

SISTER M. AGNELLA, O.S.F.
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"We saw a saint die!" Little Sister Agnella, two months short of her 95th birthday -- seventy years in the service of God -- slipped away on the eve of Epiphany.

She died with her Sisters around her, Sisters who had hurried down the quiet corridor to her room when the word went out that there "was a change." And Sister Agnella, it seemed, waited until they got there. Then there was only the last quiet sigh - it was all over -- and Life began.

The last thing she saw in those final moments was the crucifix, held firmly in her wrinkled little hands. It was her Assisi crucifix, the crucifix "fixed" with a rubber band to hold the Corpus in place. When she died she was holding the crucifix up, and she looked as Francis must have looked at his Transitus. It was the last thing she saw on earth.

"We saw a saint die!" -- praying, praying to the very end -- "for the honor and glory of God!" -- praying the dear, familiar prayers that had etched themselves into her memory and into her heart. "We saw a saint die!"

If ever a person gave lie to the idea that saints are remote, uninterested, unapproachable, that person was Sister Agnella. She walked a very real earth, and she knew the pleasures that the good God had put in the way of His creatures. She could appreciate "Coffee -- GOOD Coffee!" and she could find pleasure in the solitaire she played in the quiet afternoons. She could appreciate friendship and the attention of her friends. She was grateful for Sister Candida who "read into her good ear," -- and to Sister Rosalinda who prayed aloud with her the Crown and the Rosary.

"We saw a saint die!" -- later than she had supposed, later than many had predicted, for there was great resiliency in that frail little body. Before she left for Brazil, Mother Borromeo had visited Sister Agnella. "I don't think I'll be here when you come back," Sister had told her, "so this is my final goodbye. Pardon me for everything I did to cause you trouble!" And she made a promise: "My prayers will be for the Community -- poor as they are -- I will ask the Lord to make up for what I cannot give." She was utterly sincere -- a saint never believes in the sanctity that is so crystal-clear to those about her.

"We saw a saint live! -- many of us, and we have been blessed by the experience. We have seen sanctity in action -- in the work that was never too much to do -- never too humble to perform; in the self-effacing, "Whatever YOU care to do, Sister," - never what she might prefer; in the prayer that she LIVED and that she WAS; in her concern for the Community, and in the past weeks, for Mother Borromeo's health.

She said something very significant in her last days. "We must have peace on the inside before we can have peace on the outside." And as her thoughts turned to the General Chapter, she added, "And the Delegates must be good on the inside first."

"Good on the inside first!" -- that seems to summarize Sister Agnella's journey to sanctity. And that is why, at the journey's end, "We saw a SAINT die!"

GOD GRANT HER REST ETERNAL!

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