



## *Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate*

Sophie Cecilia Petro was born in Streator, Illinois, on May 14, 1919. The daughter of John Petro and Elizabeth Harcarich, immigrants from Slovakia, she was inspired by the Joliet Franciscans who were her teachers. Hiking two miles to school each day, along with her two brothers and two sisters, young Sophie was motivated to learn and speak English and eager to teach her parents. A member of the children's choir, she loved to sing and to perform. She attended St. Francis Academy as an aspirant, along with four other young girls from Streator, and became a postulant at the age of 16. As a novice she was given the name of a rather obscure virgin and martyr of the Fourth Century. Known by the religious name, Sr. Mary Firmina, she definitely brought new flare to the saint's memory as she made her profession as a Sister of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate.

Sr. Firmina loved her vocation. Described as "cheerful and industrious" by her superiors, her creative energy, enthusiasm, light-heartedness and "lively actions" made her a much beloved teacher by those she affectionately called her 'little ones'. Though not a disciplinarian, her "joy of spirit" was a signature characteristic in the classroom and in community. Self-possessed, yet sensitive, Sophie's life was one of striving to be the best that she could in the sight of God, her sisters, and those whom she taught and served. Known for being a bit too talkative, and even a little too boisterous at times, her charity toward others and her humility in times of testing also were known to those with whom she lived and ministered. Writing about religious life in June of 1938, she said, "It means a great deal to me, for it is the life I have chosen ... It means a closer union with Christ ... doing all that I can and all that I am capable of doing ... I know that everything shall not be easy, but I will say with St. Paul, 'I can do all things in Him who strengthens me' ... it gives me an assurity for the goal towards which we all strive – our heavenly home."

Always ready and willing to try something new, in 1962, Sr. Sophie was among the sisters who, in response to Mother Borromeo's invitation to go to Brazil, made themselves available for missionary service. "I never tire of walking," she wrote, "and I

# *Alleluia!*



*Sister Sophie Petro, OSF*

don't mind doing any service for one in pain or need." She went on to say, "If I am not chosen, I shall continue to be His little missionary at heart." And so she did, continuing on as a teacher for twenty more years. Then in 1983, Sr. Sophie, responding to another urging of the Spirit, left the classroom and became a temporary member of St. Clare House of Prayer. Though missing many aspects of her former life she wrote: "Now I gather all 45 years of my various classes and grades into my daily prayers. God bless them all." In subsequent years Sr. Sophie continued to respond with a generous heart wherever needs emerged – as a loving aunt of many nieces and nephews, as tutor, as sacristan, and most recently as a minister of prayer.

In May of 1941, Sr. Sophie wrote to Mother Thomasine requesting to make perpetual profession "in order to serve God faithfully until death." Sixty-seven years later, on October 4, 2008, Sr. Sophie achieved her heart's desire. In that same letter she ended by saying "I wish to express my deepest love and gratitude. I wish to thank you for the care, both spiritual and temporal, given me." Though written many years ago, to know Sr. Sophie is to imagine that as she made her way home to God, she primmed herself properly and with a twinkle in her eye, a smile on her face, and the story of her life carried in her faithful, 'boisterous' and loving heart, she asked the one she called her Divine Spouse for one little favor – that these words of hers would be found, read and heard – as if for the first time – by all those who loved her in this life and for whom she will be waiting with open arms in the next.

## *Sister Sophie Petro, OSF*

*May 14, 1919 — October 4, 2008*

<i>Born:</i>	May 14, 1919
<i>Parents:</i>	John and Elizabeth (Harcarich) Petro
<i>Postulancy:</i>	September 8, 1935
<i>Novitiate:</i>	August 12, 1936
<i>First Profession:</i>	August 12, 1938
<i>Final Profession:</i>	August 12, 1941
<i>Entered New Life:</i>	October 4, 2008

### **Ministry History**

1938-1943	Teacher: Grades K, 1, 2; Sacred Heart, Huron St., Chicago, Illinois
1943-1947	Teacher: Grade K; St. Joseph, Joliet, Illinois
1947-1948	Teacher: Grade K; St. Peter, Mansfield, Ohio
1948-1949	Teacher: Grade 1; Our Lady of Guadalupe, Chicago
1949-1950	Teacher: Grade K; St. Mary, Des Plaines, Illinois
1950-1952	Teacher: Grades 2, 3; St. Pascal, Chicago
1952-1953	Teacher: Grades 1, 2, 3; St. Denis, Benton, Missouri
1953-1956	Teacher: Grades 1, 2; St. Peter, Mansfield, Ohio
1956-1958	Teacher: Grades 2, 3, 4, 5; St. Joseph, Joliet
1958-1959	Teacher: Grade 4; Holy Family, Cleveland, Ohio
1959-1960	Teacher: Grades 2, 3; St. John the Baptist, Payne, Ohio
1960-1962	Teacher: Grade 3, St. Peter, Mansfield
1962-1963	Teacher: Grades 3, 4, 5; St. Joseph, Manhattan, Illinois
1963-1965	Teacher: Grade 5; St. Procop, Cleveland, Ohio
1965-1966	Teacher: Grade 5; St. Francis de Sales, Toledo, Ohio
1966-1967	Teacher: Grades 5, 6; St. John the Baptist, Joliet
1967-1968	Teacher: Grade 6; Sacred Heart, Winnetka, Illinois
1968-1969	Teacher: Grade 6; St. Matthew, Champaign, Illinois
1969-1978	Teacher: Grades 6, 7; St. Stephen, Streator, Illinois
1978-1983	Teacher: Grade 4; Holy Family, Joliet
1983-1985	Temporary member St. Clare, House of Prayer, Kankakee, Illinois
1985-1991	Sacristan, Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet
1991-2001	Tutor, Motherhouse Education Programs, Joliet
2001- 2008	Retired, Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet

<i>Wake:</i>	Wednesday, October 8, 2008, 2:00-6:45 p.m., C1 Auditorium, Our Lady of Angels, Joliet
<i>Prayer Service:</i>	Wednesday, October 8, 2008, 4:45 p.m., Our Lady of Angels, Joliet
<i>Mass of Christian Burial:</i>	Wednesday, October 8, 2008, 7:00 p.m., Our Lady of Angels, Joliet
<i>Burial:</i>	Thursday, October 9, 2008 leaving Our Lady of Angels at 9:00 a.m. to St. Stephen Cemetery, Streator, IL
<i>Interment:</i>	St. Stephen Roman Catholic Cemetery in Streator, Illinois. Block #7. Lot 87 N
<i>Predeceased by:</i>	Her parents John and Elizabeth (Harcarich) Petro; her sisters Mary (Art) Ottenbach and Elizabeth (Robert) Norris; her brothers Andrew (Doretta), George and John
<i>Survived by:</i>	Nieces and nephews

*Rest in Peace, Sister Sophie*