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Sister M. Bertina Faltin

"Death in the field" -- For the second time in a month and a half, with no warning, the Great Harvester plucked a worker from the mission field with his all-persuasive "Come." And the Community yielded another member to God - Sister M. Bertina of Immaculate Conception, Toledo, Ohio. Her passing occurred Thursday, February 1st. She was the former Margaret Faltin of Johnstown, had been a member of the Community forty-five years, and was sixty-two years of age.

Sister had the evening before not been feeling well, and next morning the Doctor, because of a heart involvement, ordered her taken to the hospital. Though she protested she was not sick enough for that, she said she would get dressed leisurely, and Sister Jacqueline should return to her music lesson. Some while later a thud alarmed Sister and, hurrying up stairs, she found the patient unconscious on the floor. She called priest, doctor, and inhalator squad. Father Southard of Our Lady of Guadalupe anointed Sister, and the firemen worked with Sister. Doctor Wiedemann on his examination at 11:20 pronounced her dead - another victim of coronary occlusion. Sister had been under his care for two years, and he gave his verdict with tears.

In Monsignor Sawkin's absence, Father Dietzer made arrangements for a parish funeral Mass. From Coyle's Mortuary, Sister was brought to Immaculate Conception Church Friday afternoon to lie in state that evening. The Office of the Dead was chanted at five o'clock, and in the evening the Scouts, the Sisters, and the parishioners in turn recited the rosary. The next morning Father Dietzer celebrated the Solemn Requiem Mass and delivered the sermon--an appropriate tribute in which he compared Sister Bertina with the Little Flower. "Living tributes" to Sister were the six priests in the sanctuary, Mothers Borromeo and Immaculate, Sister Edna, our Sisters from our schools in the Toledo Diocese, the Tiffin Sisters and Ursulines, and many parishioners and school children.

At Our Lady of Angels, a Low Mass on Monday morning was celebrated by Father Henry Wilkening of Park Forest, with Father Joseph Liguori, O. Carm. of India in the sanctuary. Both priests had been sponsored in their seminary days by Sister Bertina's sister Helen. - Father Wilkening led the prayers at Resurrection Cemetery.

In Sister Bertina the Community had enjoyed, for forty-five years, association with a cheerful, dedicated member. Appointed to domestic work, she made of these a hidden apostolate. No teacher planned her lessons with more care than Sister Bertina worked out her daily menus. A gracious hostess, she welcomed having guests and none ever felt they were imposing. Futher, her genial hospitality opened doors to countless school children. All loved being sent to the convent on an errand, for Sister always had a supply of cookies to share - and "no one could make cookies like Sister Bertina." But more than her cookies, children loved her friendliness, her infectious laugh. This was the case at every mission --St. Mary's and Corpus Christi, Columbus; Holy Family, Cleveland; St. John, Joliet; St. Clement and De Sales in Chicago; and at her last, longest, and best-loved placement, "I. C." Toledo. Just preceding that was her one trying appointment of but a single year, St. Michael, Sigel, where "there were only cornfields and the cemetery" - and one couldn't be neighborly with them.

Sister was deeply interested in school and in school activities. She knew the children, knew their names and their families; and she was a friend to all. From this vantage point she did a truly apostolic work. In her reverence for the service of God, she encouraged likely boys to enter the priesthood. If she found one who could not finance his way, she would locate a sponsor. In the two cases of Fathers Wilkening and Joseph Liguori, the sponsor was her own sister. She was also instrumental in bringing back a number of lapsed Catholics. Her friendly, sympathetic nature encouraged confidences, and where she found difficulties she would put the question, "When were you to the Sacraments last?" Without resentment, accepting the advice so simply given, they would return to the practice of their religion.

Sister's apostolic activities had a firm foundation. Ever true to the religious ideal, she supernaturalized all she did. Hers was the Franciscan spirit of joyous service to God and man. A woman of prayer she loved the Mass, meditation, the Breviary. She also loved the saints, and of her many "holy helpers" none was more persistently invoked than Martin de Porres. "Mice and all," one Sister said, "Martin was her mainstay." Nor did her many pious intentions exclude the more commonplace variety-- Notre Dame football team could not have gussed how many Hail Mary's that went heavenward were not their own.

Sister also loved spiritual reading. She enjoyed doing it herself; she enjoyed listening to it. Often on Sunday morning at Toledo, while she prepared the dinner, Sister Patrice would read to her. Always she gave alert attention; sometimes she would ask questions, sometimes make a comment, but ever she was a grateful, receptive listener learning more about God and drawing closer to Him. - Her entire life was a preparation for the end. All her family had died suddenly. She often remarked cheerfully that she wished this, too--wanted 'to die in her shoes, with her habit on.' May God, Who in His loving Providence granted her this simple wish, fulfill too her great desire, her life's striving: May He give Himself to her for all Eternity.