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Sister M. Valentine Smerz

Another of our noble old Sisters has gone to God. Sister M. Valentine, in the 86th year of her age, had lived long; in the 68th year of her religious life, she had served much. And so she had earned this happy journeying to eternity. How ready she was!

For sixty-two years Sister had practiced the apostolate of the classroom by teaching the primary grades. Fifteen of these years she spent in Chicago - two years at St. Procopius, nine years at St. Wenceslaus, three years at Ss. Cyril and Methodius, and a year at Ss. Peter and Paul. For 38 zealous years she served in Cleveland, Ohio, giving eight years to St. Procop's and thirty to Holy Family. She taught also at St. Joseph's, Joliet, for eight years, and at St. Stephen, Johnstown, for a year.

On August 9, 1957, while in retreat at the College, Sister suffered a heart attack and was brought to the Motherhouse Infirmary. This effectively terminated her teaching career. Could one wonder that, weakened and unable for further active duty, the patient received her appointment to the Motherhouse with quiet joy? With infirmary care, she had by the end of the month improved sufficiently to be released, and she took up the ordinary routine of the retired Sisters. Ambulatory until the following spring when a decline was visible, Sister was again admitted to the infirmary in May. Although she continued to suffer from a heart condition, she was able to ~~attend~~ Holy Mass until a month before her death, when complete bedrest was prescribed. Taken with pneumonia at the end, Sister was anointed Saturday, November 19th, and passed peacefully to God four days later.

Bishop McNamara presided at the Solemn Requiem Mass at the Motherhouse on Saturday, November 26. Rev. Angelo Zwiesler, O.F.M. was celebrant, with Rev. Alphonse Coan and Rev. Benedict Pfeiffer assisting. Rev. George J. Hurley of St. Patrick's, Joliet, and Rev. William P. Fox of St. Joseph, Rockdale, were chaplains to the Bishop, with Rev. Theodore Berst of Lockport as assistant priest at the throne. Burial was at Resurrection Cemetery.

A simple, humble nun, Sister Valentine was most kind and gentle. There was an unflinching sweetness about her, which was accentuated by her shy, winning smile. By nature generous and self-sacrificing, she could not see anyone burdened without offering help, and never received gifts or treats without sharing them.

Those who knew her on mission reported her a charming primary teacher. A child at heart herself, she loved little children, understood their needs, and knew intuitively how to direct them. She had the happy faculty of keeping simple lessons simple, and what she imparted her pupils grasped and retained.

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A fine appreciation of music and song was another of Sister's characteristics. She responded to all good music, but her favorite past-time was to listen to sacred records. During her stay at the Mother-house, the chapel services were her special delight, for the novices 'sang so beautifully.'

Though Sister was failing in health and strength those last years, she accepted the situation without complaint. This, she was convinced, was "as God wills" --a phrase she frequently repeated to those who asked how she was. Though often alone, she seemed never to be lonely, never at a loss what to do, for she spent her free time in prayer - sometimes in her room, sometimes in the oratory. With fervent regularity she paid homage to St. Joseph, and her frequent Mass stipends always included his name with the intention "for a happy death." And even while she waited, she waited happily. Expectation, not fear, marked her outlook. Back in 1893 it was on the Feast of St. Joseph that she entered the convent; and now it was Wednesday, Joseph's day, that she went forth from it to the peace and joy of eternity.