

Remembering



Grace Ann Loperena, CSJ

October 10, 1926 – June 19, 2017

Two things had life-long importance to Sister Grace Ann: her love of God and her dedication to her Basque culture.

That accounts for her attraction to prayer and her love of family. Born in San Diego, California on October 10, 1926, the fifth and last child of Martin Loperena, a shepherd, and Gregoria Iturri, a homemaker. She was baptized Grace Anne, preceded by siblings Julio, Julia, Juanita and Joe. Both her parents had come from the small Spanish town of Garalda in the Pyrenees Mountains. As a child, the young Grace admitted to being ashamed about her Father's occupation because it wasn't a job in the city like everyone else's Dad. Later, she would appreciate and value the shepherd's "in-touchness" with God in nature and with the sheep. In her own words, she writes, "Being Basque, Mama and Papa held

firmly to their strong cultural values of faith and family. Together, but in their own traditional roles, my parents centered their lives on us as family." That blessing continued to be reflected in the close lifelong relationship she enjoyed with her siblings and family and the bond they share with future generations. School years were uneventful. Grace attended The Academy of Our Lady of Peace. She was actively involved in school and social activities and held leadership positions all four years. Of these years she wrote, "... as a teenager I was attracted to the quiet of school retreats and I sensed deep stirrings within me, drawing me to religious life." The decision to enter the Sisters of St. Joseph after graduation was very difficult for her parents but they did not prevent her from following her call. She entered in September 1944, receiving the habit on March

19, 1945 and the name Sister St. Martin. First profession followed on March 19, 1947 and final profession on August 15, 1950.

Sister St. Martin's early ministry was in elementary education both as teacher and principal. She was missioned to St. Jarlath's in Oakland, St. Patrick's in San Diego, and St. Bernadette's and St. Jerome's in Los Angeles. Between 1962 and 1966 she served as elementary supervisor in the Archdiocesan Department of Education in San Francisco. Sometime during these years, when given a choice, Sister St. Martin returned to her baptismal name and became known as Sister Grace Ann.

The call to leadership began in 1968 as Assistant Provincial followed by a term as Provincial Superior starting in 1974. These were years of beginnings and endings, of highlights and challenges. Although Sister Grace Ann oversaw the ending of many CSJ works, these were offset by several new ventures. Many sisters were leaving religious life; difficult decisions had to be made about CSJ presence in elementary schools. Yet, St. Joseph Center in Venice opened and (we) the CSJs purchased Marina Mercy Hospital in Marina del Rey. Queen of the Valley Academy in Fresno closed but we offered hospitality to six Vietnamese sisters who eventually became CSJs. The House of Studies became Carondelet Center and the new retirement wing was opened. Perhaps dearest to her heart was the opening of Villa Maria House of Prayer in La Habra.

A year of study and personal renewal followed her

years as a provincial leader. Time for prayer and discernment opened her to a new direction in her life and ministry. She wrote, "Groups of sisters invited me to guide them in praying with scripture. These experiences led to my being asked to offer 6-8 day retreats in community. It was then I became aware of my ability to share the gifts of faith and prayer with others and to offer them guidance and encouragement." She was being called to a ministry of spirituality.

Upon completion of the ARC (*Apostolic Religious Community*) program in Rome in 1981 and following the graces of her discernment, Grace Ann pursued a position as pastoral minister in St. James Catholic Community in Solana Beach. She served for eleven years in Adult Faith Formation and Bereavement Ministry. (It was here that she made many life-long friends.) The fruit of this ministry was loving respect and many life-long friends. In time, rather than serving in a parish community, she felt more and more drawn to focus her service directing retreats and offering guidance and spiritual direction. As a child, she had dreamt of living in a town where all the people were good. A move to life and ministry at Villa Maria House of Prayer in La Habra was like a dream come true!

Sister Grace Ann remained in the ministry of spirituality at Villa Maria for eighteen years. She offered spiritual direction and encouragement to many of our sisters as well as lay men and women who came for quiet time at the Villa. Remarkably, this ministry was offered to all

seekers not just Catholics. In 2013, as her physical health declined, Sister Grace Ann decided the time had come for her to join Holy Family Community. Although missioned to "prayer and witness", Sister Grace Ann was an active, prayerful presence among the sisters.

Indeed, she continued to be present despite her weakness and suffering. Waiting for God to call her home was not easy. At last, on June 19, in the early morning she was summoned by the Good Shepherd. Folded in his arms she will continue to model the saving virtues of deep listening and the wisdom of our CSJ maxim—"Do

not go ahead of grace...." How simple, yet so hard. Let us remember the words of St. Paul to the Hebrews: "remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." Thank you Grace Ann for your faithful example. ✞

~ Written by Sister Adrienne Clare Pereira, CSJ

