

Later, Sr. Mary Bernadette confided that when she told her parents of her desire for religious life, her mother said she thought it was a good idea. Her father said that if that would make Theresa happy, it would indeed make him happy. Early homesickness in the monastery was relieved by the knowledge that her father would be visiting each year, thanks to free passes he received as a railroad employee. Her mother accompanied him occasionally, and Leonard visited a few times before dying of cancer at the early age of 27.





Sr. Mary Bernadette with her father Mr. Theodore Rohling

Her older brother's death was an acute suffering for Sr. Mary Bernadette's young heart, a special call into the mystery of Our Lord's Sacred Passion.

Sr. Mary Bernadette cherished the fond memory of Leonard's parting words as she left for the monastery: "Give it a good try, Sis." We say to him, "Good advice, Leonard, which your sister took seriously, giving it a 'good try' for 76 years!"

Theresa received the Passionist habit and her new name on October 3, 1933. From henceforth she was to be called Sr. Mary Bernadette of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The following year on October 11, 1934, she made the profession of first vows and received her Passion Sign, the distinctive emblem of our Congregation. On the day of her final profession, October 11, 1937, Sister never dreamed that in less than ten years, she would be leaving the monastery in Scranton, and traveling toward, instead of away from, Covington, Kentucky. Yes, she was chosen as one of the five foundresses of the Owensboro, Kentucky monastery. Along the way, the five travelers stopped at St. Aloysius Church in Covington to visit with her parents and family members.

The Early Years after the Foundation in 1946

The founding band of Nuns reached their destination on 1420 Benita Avenue in Owensboro on October 7, 1946, and observed this date as the official establishment of St. Joseph's Monastery. A few days later, Sr. Mary Bernadette's father who was a master carpenter, arrived to help the Nuns convert the three story pre-Civil War home into the semblance of a cloistered monastery. Mr. Rohling was Building Superintendent in Cincinnati for NYC Railroad and was known for his skills in building, repairing and renovating.

At the end of his two week vacation, this kind and generous man, with the help of a few local workers, had succeeded in providing the Nuns with a "double" chapel (an outer space for visitors and retreatants and an inner cloistered space for the Nun). Mr. Rohling had crafted a lovely altar and pews for the chapel and made other furniture as well.

Over the years, he continued to dedicate his carpentry skills to the Nuns by making a writing desk for each Nun's bedroom ("cell" in the language of monasticism), wooden tressels for the Nuns' straw-filled mattresses, tables and small stools for the retreat house guest rooms, and many other things as well. Most of these items are still in use here in the monastery.

Sr. Mary Bernadette inherited her father's carpentry skills. It was not unusual to see a trace of sawdust (which she called "clean dust") on her work habit. At ease with an electric saw like her father, Sister made many pieces of furniture for the monastery.

One Sister remembers that shortly after she entered the postulancy, Sr. Mary Bernadette (then novice directress) put an electric saw in her hands and helped her make a set of elaborate wall brackets for devotional statues.



Throughout her religious life, Sr. Mary Bernadette amazed us with her creativity. She engaged in various projects, especially as novice directress, possibly as a way to help new members keep their minds off home sickness. On entering the large recreation room of the novitiate, one would likely see a stuffed animals project, or various arts and crafts.

Since the six large windows of the recreation room had the benefit of the morning sun, Sr. Mary Bernadette turned the room into a hot house one spring, where all the formation Sisters were enlisted to plant and nurture flower seedlings. That year our flower

**Within the Church, the Passionist Nuns
are called to be a sign of the love of
Jesus Crucified for the Father and for mankind**

~ Rule and Constitutions



garden was a riot of color! One Sister, who couldn't tell the difference between a flower seedling and a weed, would hear "O sweet Mother!" from Sr. Mary Bernadette, who then patiently taught her not to pull up daisies, asters, marigolds, sweet williams and other flowers!

Speaking of Sr. Mary Bernadette as novice directress, many of us recall with deep gratitude how our hearts would burn within us as she spoke about prayer or the spiritual teachings of our holy founder, St. Paul of the Cross. It was obvious that Sister had made these teachings her own, and that she was living them in daily life. This in itself spoke volumes to newcomers. She will always be remembered for the ways she tried to keep a loving memory of the Crucified always before her and to promote it in the hearts of others.

Besides serving the community as novice directress, Sr. Mary Bernadette held the office of assistant superior for many years. She also served on the superior's council and as retreat directress. Possessing a great generosity in seeing the holy will of God in every assignment, she gave her very best to a variety of duties: for instance, serving as



Sr. Mary Bernadette and Sr. Marie Michael in the 1980's

"economy" (the Sister in charge of supervising the kitchen), and as seamstress who made our habits and other clothing, to mention only these few. One could truly say that Sister was a "community person," ready and willing to build up the community in whatever way she was asked.

Having lived under an earlier text of our holy rule for several decades, Sister found the changes required by Vatican II quite a challenge. Once she was assured, however, that a proposed change in the customary way of doing things did not infringe on essentials of doctrine or charism, Sr. Mary Bernadette was more at ease, and others could sense that she was at peace in her heart beneath the surface of situations. Her attitude of deep faith gradually formed in her a remarkable peace, detachment, prayer and trust in God the Unchangeable One, who kept her serene in His will until the end.



Sr. Mary Bernadette and Sr. Therese Marie visit the new property in Whitesville, KY during the relocation of our monastery in the early '90's

Sister's Death: A participation in the Paschal Mystery

Throughout her two and a half years in the Carmel Home infirmary, Sr. Mary Bernadette received attentive care, to which she responded gratefully, though sometimes without words. She spoke less and less as time went on. Finally, even her smile faded, but she always manifested great peace, holiness and an uncomplaining abandonment to God. To the end, Sr. Mary Bernadette was for us and for many others a sign of the love of Jesus on the cross. "God is love" said it all for Sister. Often we would offer a large crucifix to her, and she would reverently kiss the wounds of Jesus. At any time of the day or night we might find her quietly gazing toward the crucifix on her wall. She who had longed to have the memory of the Sacred Passion of Jesus engraved on her heart knew how to live and how to die with Jesus.

On October 13, 2008, the staff at Carmel Home alerted us that Sr. Mary Bernadette's condition had suddenly worsened, and we were advised to keep



The family members who were able to attend Sr. Mary Bernadette's funeral
 Standing: **Mary Ann & Ted Rohling** (nephew), **Marc & Mary Kay Avery** (great niece),
Joe (nephew) & **Sue Rohling**, **Pat & Mike** (nephew) **Rohling**, **Tim Kreusch**.
 Seated: **Bob Rohling** (brother), **Anne Kreusch** (niece), **Paul Rohling** (brother)

Mary Dolores, Sr. Therese Marie and Sr. Mary quickly left for Carmel Home. The Divine Bridegroom, however, was eager to take to Himself His faithful bride who for so many years, had kept her lamp alight and ready for His coming. Sr. Mary Bernadette peacefully breathed her last at 2:22 p.m. When Mother and the Sisters arrived shortly afterward, we prayed the rosary and sang the Salve Regina. Our chaplain, Fr. Ray Clark, who had anointed Sr. Mary Bernadette a few hours before her death, came by to join in the prayers, as did Fr. Joseph Mills, Sister's confessor for many years. Sr. Francis Teresa and other Carmelite Sisters plus many of the staff came by for a final farewell.

The funeral Mass was scheduled for October 22nd, in order for Sr. Mary Bernadette's

watch with her as it seemed the end was near. Stella Higdon, who had continued to care for Sr. Mary Bernadette even at Carmel Home, continued to be on duty at her usual times. Sisters took turns staying at night or visiting to pray with our dying Sister.

At 2:10 p.m. on October 16, 2008, a sudden change came over Sr. Mary Bernadette. It was the feast of St. Margaret Mary, and our Sr. Margaret Mary was the privileged one to be staying in prayer with Sister at the time. Sr. Mary Bernadette was conscious because she gave a definite "yes" to Stella's question, "Sister, is it hard to breathe?" As the nurse could not measure Sister's vitals, she called us to come immediately. While the community gathered in chapel to offer prayers for the dying, Mother Catherine Marie, Sr.

relatives to arrive. Her two faithful brothers, Paul and Bob, were there together with the four children of Sr. Mary Bernadette's brother Gerald, and their spouses: **Ted** and **Mary Ann**, **Ann** and **Tim**, **Mike** and **Pat**, **Joe** and **Sue**. Ted's daughter, **Mary Kay Avery** and husband **Marc** also attended. We will always be grateful to **Mary Kay** for the many times she brought Paul and Bob to visit Sr. Mary Bernadette.

We can now hear Sister saying to us, "I am so happy because Jesus has come for me as He promised." Farewell beloved sister and bride of Christ. Do not forget us your fellow pilgrims as we continue the journey to the embrace of Jesus in the Bosom of the Father.

Words from the homily preached by Fr. J. Edward Bradley at Sister's funeral Mass

"Sister Mary Bernadette taught us how to live and how to die. 'Behold the Bridegroom is here; go out to meet Him' was the Entrance antiphon on the feast of St. Margaret Mary, the day the Risen Lord called Sr. Mary Bernadette home. This was just last week, during your novena to St. Paul of the Cross, your beloved founder. Imagine Sister's joy in having your founder who promised 'to welcome each one of you into Paradise' greet her and say, 'Sister, you are here in time to celebrate my feastday.' Father Bradley continued, saying: 'I can hear [St. Paul of the Cross] say to Sr. Mary Bernadette: 'You have meditated your entire religious life on the Passion of Our Lord, and by this sacred path you have reached union with God. In this most holy school you have learned true wisdom, for it was there that all the saints learned it....You have lived in such a way that all may know that you bore inwardly as well as outwardly the image of Christ crucified, the model of all gentleness and mercy.'"

A Loving Remembrance of our Deceased

ANTHONY LEON MCKIMMY

The following is a memorial **Sister Mary Veronica** wrote about her brother. "My only brother, Tony was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident Oct. 1, 2008, the anniversary of my entrance into religious life. The next day, the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, the Sisters and I were much consoled by the prayers and reflections for the day: *"They are all ministering spirits, sent to care for those on the way to salvation"*, and *"The Lord will send his angel to accompany you and to guide you safely on your way"*. As I felt Tony's presence by my side my heart was filled with gratitude at how graciously our God arranges all things. One of the Sisters reflected that only God knows what his angels were whispering in his ear to prepare him to meet the Lord as he drove down that highway one last time.

Tony left behind Linda, his beloved wife of over 30 years, his cherished children, Laura and Brian, and one grandson, the apple of his eye. I have been so grateful for all the assurances of prayers for the family and Tony, who so hastily made his departure at the age of 62."



SISTER BARBARA HORNBECK, SCN

Two days after the death of our Sister Mary Bernadette, **Sister Mary Dolores'** older sister, Sister Barbara, had a severe fall and died a week later on October 25, 2008 at Nazareth Home at 69 years of age. She had been a Sister of Charity of Nazareth for 51 years and spent many of those years as an RN in healthcare in both Kentucky and Ohio.

At the age of 16, Sister Barbara became an "adoptive mother" to 3 younger siblings when their Mother died suddenly. Though Sister Barbara was a shy person by nature, she kept the family home going, graduated from high school and was accepted at St. Joseph Infirmiry (a school of nursing) for nurse's training. However, God had other plans as He called her to seek admittance to Nazareth - fulfilling a desire to give herself to God as a religious. Our sympathy to the Sisters of her Congregation who truly live the charism of charity.

Her two sisters, Sister Mary Dolores and Betsy Brodnax of Gartland, TX miss her dearly. She was preceded in death by her parents and her brother Bill, all formerly of Owensboro KY.



KATHERINE SALTSMAN

Called into eternal life on February 20, 2009, Katherine Saltsman, of Sorgho, KY, an older sister of our **Sister Mary Elizabeth Sauer**, left a vacancy in the hearts of all of us sisters. It came as no surprise that Jesus came for Katherine while the community was chanting Vespers of the Office of the Solemn Commemoration of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ on the titular feast of the Passionist Congregation.

Like all disciples of Christ, Katherine knew from her long life of 82 years that sharing in the cross of Jesus was part of every day living. She was called into a deeper participation more than eleven years ago through the dialysis treatment she underwent three times weekly. She had a personal ministry of giving a card with a message of "God bless you" to others on their special days. Divine Providence arranged that she even lovingly reached out to our Nuns in Erlanger, KY and in the Philippines! Surely, Katherine heard the welcoming words of Jesus, "As long as you did it for one of these, you did it for Me. Come!"

Preceded in death by her husband, Red Saltsman, and two daughters, Katherine is survived by a loving, faithful daughter, Kathy and her husband Barry Blandford and six grandchildren. She is also survived by a Passionist family, especially the members who live in Whitesville, KY! God bless you eternally dear Katherine!



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Passionist Nuns
8564 Crisp Road
Whitesville, Kentucky 42378-9782

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Dear Friends in Christ,

We hope you will receive this newsletter in time for Holy Week when the whole Church relives in a special way the great mystery of our redemption. #1085 of the Catholic Catechism tells us that all other events happen once and then pass away, swallowed up in the past. **“The Paschal Mystery by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is—all that he did and suffered—participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all.”**

As followers of Christ, each of us must take up our daily cross and unite our prayers, works and sufferings to the love and merits of his death and resurrection. In doing so, we remember how He loved us, and we respond to His love by offering our lives as a participation with Christ in the salvation of the world.

In His love, as we conclude this newsletter, we promise you our prayers, especially during Holy Week and the Easter season, and we ask yours in return. God bless and reward you for the countless ways you continue to help us fulfill our Passionist vocation.

May the Passion of Jesus and the Sorrows of Mary be ever in our hearts!

Mother Catherine Marie and all the Passionist Nuns

Please remember us in your will and help continue our Contemplative Passionist Mission