

Reflection

Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate
Joliet, IL

Sr. Ruth Anne Berry, OSF

By: Sr. Margaret Guider, OSF, Monday, April 27, 2026

Memorial Liturgy celebrated in the Chapel of St. Patrick's Residence on April 27, 2026

Today, we gather to remember and celebrate the life of someone who has touched the lives of each of us – as Ruth Anne, Sister Norma Clare, Aunt Ruth, Irmã Norma Clara, Sister Ruth, Irmã Rute, Ruth – someone with as many names as there are relationships that were so important to her over the course of 94 years. Included among these relationships are countless children, women and men, to whom Sister Ruth dedicated herself as teacher, musician, pastoral minister, Franciscan sister, formator, congregational leader, Franciscan Clarean mentor, spiritual companion, and, most importantly, a devoted family member as daughter, sister, sister-in law, aunt and cousin. Indeed, it is obvious that in Sr. Ruth's "book of life" there are as many chapters as there were relationships.

In this morning's memorial liturgy, through images, songs and readings, we are provided with insights into the foundations that informed and influenced Sister Ruth's vocation as a Franciscan-Clarean missionary disciple.

I suspect that for many of us, the Psalm response is still echoing in our hearts, that gentle, confident and mystical refrain: *"You will show me the path of life, you my hope and my shelter, In your presence is endless joy, at your side is my home forever."* This is where it all began from a youthful age – as an aspirant – aspiring to embrace the Franciscan way of life. Similar to

Saint Francis of Assisi, who in the dilapidated chapel of San Damiano, heard the voice of Christ come forth from the Crucifix, "Go, rebuild my church, for it is falling into ruins."

Evidence suggests that Sister Ruth also experienced the Lord speaking to *her* heart, for among her parting wishes, as she prepared to make her journey home to God, was that through her prayer card (which appears on the cover of your worship booklet), every one of us would be drawn to gaze upon, to consider, to contemplate, and to imitate the One who laid down his life for his friends. Perhaps hoping, that we too, would experience the loving presence of the One who is always and everywhere "God with Us."

In the first reading, proclaimed by Ruth's niece Liz, we are invited to understand more deeply the power and mystery of the God who calls each of us by name. While I don't know the reason why Ruth's parents, Norma Clare and Dorwin James Berry, baptized her Ruth Anne, many of us do know how Ruth discovered the depth of meaning in the narrative of Ruth and Naomi from beginning to end. "I will never leave you" was her lifelong commitment to her Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate, especially those in Brazil. Fidelity to one's commitment, mindful of the sufferings, uncertainties, fears, anxieties and sacrifices that it involved, was the gift of self that Ruth gave so generously, even amidst the trials and tribulations that St. Francis described to Brother Leo as "perfect joy." As Naomi realized, and we

all realized as well, Ruth was determined – “Your people will be my people.” And determined, she remained steadfast until death. “Wherever you die, I will die and there be buried.”

In the second reading from Saint Clare’s Letter to Agnes of Prague read by Sister Sharon, we hear the encouraging advice that Saint Clare gave to a loved one going through difficult times: *Hold on to what you believe. Never abandon the call you have received. Go forward. Do not be deterred by obstacles in the way. The Spirit of God is with you. Be joyful.* Inspired and guided by the words and example of Saint Clare, especially in challenging and troubling times, Sister Ruth found ways of sharing the wisdom of Saint Clare with others.

Turning now to the Gospel of Matthew, while it has been nearly a three-month wait to gather together to give thanks to God for the life and legacy of Sister Ruth, this Easter season provides us with confidence in the promise of resurrection, but also another story that sheds

light on Sister Ruth’s vocation as disciple and missionary. As the women disciples remind us, following Jesus means taking risks, it involves sorrows, disappointments and dangerous memories of the past, but it also involves joys, hopes, and visionary dreams for the future. It means not running away from the Cross, but daring, even when afraid, to run to the tomb, to discover He is risen as He said, to meet the Risen One unexpectedly on the road, and to receive a missioning that begins with the words: “Do not be afraid.”

In conclusion, I invite you to look once again at the cover of the booklet and ponder Sister Ruth’s prayer of thanksgiving to God. And in her memory, let us pray that God will speak kindly to our hearts and give us the courage to take risks for the sake of love.

And let us hear Sister Ruth’s voice saying to each of us: “*I have seen the Lord.*”

Sr. Margaret Guider, OSF
Mass of Christian Burial
April 27, 2026