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Sister Leona Peters

Sister M. Leona, formerly Clara Peters of Oak Park, Illinois, died of tuberculosis at the Motherhouse in Joliet, on May 17, 1914, in the 26th year of her age and in the 9th of her religious life. She was the daughter of Charles Peters and Anna Heinz of St. Francis Parish, Chicago.

Sister Leona was of a mild and congenial character; she was gentle, courteous, ever ready to oblige and assist a neighbor. Besides, it was obvious to all who knew her, that she made earnest efforts to acquire a truly religious spirit to counteract her lack of self-reliance and her disposition to be easily influenced. She spent some years as aspirant with the Community, and the more frequent reception of the sacraments, as also the constant and detailed study of the Catechism, of Biblical and Church histories did much to make her steadfast and resolute.

God had blessed this young Sister with a remarkable talent for music. After having been added to the teaching staff of music she entered upon this duty with energetic determination and achieved good results. Her pupils esteemed her and considered themselves privileged to be under her tutelage.

Sister Leona was an only child, the sunshine of the little home circle, idolized by the mother. She had given her consent to her daughter's desire to enter upon Convent life; however, only after her return home, missing her daughter's smiles and laughter, her endearing words and ready helps, and beholding the silent instruments of music, did she realize what she had given up, did she grasp the meaning of "My daughter will never return to me." Then it was that she conceived the idea of regaining her daughter by various means. Kindness was lavished upon her, visits were multiplied to the limit of permissibility; not infrequently did the mother plead with her daughter not to leave her sad and lonely; again she would affect coldness and indifference toward the child of her heart. To the sensitive nature of Sister Leona these assaults were sore trials. But the good advice of her Father Confessor, of her Superiors, and of trusted co-religious, above all continuous fervent prayer, sustained her and aided her to bear these assaults with patient heroism. Daily she also begged of God the grace of fidelity to her vows, she implored the Sorrowful Mother of God to comfort her own mother in the bereavement she had sustained.

Sister Leona's physical condition was not one of the most sanguine. Colds would readily attack her and hold to her tenaciously. These colds, together with the confinement to the house and classroom atmosphere to which the greater number of religious persons are subjected, and her unrelenting worry, impaired her health. All too soon it became apparent that her lungs were affected. With her as with others smitten by this affliction, medical aid proved of little avail. Soon, too, the mother realized that her daughter

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would be snatched from her entirely, and she urged and finally prevailed upon the Convent authorities to allow her daughter a change of climate, a sojourn in a warm and sunny region, as a means to at least prolong the life of her child. For the good of both parties, the Mother Superior finally yielded to the persisting entreaties made upon her, but not without first explaining the case to the Ordinary, the Most Rev. James Edward Quigley, Archbishop of Chicago. His Grace replied that many Communities have the practice of sending members having weak lungs to a milder climate and even establish houses in such places for that purpose; consequently there would be no objection, should we find it practicable and beneficial to do so.

The "benefit" of a change of climate became also a fixed idea with Sister Leona, and as two other Sisters also showed signs of insipient consumption, it was agreed to send these three Sisters to a sanatorium in Las Vegas, New Mexico, the place designated by Sister Leona's former physician of Chicago. It can hardly be denied that these Sisters derived some good from their sojourn in the mild southern climate. However, after six months' stay, Sister Leona's condition became very alarming, and it was thought imperative that she be brought home. Hence all returned immediately to Joliet, arriving there on Saturday morning, May 16th. Twenty-five hours after their arrival at the Convent home, Sister Leona's soul had left the little emaciated frame. The end came rather unexpectedly, for Sister's langour and weakness was thought to be mainly the consequence of the long and tiresome trip although the Sisters had a stateroom at their disposition. In the alarm which the sudden change had caused the thought of having Extreme Unction administered superceded every other, even that of informing the mother of the critical state of her daughter. Rev. Anselm Mueller, O.F.M. had just laid off his vestments after the Community Mass, when he was summoned to her bedside. Hurriedly he gave her absolution, annointed her, said the prayers of the Church for the dying, and as she still lingered on this side of the portals of eternity, he added the Litany of the Blessed Virgin and pious ejaculations. Before these ceremonies had taken place she had expressed amid gasps and sighs, her willingness and readiness to die. She then lapsed into a state of semi-consciousness and, without a twitch, without a struggle, she closed her eyes in death. A chastened, beautiful soul had gone to meet her heavenly Spouse.

The mother was immediately informed by telephone of the demise of her child. She replied that she and the stepfather would be in Joliet in the evening. It was well that she had appointed the later hour, for meanwhile the little body was prepared and placed in its narrow bed, a contented smile hovering on her face. Why not? Sister Leona had fought the good fight to the bitter end; she could not help feeling within herself the verification of our dear Lord's promise, "If thou persevere to the end I will give thee the crown of life everlasting."

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The parents arrived at the Convent at eight o'clock, and when conducted to the room of mourning (the north-west room at what is now the mail hall of the College), the mother did not break forth into loud lamentations, as had been anticipated. Amid deep, suppressed sobs she could only repeat while bending over her daughter: "My child, my dearest child, my only child!" Both stayed over night in the men's cottage, returned the following morning to their home in Oak Park, and came again early to Joliet on the day of the funeral. With Christian fortitude the mother's reddened eyes gazed upon the shrine which held her all as it was lowered into the grave, and venting her feelings in the words "till we meet in Heaven," she tottered back to her car, a lonely mother indeed!

Facts, through later information are that Sister Leona's mother paid her daughter's fare to Las Vegas and one month board and care and that she herself went along to Las Vegas and stayed there for three weeks. Also that she had given the little statue of St. Clare and furnished the clergy suite for God's special blessing on her daughter.