

SISTER M. NARCISSA, O.S.F.
September 7, 1967

"Are you afraid of dying, Sister Narcissa?" Sister Celine had asked her. Sister Narcissa gave the question a moment's thought. "Well, 50% yes -- 50% no!" she answered. She was not one for heroics, and she would have been the last person in the world to think of herself as "anything special." Her more than forty years of devoted service to her Sisters? That was her vocation, she would have answered. The hard years in the old convents, with the stairs, the inconveniences, the heavy work? Well, what was so wonderful about all that, she would have wondered. Everyone had something hard. Life wasn't meant to be easy, and she hadn't come to the convent to do nothing!

It was that dedication to duty that made her restive under the restraint of illness. "I will go back to St. Procopius, won't I?" she had asked Mother. "I will go back on mission?" And when Mother gently replied, "Just get well first, Sister," Sister Narcissa resigned herself to convalescence and clung to the hope that "when I'm better, I'll go back again!" But she was never to return to her kitchen, to the Sisters whose welfare was her responsibility and her joy. Sister Narcissa died at 12:30 Thursday morning, one month after entering the hospital.

For two successive years, she had come in for the August retreat, and each time had been stricken before it really began. But there could be no doubt that Sister Narcissa made her own private retreat. She was never one to "let her prayers go." On the last afternoon of her life, she remarked that she still had to say her Office and Crown, and she did just that. She couldn't hold her Breviary, but her lips moved in the "Paters" that replaced the psalms. Sickness was no excuse for not praying, unless the pain made praying impossible. And on that last afternoon, Sister Narcissa could still pray.

Not that the pain was gone, but the agony of the previous night had abated. The scheduled surgery had been postponed. It was an ordeal her tired old heart could not stand -- and there was nothing more to do but to "wait and see." The waiting ended shortly after midnight. There was no hint of struggle. At the end there was only the slow, slow breathing -- then one last deeper breath -- then nothing. Sister Narcissa had quietly been dismissed from St. Joseph's Hospital.

Sister Sylvester had been with her during the day, but had returned to Chicago. On one of her previous visits, she had brought Sister Narcissa the lily the two of them had planted at St. Procopius. There were three blossoms on it then. On the night Sister Narcissa died, one of them opened and its fragrance filled the room all through the long night of her dying.

Considerate as she had always been of others, Sister Narcissa would probably have worried about the sleep Sister Grace wasn't getting, and about "all this trouble!" When she had entered the hospital, she had been concerned because she couldn't go to see Reverend Mother, "and she always came to see me!" To the last, Sister Narcissa retained her interest, her concern for others. She had never been able to enter deeply into discussions on religious life. But she knew how to live poverty and charity and service, though she could not put her convictions into words. Her life was its own inspiration.

When, the night before she died, Sister Grace asked her to offer her pain and loneliness for someone special who needed help, Sister Narcissa answered with characteristic frankness, "I'll offer my pain, but I can't offer any loneliness. I'm not lonely! I have God with me all the time!"

"Time" for Sister Narcissa is "Forever" now.

GOD GRANT HER REST ETERNAL!!