



Sister Alcantara Held, OSF

Another week -- another death at the Motherhouse! Early in the morning on the Saturday following Sister Ferdinand's burial and just one week from the day she died, the Angel of Death summoned Sister Alcantara to her eternal reward. Sister died about five minutes after five on the morning of January 25, 1936, after a prolonged illness. At the time of her death she was in the sixty-eighth year of her age and the fifty-second of her religious life. Had she lived she would have been among the Jubilarins of the summer of 1936 who are to be the first Golden Jubilarians to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their religious profession. This group had made a petition in 1934 not to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their reception.

In August, 1925 Sister Alcantara was appointed Dean of the College which was opened in September of that year to outside young women under the name of Assisi Junior College. In a year or so after her appointment as Dean, Sister's health began to fail noticeably. Paralysis agitans, commonly called creeping palsy, had been gradually affecting her speech, her walk, etc, and it was remarkable how much she was able to accomplish in spite of her physical handicaps. She was intensely interested in the growth and the welfare of the College, and seemed anxious to remain year after year as Dean. In the summer of 1932 she asked to give up her work as Dean. For some months following she endeavored to regain strength by resting during the time between the various Community exercises. In the spring she thought she felt better and stronger and asked to help in the College library. She assisted in the reading and reference room for several hours each day. She did this during the following year, 1933-1934, but in 1934-1935 it was deemed best that she give this up. The Superior General advised her not to make this demand on the little strength she had. She became more and more helpless as time went on, until in June 1935 her condition was so serious that she was forced to go to the infirmary. It had been her earnest ^{desire} to remain with the Community and follow the exercises as long as she possibly could. When she went to the infirmary she had often expressed the desire to be able to go to the chapel just once more. She lived in hope from week to week that next week would find her stronger. On Christmas morning she had the happiness of having her desire fulfilled -- She was able to be in the chapel for the two low Masses. It must have cost her great effort to accomplish this, but the joy she experienced was worth it all. It was indeed "just the once more." A month later to the very day, Sister Alcantara lay a corpse -- Her soul had gone to God.

The Solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated in St. Joseph's Chapel in the Motherhouse on January 27. The chaplain, Rev. Thomas Rust, O.F.M. was the celebrant, and the Rev. Angelus Zwiesler, O.F.M. deacon, the Rev. Pascal Rollmann, O.F.M., subdeacon. The senior class of the College in cap and gown, formed an escort for the body in and out of the chapel - A tribute of honor to the first Dean of the College.

Because of the great distance and the very cold weather, none of her relatives was able to be present. They had visited Sister in June and at that time they had said they would not return for the funeral should Sister die within the year. Two of her former pupils, Miss Kiesling and Miss Demes, devoted to Sister Alcantara through many years, attended the funeral. She was buried on one of the coldest days of a very cold winter. Because of the severe weather only a few of the Sisters were able to be present for the burial in St. John's Cemetery.

Sister Alcantara was among the first Sisters who attended DePaul University in Chicago when it was opened to the Sisters in 1911. She was an earnest student and merited outstanding scholarship at the University. She was the first member of our Congregation on whom an academic degree was conferred, having received the Bachelor of Arts in 1916 and the Master of Arts in 1918. In 1922-23 Sister Alcantara and Sister Thomasine attended the Catholic University at Washington. They were the first Sisters of the Congregation to be sent to a university as resident students and for some years the only two.

Whatever knowledge Sister Alcantara acquired through the opportunities which the Community granted her, seconded by her own untiring efforts to make the best of the opportunities, she generously and willingly passed on to the other Sisters. Nothing seemed too much nor to take too much of her time. During the years she was in connection with the Normal Department of the Community, it seemed to be her greatest joy to help the postulants, novices and the Sisters whom she taught or who came to her for any help.