

Reflection

Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate
Joliet, IL

Sr. Mary Agnes Cross, OSF

By: Sr. Elaine Kerscher— September 27, 2024

Today we gather to celebrate the life of Sister Mary Agnes Cross. We celebrate and give thanks for her faith, her call to religious life, and her faithful response every day of her life. The readings and songs of this Mass of Christian Burial were chosen by Mary Agnes, and they give us a glimpse into her spirit and her relationship with God and God's people. It is not surprising that she chose as her theme a line from the prophet Isaiah: "*God has sent me to bring Good News*" (Isaiah 6:1). In a very real sense, Mary Agnes felt from a young age that the Spirit of the Lord was with her. Her anointing at Baptism planted the seeds of faith that gave her the grace and courage to follow the Spirit's call throughout her life.

Mary Agnes wrote in 1997: "I had always wanted to be a Franciscan from my earliest days at home in my family...and I resonated with Francis' love for all creation." She adds that her parents, Frank and Agnes, were in tune with nature, especially animals and flowers. Her fondest memories were of her father in the garden or with his beehives, and her mother, cooking the garden vegetables for the family meals and decorating the house with the flowers. Her mother loved to watch the birds and listen to them sing. Mary Agnes' love for all creation was nurtured by her family life.

With her entrance into a Franciscan community after high school and having made her first profession of vows in 1959, the childhood desire of Mary Agnes became a reality. As a Sister of St. Francis, she embraced the call to

bring Good News to all she met. Whether in the classroom as an elementary school teacher, a parish director of religious education and adult formation, a licensed practical nurse in healthcare settings, as the Unit Assistant for Memory and Aging Services at the Dolan Center in Chardon, Ohio, or as a selfless volunteer at Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Mary Agnes served the needs of her brothers and sisters with loving compassion and kindness. She met the challenges of change, transition, personal growth, and ministerial diversity with the same courage and openness to the Spirit that had guided her since her earliest years. St. Paul reminds us that it is through Jesus' love for us that we are empowered to face the challenges of life, for nothing "will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39). This was a guiding principle in Mary Agnes' journey of faith. She knew well the message of Jesus in today's Gospel: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me" (John 14:1).

Mary Agnes was a faithful woman of prayer. She took to heart the words of the *Constitutions* of our Joliet Franciscan Congregation: "We are called to be women of prayer. We rely not on our own strength, but on the power of a loving Father in whom we place complete trust" (*Constitutions*, #13-14). In preparing my reflections for today, I had the opportunity, actually the privilege, to hold in my hands the book of *Franciscan Morning and Evening Prayer* that Mary Agnes used daily. It is worn from age

and repeated use, the words on the cover have faded, and the cover has separated from the book's spine. As I flipped casually through the pages, I noticed that many phrases were underlined in ink and I saw her personal writing in some of the margins, so I began to look more carefully. Any of you who have ever received a birthday card, a thank-you note, or other correspondence from Mary Agnes, know that she always underlined in ink the words and phrases that she wanted to emphasize.

She did the same with her prayer; just three examples. Underlined in her prayerbook was: "...serve God with great humility." Mary Agnes wrote: "Lord, I need patience and humility right now; I need courage, too." In a psalm that included a reference to rich people, she underlined: "...their wealth will not go down to the grave with them." And she wrote in the margins, with her characteristic sense of humor: "They do not have U-hauls in back of caskets." She then underlined the prayer: "Teach us what is truly treasure to live for and to die for." Mary Agnes wrote: "The Treasure is you, O Lord!" *That* is what we celebrate today.

**Reflection by:
Sr. Elaine Kerscher
Mass of Christian Burial
September 27, 2024**