

REFLECTIONS FOR SR. PIERRE ROBERTS

“BLESSED IS THE WOMAN WHO HAS AN ELIZABETH IN HER LIFE.”

Tonight’s reading was that of the Visitation...a familiar story as Mary hurries to visit her cousin. Elizabeth was herself available to God, steadfast, faithful, loving and generous...she was an older woman...a seasoned wife of a temple priest. Mary, also faithful, generous, and loving...a young woman seeking to give and to receive. Like an Elizabeth to Mary, S. Pierre has always been “the wise, solid, compassionate and loving” Elizabeth to me. I have turned often to her for advice and sisterly companionship. I believe each of us here is blessed for having an Elizabeth in our life.

Marie Ruth Corinne Chretien, was born in London, Ontario, Canada, on September 22, 1923. Hers is a fascinating and unique story about how she got to Sacred Heart Convent. Sometime before her second birthday, she was adopted by John and Christie Roberts...and her name became Gertrude Marie Roberts...more about this adventure later.

Gertrude lived with her adoptive parents in St. Lawrence, SD...her claim to fame was that she was the only Catholic kid town. She and her parents went to Miller to Church on Sunday...walking, hitching a ride, or riding on the road grader the three miles to Miller. Really, a road grader!!!. At age nine Gertrude’s mother died (1932). It was determined by social workers that her father could not raise her on his own, so she attended the Presentation Sisters home in Woonsocket. After one year this home was moved to Sioux Falls and Gertrude remained in the orphanage until she graduated from 8th grade. She was then allowed to go back to her father.

As a sophomore and junior, Gertrude attended Mount Marty High School. At the completion of her junior year, she had decided to enter the Convent. Mother Jerome told her should enter right after school in May because, “you might not get

here at all; and you really don't have anything to do this summer anyway." Now that's what I call a unique call to the vocation of religious life! So with friends who were already Postulants, she was "carried" on the shoulders of two of them, while the others followed singing "Hail, Hail, the Gangs All Here...the "parade went from MMHS up the back steps to the Business office and into the Convent...another claim to fame, I would guess.

In 1940 several months after entering, Gertrude's father died. She says in her autobiography—"Now SHC had truly become my home." On June 23, 1941, Gertrude became Pierre...even though she was told that "no masculine names were given in our community". S. Pierre says "I delight in the name 'Pierre', and I have always tried to remain as solid and rock-like as I can." I think she surely deserves the right to carry Peter's name. S. Pierre made 1st Profession in 1942 and Final Profession in 1945. This summer Pierre celebrated her Profession of 75th years...75 years of following the Benedictine Way to God.

Wait! There was one small glitch to handle before making final profession. This adventure began when Pierre was a novice...it was "revealed", "found out", "determined" that Novice Pierre was not an American citizen. After searching, some of the facts became clearer. Her adoptive parents had migrated from Ireland, then Canada, and then the U.S.; and had become citizens before she came to them. Pierre says "There were no records of how I entered the United States...so it was necessary for me to register under the Alien Registration Act and pursue citizenship. Since I may have been "smuggled in" with the help of Canadian and American priests, I had to return to Canada, fill out papers, and make a 'legal entry' into the U.S., which I did with Sr. Stanislaus' help in the summer of 1944. In May of 1950, I received my American citizenship...five years after final profession. Pierre...a master teacher, an incredible administrator, and a faithful formation director...the list is long and impressive.

- Taught from '43-'45 at St. Mary's in Aberdeen. She says S. Valentine "kept our heads above water and impressed us with our own human worth."

- Taught from '45-'53 at Sacred Heart in Yankton. "The famous team of S. Alphonsa and Sr. Martina guided me." Ss. Cynthia and Kathleen Courtney were among my students." "I loved SH and a bit of my heart is still there." I have a suspicion that she left a bit of her heart everywhere she ministered.
- Taught and was principal for the first time in 1953-'55 at St. Otto's in Webster. "I was never too sure whether I was a principal, who happened to be the superior...or the superior who happened to be principal. But during my first year there the pastor had a heart attack...really he did...Pierre's says "I don't believe I was that green or that threatening."
- In '55-60 was teacher and principal and superior at Christ the King in Sioux Falls. The school was being built that summer. "Sept 23, she says, we had to open the school...ready or not...and it was NOT. But families were beginning to register their children at the public school. We began with four grades...four teachers and two classrooms...wooden planks, building equipment and paper boxes were scattered around our rooms. Workmen came in and out all during the day.
- Pierre finished her bachelor's, went to Omaha to teach and work on her Master's in '60-61, S. Patricia Ann was her student here. Then back to Sioux Falls to Little Flower for a year.
- In 1963 Pierre was sent to teach English at Cedar Catholic in Hartington...became principal in 1965...fifteen wonderful years later, Pierre decided to leave this "most happy and precious place" About her heart...she left a bit everywhere but still always had a complete and full heart.
- 1980 Pierre went to MMC where she was Registrar, VP for Academic Affairs and Academic Advisor, until 1995. Not all three of them at the same time...it may have felt that way.
- Pierre became Formation Director in 1992-2001. She says "I had the privilege of working with some of the finest women in the area." (Raise your hands)
- S. Pierre listed no less than 20, committee appointments, boards, and

organizations she was on and/or the head of...including, of course the Monastery Council and Finance Committee.

At this point I would like to share with Pierre and all of you A Pilgrim Prayer I wrote some years ago, shared with S. Pierre and she said...would you like to give that at my wake? I laughed. But here we are and here I am. This poem, I believe speaks of all of our journeys in some way...the ups and downs, the beautiful places and the not so beautiful.

A PILGRIM PRAYER

O Pilgrim God,
You once led a people
dear to your heart
through the desert land of their
exodus journey.
Walk with me on a pilgrim journey
through the scenic and wilderness lands of my heart.

Stop with me at the beautiful places,
the safe places,
the shrines
along the way.
Show me the ways you entered my life
at these sacred places.
Tell me the sacred stories of our journey together
to these places.
Tell me how you stood beside me
and watched and waited
at each sacred place—
the beautiful ones.

Stop with me now—stop and pray—
at the places

where I have been lost...
deluded...
and imprisoned
Where I have known
defeat...
loss...
and failure.

These, too, are sacred places.
Anoint these places with eyes that see the beauty
with a glance of love.
Bless these places with out-stretched arms
with a glance of love.
Make holy these places with pilgrim feet
with a glance of love.

Pray with me at each sacred place
show me the person you created
in your image
Teach me to love this person
Teach me to walk into your heart
each time
and strengthen me in all my sacred places.
Finally, my pilgrim God
...transform all within me that yearns
for renewal, for change, for growth
...refresh what is stale
...open what is closed
...and rekindle what has grown
too dim to give light.
Make more sacred all the sacred places
Journey with me, my pilgrim God
to the promised land of Your covenant.

Pierre, you are my Elizabeth...and I'm quite sure others here could say the same. You are steadfast, faithful, loving, and compassionate. You have made the journey...all the sacred places are more sacred. Thank you and I love you.