



Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate

On Sunday afternoon, March 8, 2020, our Sister Elizabeth Marie Klepec “passed from this life to the Lord, to the clarity of Eternal Light.” Entering fully into the mystery of the Resurrection, she died as she lived, holding fast to her enduring hope and desire to be united one day with the Beloved One, to whom she prayed unceasingly, “My God and My All.” Truly, a Franciscan Clarian mystic, she taught us by example what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Born to her parents Mary (Stefanich) and Joseph Klepec on February 5, 1928, Dorothy Klepec was baptized at St. Joseph’s Church in Joliet, Illinois. It was there that she was rooted firmly in the faith and culture of the Slovenian-American heritage that shaped and influenced her identity and sense of vocation for years to come. The fourth of six children, Dorothy experienced the joys and blessings of a close knit family as well as the benefits of St. Joe’s vibrant parish community and a parochial school. Educated in her early years by the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate, Dorothy was inspired and encouraged by the Franciscan Sisters who recognized in her a special giftedness and a God-given call. Starting at the age of five, Dorothy knew she wanted to consecrate herself entirely to Jesus. Coming of age in the aftermath of the Great Depression and a world devastated by war, Dorothy completed her secondary education at Joliet Township High School. Drawn to the Franciscan way of life, she looked ahead to her unfolding future and in September of 1946, she made her way across the Des Plaines River and up Plainfield Road to St. Francis Convent.

As a postulant, she found herself in the company of a diverse group of aspiring young women, many of whom shared with her an experience of undergraduate studies at the College of St. Francis. Excelling in English, Dorothy’s interests in literature, poetry, spiritual writings and composition were evident, but her single-hearted passion for religious life, in all of its dimensions, took precedence over everything else. Received into the novitiate on August 12, 1947, she was given her religious name, Sister Elizabeth Marie. Two years later, in August of 1949, she made her first profession of vows and proceeded to conclude her bachelor’s degree in English. After a period of three more years, she made her perpetual profession of vows and joyfully committed herself to God for all the days of her life.

A natural born educator, Sister Elizabeth Marie devoted herself tirelessly to seventeen years of ministry as a high school teacher at St. Mary’s in Columbus, Saints Peter and Paul and Sacred Heart Englewood in Chicago, and finally at St. Francis Academy in Joliet. Over time, she taught everything from English, religion, history, journalism, and speech to typewriting, stenography and home nursing. Somehow, she also made time to serve as a guidance counselor and moderator for year books, school newspapers and the Legion of Mary. In the process, she also completed a master’s degree in English at DePaul University. Aware of who she was as an accomplished and creative instructor, a dedicated mentor and a valued colleague, as a Franciscan Sister, she became increasingly more aware of another “fire burning her heart” (Jeremiah 20:9).

Sensing a profound and urgent call to devote herself to the contemplative life, and moreover, to creating the conditions for others to nurture this important dimension of their lives as followers of Jesus, Sister Elizabeth Marie shared her vision with Mother M. Borromeo Mack in the early 1960s just as Vatican II was beginning (Habakkuk 2:3). Planting a seed of possibility, she patiently waited for it to sprout and grow. In the meantime,

Alleluia!



Sister Elizabeth Marie Klepec, OSF

she continued teaching until she was appointed director of formation for a year and a half. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of Mother Borromeo and Mother Joan Marie Wheeler, General Minister of the Allegany Franciscans, an opportunity to test out the vision presented itself. In 1967, she was invited to live for a period of time with seven Allegany Franciscans in their newly established cloistered community located within Saint Elizabeth Motherhouse. Months later, upon her return to Joliet, Sister Elizabeth Marie found herself even more convinced of the importance and need for the Joliet Franciscans to establish a contemplative House of Prayer, not because it was *her* vision, but because there was so much compelling evidence, that it was a good and promising vision whose time had come. Within a matter of months, the General Chapter of 1968 received and approved the proposal and within a year, the St. Clare House of Prayer was founded in Kankakee, Illinois, and quickly began to flourish. Over the course of the next four decades, Sister Elizabeth Marie and her companions helped to bring the vision to life through the ministries of prayer, spiritual direction, retreats and hospitality.

In 1976, Sr. Elizabeth Marie was elected as vice-president of the Congregation. With generosity of spirit and trusting in God’s providence, she left St. Clare House of Prayer and returned to the Motherhouse. During her four years in leadership, the Spirit of the Lord guided her, along with members of the *Constitutions* Committee which she chaired, in the drafting of the Congregation’s new *Constitutions*. During the process, and for years to come, the work directed by Sister Elizabeth Marie enabled the Joliet Franciscans *to grasp the essence of the Gospel way of life, to embrace the Franciscan charism entrusted to their care and to carry forward into the future the heritage of Mother Alfred Moes*. In 1980, when her term of office concluded, she pursued further training in spirituality and spiritual direction at Regis College in Toronto. A year later, she returned to St. Clare House of Prayer where she remained a member of the core community until 2008 when the House of Prayer was relocated to the Franciscan Village in Joliet.

During the years that followed, Sister Elizabeth Marie resided in the Joliet area where she continued her ministry of spiritual direction and shared life with her sister Lorrie and her brother, Father George, until his death in 2012. As her own health declined, she retired to Our Lady of Angels in 2016, where she spent the final four years of her life in community. As we celebrate the life and legacy of our Franciscan Sister, Elizabeth Marie Klepec, let us give thanks to God for the gift of her presence in our lives. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Sister Elizabeth Marie Klepec, OSF

February 5, 1928— March 8, 2020

<i>Born:</i>	February 5, 1928
<i>Parents:</i>	Joseph and Mary (Stefanick) Klepec
<i>Postulancy:</i>	September 4, 1946
<i>Novitiate:</i>	August 12, 1947
<i>First Profession:</i>	August 12, 1949
<i>Final Profession:</i>	August 12, 1952
<i>Entered New Life:</i>	March 8, 2020

Ministry History

1949—1950	Student: College of St. Francis, Joliet, Illinois
1950—1951	Teacher: Religion, English, typewriting, St. Mary High School, Columbus, Ohio
1951—1957	Teacher: Religion, shorthand, typewriting, history, home nursing, SS. Peter and Paul High School, Chicago, Illinois
1957—1960	Teacher: Religion, stenography, English, speech, guidance, school paper, yearbook Sacred Heart High School, Englewood, Chicago, Illinois
1960—1967	Teacher: English, St. Francis Academy, Joliet, Illinois
1967—1968	Director of Novices: St. Francis Convent, Joliet
1968—1969	Director of Junior Professed Sisters, St. Francis Convent, Joliet
1969—1976	Core Member: St. Clare House of Prayer, Kankakee, Illinois
1976—1980	Vice-President of the Congregation: St. Francis Convent, Joliet
1980—1981	Student: Regis College, Ontario, Canada
1981—2008	Core Member, Spiritual Director: St. Clare House of Prayer, Kankakee
2008—2016	Spiritual Director: 405 Terry Drive, Joliet
2016—2019	Spiritual Director: 1201 Wyoming
2019—2020	Ministry of Presence: OLA

<i>Wake:</i>	Monday, March 16, 2020, 2:00-6:45 p.m., Tezak's Home to Celebrate Life, Joliet
<i>Prayer Service:</i>	Monday, March 16, 2020, 4:00 p.m., Tezak's Home to Celebrate Life
<i>Burial:</i>	Tuesday, March 17, 2020, leaving Tezak's Home to Celebrate Life at 9:00 a.m. to St. Joseph Cemetery, Joliet, Illinois
<i>Interment:</i>	Klepec Family Plot
<i>Predeceased by:</i>	Her parents: Joseph and Mary (Stefanich) Klepec, brothers, Joseph and Rev. George Klepec, sisters, Marie, and Betty Klepec
<i>Survived by:</i>	Her sister, Dolores Klepec and cousins

Rest in Peace, Sister Elizabeth Marie!