

*SISTER MARY*

*COLUMBA*

*LENNON*



*BORN TO EARTHLY LIFE:*

*MAY 2, 1924*

*BORN TO ETERNAL LIFE:*

*JUNE 2, 1977*

**Sister Mary Lennon**  
**Province of U.S.A. & Canada**  
**1924 - 1977**

"A devoted teacher and a friend of all the parish of  
St. Catherine Laboure in Torrance, California."

The gravestone of Sister Mary in the cemetery of the community of Newport, Rhode Island, bears this inscription - a tribute of affection and gratitude from the families of the parish of Torrance, to whom she had devoted herself.

Mary Lennon was born on May 21, 1924 in Bealrea, Co. Roscommon in Ireland. The fifth of nine children, Marie spent a happy childhood in a profoundly Christian family. As a young girl, she enrolled in the Workshop of Our Lady with the Mercy Sisters where she became friendly with Sister Columba, the Directress.

The latter, in response to the confidence of Mary, advised her to apply to our novitiate in Ferbane. The young girl entered there in September 1943, and underwent her formation. After her Profession in 1946, the young sister sailed for Fiji. She taught in Suva in the primary school. Endowed with a natural talent for teaching she loved the children and could obtain astonishing results from them. In spite of large classes which entailed much preparation, Sister Mary found time to prepare meals for the missionaries from the distant islands, who passed through Suva. She studied in the Teacher's College in New Zealand, then taught in Tauranga, then in the Cook Islands and came back to Christ Church (New Zealand). She loved her work with the young. She was tireless in preparing them for their examinations.

After twenty years, Sister Mary returned to Ireland for a period of rest. This was very painful for her. Her father was dead, as well as her brother and the sister whom she greatly loved. These deaths had taken a serious toll on her mother's health. She recognized her daughter, but that was all. All this caused Sister Mary great distress. At the end of her holiday, in September 1966, she received a new obedience - this time for the United

States. At Wilmington, then at Torrance in California, she once more enthusiastically undertook her teaching apostolate.

She was very devoted to the young and made their problems hers, spending much time with them. Their moral formation was a priority. She oriented them to make an effort, to forget themselves to advance spiritually.

On the intellectual plane, she had the gift of stimulating even the slowest and least endowed. As well as teaching the scholastic program, Sister Mary prepared her pupils for inter-school competitions, sports and games; showing great interest and encouragement. Standing tiny, she was the best "supporter" of the competitions. Many times the community, at table or at recreation relived with her the match her pupils had played.

If her pupils' progress was Sister Mary's dominant concern, she also sought her own personal perfection. Thus in the summer of 1975, she obtained her Master's Degree. Some weeks later, a serious health problem halted her. She had to undergo an operation. When her strength returned, she resumed part-time teaching. But soon she knew that this was too much for her. For several months she underwent with courage, a very painful treatment, always hoping for a complete cure.

In the summer of 1976, she was well enough to return to Ireland; however, she was admitted to hospital. Great were her physical sufferings; but still greater was her pain on witnessing the suffering of her family on her behalf. Thanks to the treatment, her physical suffering diminished and she was judged able to return to the United States. She thought that the doctors in California would give her better care. But tests showed that the disease was progressing. This was a great disappointment for Sister Mary.

The dear patient underwent a veritable calvary - physical and moral suffering. She became bitter and resentful. But she was surrounded by prayers. Sometimes, the Eucharist was celebrated in her sickroom, or the community assembled for the Office or some other celebration. She

received the Sacrament of the Sick many times; priests who knew her visited her. Little by little grace worked in our dear Sister's soul. Her bitterness was superseded by sweetness and peace which could only come from the Lord.

Three weeks before her death, she had a talk with her doctor. This direct facing with the reality of her condition was very painful to her but she showed herself wonderfully courageous and tried to write a few words to each member of her family.

In the morning of May 30, it was evident that the end of her journey to eternity was approaching. She received her Lord and fervently renewed her vows, stressing the words "forever". Three days after, in the afternoon of June 2, in the presence of all the Sisters, Sister Mary breathed forth her soul to God.

The dear Sister's funeral was the occasion of a demonstration of esteem and affection on the part of the past pupils, the parents of the young persons she had trained, and of the parishioners of all ages. The parish church was filled for the Funeral Mass which was that of the Resurrection, celebrated by five priests on Sunday, June 5.

The Parish Priest spoke thus in the homily: "Sister Mary", he said, "did not want to die, but once she realized that she was face to face with death, she became an admirable contemplative." Even today, he recalls her memory to the students, encouraging them to pray to her.

After the Mass was said in Torrance, there came the moving moment of the departure of Sister Mary's mortal remains, which were accompanied by two sisters from the California communities to the airport of Los Angeles, en route to Newport on the East Coast where she was to be buried.

On the following day, our sisters of Newport surrounded our dear Sister. In the evening, after the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice and of Vespers in the community chapel, the Sisters and friends watched and prayed. In the morning of June 7, a Mass of the Resurrection was concelebrated in

the parish church of St. Augustine. Bishop Kenneth Angell, Auxiliary Bishop of Providence presided at this concelebration.

The memory of Sister Mary still lives among us and we ask her to be the messenger of the Lord's love to us and to all those who knew and loved her.