

SISTER M. CHARLOTTE,, O.S.F.

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You always knew when Sister Charlotte was going down the hall to Chapel by the sound of her ring on the hand rail. And Sister Charlotte was always going down the hall to Chapel -- even on Holy Innocents Day. She wasn't feeling exactly "Delicious," but she was well enough to go to Chapel for Mass and Holy Communion and for Visits to the Blessed Sacrament during the day's Exposition. In the afternoon there was Confession, and Sister Charlotte was right in line, rosary in hand as always.

You always knew when Sister Charlotte was around by her cheerful greeting and her laugh. "Bright and early!" she would say whenever a tray was brought to her. The day could have been muggy or the evening gray -- no matter. For Sister Charlotte it was always "Bright and early!"

"Behold-ja!" that had been her standard exclamation for as long as most of us can remember. It covered everything -- pleasure at meeting a friend -- amazement at a kindness -- gratitude for a service. "Behold-ja!" she would say, and her hands would go up in that typical gesture so familiar to those who had shared even a little of her 67 years of religious life. You knew Sister Charlotte was around when you heard "Behold-ja!"

You learned to identify Sister Charlotte, too, by her rosary. She was never without it, never. She did condescend to put it down while she ate, but it was always within reach, and once the meal was over, she took up the beads again. How many times had she fingered them prayerfully during her almost 90 years of living? How many times had she said, as she did on her last visit to Chapel, "I will pray for you"? For prayer was not a luxury to Sister Charlotte, and she must have learned its art well during the long years of service in her kitchens -- keeping the house -- making the Sisters happy -- helping them to laugh. "If I always say things right," she once remarked, "nobody laughs!" And Sister Charlotte believed in laughter -- just as she believed in prayer.

She'd had a beautiful Christmas, and what did it matter if "I can't see"? There were Sisters around to be eyes for her -- Sister John Ann who helped her with her "Thank You" notes -- Sister Andre to dial the phone. Although she had more than a passing acquaintance with some four languages, Sister Charlotte always made it a point to have someone else write her letters, because "Their words would sound better." Once Sister Olga protested, "But Sister Charlotte, I don't know these people! What can I write?" Sister Charlotte answered, "That's all right, dear -- just make like a University!"

She was concerned about Mother Borromeo's hospitalization, and one of her last questions was "how's Mother?" She knows the answer better than the doctors now, but on Thursday it was the anxious, concerned query of a devoted Sister.

Yes, you always knew when Sister Charlotte was around. But in the early morning hours of Friday, Sister Charlotte suddenly went away -- and no one knew. When Sister Edwin checked her room at 4:30, she was sleeping quietly. Then, sometime around 5:45 occurred what may have been a massive coronary -- and Sister Charlotte did not wake "Bright and early!" for a new day.

Can't you just picture her stepping into Eternity -- and can't you almost catch the echo of her wonder-filled "Behold-ja!"?

GOD GRANT HER REST ETERNAL!!