

November 3, 1961

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Sister Maureen Dunne

Returning to the Infirmary from three o'clock prayer on First Friday, November 3rd, Sister Maureen suffered an acute heart attack, collapsing on the porchway and dying in the infirmary at 3:13. She was the former Violet Dunne, who had entered the convent from Chicago in 1935. She was 43 years of age at her death.

Sister had been ailing with rheumatic heart disease at Lombard last year and underwent heart surgery at Billings Hospital on July 11th. She was brought to Joliet on August 3rd and pursued a hopeful but checkered course of recovery until the end of September, when she returned to Billings for observation and treatment. Dismissed after a month, she knew the seriousness of her situation: she needed medicine to control the heart, and this very medicine was toxic for her. The hope she had courageously sustained through all the struggling months was now abandoned. The possible "fifteen more years of teaching" held out to her before surgery would never be hers. Though, as she liked to say, she could give God a thousand reasons why she should not die, now that her time seemed close, she dismissed them all with loving resignation and lived simply "this hour."

Sister had been stationed at St. Raymond Cathedral School, Joliet, for nineteen of her twenty-three years in the classroom, and Monsignor Hoover offered the use of the Cathedral for the funeral services. He was himself celebrant of the Solemn Requiem Mass and was assisted by Rev. E.V. O'Neil, pastor of Pius X, Lombard, and Rev. Angelo Zwiesler, O.F.M. Present in the sanctuary were Rt. Rev. Msgr. Romeo Blanchette, Vicar General, and seven other priests. St. Raymond's two eighth grades, formerly Sister's "seventh graders," and many boys of Catholic High, as well as many parishioners, attended the Mass.

In addressing the congregation, Monsignor Hoover explained that Sister Maureen would not want an eulogy, but that he could not let this opportunity pass without saying a few words about "the loss that was ours and the gain that was hers for all eternity." And he began with a comparison. He had several years ago attended beatification ceremonies for a nun. St. Peter's was packed, thousands were there. It was a magnificent scene. Next to Monsignor was an elderly couple. Amid all the pomp and magnificence, the woman leaned over to ask, "What is all this about?" And he answered, "All this is for a little lady, a nun who made a success of her life."

So here too, Monsignor stated. This was all for a little lady who had made a success of her life. Taking only one phase of it - Sister in the sacristy - she spoke of her invaluable help at a time when the Diocese was new and all were learning. "There is a diary there," he said. "that will be used by all the sacristans to come. She 'made' that sacristy. That little gentle hand of hers has left the imprint of its blessing. Every detail of what is needed for any possible ceremony is there."

There was, he continued, a child-like simplicity about her; there was always a smile from this "good-natured, red-headed Irishman." Remark- ing that there had been three Sisters to die at St. Raymond's--Sister Alicia, Sister Vita, and Sister Maureen--he recalled Sister Vita's visit when she was ill, how she had been wheeled into the new Cathedral, the organ peeling, all lights lit, the Sisters of St. Raymond standing to re- ceive her; and her joy in the experience, her glad "This is heaven!" And now Sister Vita and Sister Maureen were together again - for all eternity in the bosom of Almighty God. "That is the joy of heaven," he said, "the presence of Almighty God, His blessed Mother, and all our own dear friends."

Monsignor then addressed the family, assuring them that this member would never be forgotten; that thousands of her former pupils, saddened by the news of her death would remember. "And further, we won't forget her," he promised. "We extend our sympathy and our prayers. And we shall always remember."

Father O'Keefe's letter, giving tribute to Sister, with whom he worked closely through the years, stated, "I felt privileged to wit- ness a truly devoted religious in action. Whether it was the intricacy of pontifical ceremony, or a matter of originality in the foundation of the diocese, or the running of the CYO Vacation Schools, Sister always was more than adequate, and ever very Christ-like."

In this estimate all the Sisters concurred. "A more than ade- quate performance of duty coupled with a Christ-like spirit" neatly summarized her work and character. The tributes of former pupils and their parents, as well as of the Sisters she lived with, bore this out. Doctors and patients at Billings praised her indomitable courage and cheer. One patient said she had taught them how to be ill gracefully, and another wrote that her few days' contact with Sister 'had taught her deep lessons and had permanently enriched her life.'

All this in its totality meant Sister's had been a successful life for time and eternity. And her loved ones could, with resignation and gratitude, accept "the stilling of her brave heart and willing hands," and pray confidently for her eternal rest in the joy of God.