

SISTER ANNE
OF THE IMMACULATE HEART
KENNY



BORN TO EARTHLY LIFE:
APRIL 10, 1939

BORN TO ETERNAL LIFE:
MAY 2, 1989

SISTER ANNE KENNY
Province of U.S.A. & Canada
1939 - 1989

GO TO JOSEPH were the words clearly embroidered on the cloth beneath the statue of Saint Joseph. Alice Kenny found it difficult to believe that these words had always been there. She had slipped into her parish church to spend some time in prayer as she struggled to discern the yearnings in her heart to give herself to God in the religious life. She had found the answer! She would GO TO JOSEPH!

Alice Kenny was born into a Christian family where love, peace and harmony reigned. In their newly married life, her parents lived in London, England where Alice was born on April 30, 1939. When she was about ten months old, the family returned to Ireland and three years later God blessed them with another little girl, Marie.

The two little girls were the pride and joy of their parents, but these years were to be short-lived. God has His designs and took their father to Himself at an early age; he was actually dying when Alice made her First Holy Communion. The grief in her little heart was known to God alone! An even more bitter grief was hers when God called her mother home to heaven just three months before her Confirmation.

A cousin Bridie, whom Alice always affectionately called "Auntie" opened her home to the little girls after the deaths of their parents. She remembers Alice as a very loving child who was always gentle and kind. From a very early age she seemed very close to God. Bridie recalls an incident which occurred when she was about three years old. She was asked one morning if she had said good morning to God. Without any hesitation she looked at the Sacred Heart picture and said, "Good morning, holy God! I will be out to play in a minute."

In her mid-teens, Alice went to work, first in a laundry and then at Jacob's biscuit factory. From her earliest years she longed for the religious life and after much prayer she entered the novitiate in Ferbane. On March 13, 1958 Alice was received into the congregation and got the name Anne. A

companion in the novitiate recalls her spirit of joyfulness and her simplicity. She had a way of telling a story which caused everyone to end up in peals of laughter and Sister Anne enjoying herself in the midst of it all. Her simplicity was a beautiful part of who she was and it was a virtue that she cultivated all through her life and which endeared her to so many.

After profession on March 10, 1960 Sister Anne was missioned to the community of Sts. Peter and Paul's Rectory in Providence, Rhode Island, USA where she ministered for the next twenty years to priests and bishops. The sisters who lived with her came to realize her deep faith, her trust in God, her wonderful sense of humor and the ability she had to laugh at herself. Sister Anne loved to recall funny incidents of those days and her recollection of what had happened would bring tears to her eyes with laughter. One such happening was the time the pastor bought pastries from the French Bakery. Among other items were ten small pies. Sister Anne thought that a scoop of vanilla ice cream on top would make them look elegant as she served them for desert. When they were piping hot and all dressed up she placed her delicious looking sweet in front of each priest and bishop. To her amazement the ice cream was eaten but the pies were untouched with the exception of a piece out of the side of one! The gorgeous looking dessert turned out to be pork pie!!

Bishop Kenneth Angell speaking about those years recalls:

I came to know Sister Anne as an exemplary religious. She was dedicated to us all: she was joy-filled and she exuded goodness itself. She always wore a smile. While she was modest and humble, you could tell she had a great zest for life. Her ministrations were not limited to the bishops and priests but to so many of the people in the parish, the poor and the unfortunate. She was good to us all.

When Sister Anne was diagnosed with lupus in the year she made her Final Vows, she did not go down under the malady. Quite the contrary. She fought it knowing that God was with her. Diagnosis took many doctors' visits and a trip to Pasteur Institute in the spring of 1971. Twice

she underwent surgery to help stabilize her condition. Yet there was no cure. There was only medication. There were good times and better times, but there were bad times too, and she had to adjust her life to allow for them. She led an active life amid discomfort and sufferings which at times were not suspected as she always looked the picture of health. Often times this led to misunderstandings. It was easy for others to forget the seriousness of her illness and to have unrealistic expectations of her. Through it all she never counted the cost. She gave of her best in every area in which she worked and was gentle and easy to get on with. Without being a workaholic, she loved work. Even when very ill, she used the gifted hands that God had given her to do crafts of various kinds, particularly eggery. Her graciousness was outstanding and she was always ready to pardon. her love for the truth enabled her to face an issue courageously and she was fearless in expressing what she felt was correct.

Sister Anne's spirit of poverty was striking. Negligence and waste were painful to her. Excellent at sewing, she never wasted materials and made sure that when cutting out she would get the most from the material. It was this same spirit of poverty which led her to be so self-forgetful. She gave her time freely and generously to others. When it came to others giving her their time, she was most grateful and always made sure to express her thanks. She had a fear of becoming demanding in her illness. Days when she hardly had the strength to hold a cup, she would get up saying: "I must not let the lupus take over."

Despite the inroads of the disease and the side effects of the medication, Sister Anne maintained a basic serenity and sense of hope in her life. If one asked how she was, she was honest in responding, but she was not a complainer. She learned patience with her body and her mind when they could not keep up with her dreams and plans. She worked, prayed and brought joy to others.

Sister Anne's ability to cope with so much ministry in spite of ill health came from her deep spirit of faith and her profound prayer life. She loved the scriptures and her insights into various texts never ceased to amaze her companions. Prayer was a priority for her and she gave it full attention.

She had a deep devotion to the Divine Indwelling and drew strength from this to cope with her long-term illness. When too weak to pray the Divine Office or Rosary, she would ask the sisters to pray these by her bedside, and she would follow with deep fervor. Her prayer life became alive in her attitude to her sisters and to all she met. Each person was precious to Sister Anne and she reached out to help in any way she could. One example was "Ma Fagan" who was a prisoner in her own home. She was a little lady who had both legs amputated whom Sister Anne had met in the hospital. Almost every evening they talked on the phone and for "Ma Fagan" Sister Anne's voice was the only one she may have heard that day. Seeing the Suffering Christ in the sick with long-term illness strengthened Sister Anne's faith, helping her to pray all the more.

After 22 years, Sister Anne left St. Peter & Paul Cathedral for St. Margaret's Home, a diocesan home for women, mostly elderly. She operated the switchboard and ministered to the many guests. She enjoyed working with them and felt called to work with the elderly. Her illness was somewhat in remission at this time. Rhode Island College had a program for a certificate in Gerontology, but first she had to obtain a High School Equivalency Diploma. It took lots of courage, but she began to study again after all those years and she passed the G.E.D. examination and got her diploma. Then on to the certificate program. She did have a gift for the work and her instructors recognized it - her manner, her keen perception, her good judgment and ability to assess clinical situations. Her sense of achievement was great and helped to convince her that her intellect was still perfect despite her fears that the lupus would affect her brain. Great too was her gratitude to God who carried her through all things in life.

Then came a time of discernment; St. Margaret's was closing. Her ministry would have to be exercised elsewhere. Given her health condition, full time work was not possible, and climate and adequate medical supervision were also key factors. After a short stay at St. Augustine's Parish, Sister Anne went to the Dominican Spiritual Life Center at Dover, Massachusetts for a time of renewal and discernment. At the close of her stay, she accepted an assignment to the Hamilton community in Ontario, Canada. It was all new territory: new country,

new doctors, new ministry - one which she would have to "create", and give it structure and form. She would coordinate pastoral services for patients in a number of nursing homes.

Unfortunately, she was not there long when she again became ill - this time with cancer. From her first surgery on December 2, 1988 until her death five months later, she was never well enough to return to work. Despite the long years of illness, the disappointment of losing the new ministry which she had worked so hard to put into place, the certainty of terminal illness, Sister Anne kept her equilibrium. She did hurt; she did suffer; she did get discouraged at times. But she also laughed and reached out to others.

After Christmas 1988 sister Anne came to Newport, Rhode Island to be with the sisters at the Annual Area Meeting and to recuperate. She made excellent progress and was almost ready to return to Canada when she was hospitalized with a severe headache and her worst fears were realized - the cancer was in the brain. Bravely she submitted to surgery and made every effort to get well. Her "Auntie Bridie" and sister Marie flew out from Ireland to spend some time with her and were delighted with her progress. Bridie expressed how much joy Sister Anne had brought to them when she would come home on holidays. They were always struck by her prayerfulness and fidelity. Bridie recalled that it was during one of those holidays at home that she awoke one morning at three o'clock and heard movement in Sister Anne's room. When she went to check things out she found her sitting up, crying. When asked what was wrong she said, "This is the hour when most sins are committed. I love you but I love God more."

After two weeks her family members returned to Ireland delighted at how well she was. Sister Anne found that she was well enough to go to Canada and bring closure to the ministry there which had barely begun. Immediately upon her return to Newport she began to lose the power of her legs and on Good Friday was admitted to the hospital for the last time. The cancer was now in the spine and in a matter of a few days Sister Anne was paralyzed from her waist down.

On April 11, 1988 Sister Anne came home to Cluny Convent in Newport and spent her last three weeks in a spirit of joyful waiting. All during her life she wanted more than anything else to do whatever God wanted for her. Now in death all that mattered was that she was returning to her Maker and Spouse. She was eager and ready and would wait patiently.

Her sister Marie and cousin Bridie were devastated at the news and returned to Newport to be with Sister Anne. They spent two weeks with her during which time Sister Anne talked to them about her death and gave them some souvenirs and personal mementos.

Sister Pius Moore who had lived with Sister Anne for more than twenty years spent a week with her before her death. She recalls how Sister Anne told her that she did not fear dying, but was scared of long suffering. Her dying was done during her lifetime. Every time she reached out to others, every time she helped the nurses even by inquiring how they were feeling and listening to their replies, every time she listened and gave hope and courage to the lonely - during those times, something in her that was selfish died a little.

During her last weeks in Cluny Convent when the sisters came in from school, Sister Anne always asked them what kind of a day they had and always did so in a way that showed real interest and her gift, still, of listening well. During those days she planned her funeral Mass which reflected her life in its joyfulness and simplicity. She asked for the cover to depict a glorious sunrise because "when I meet Jesus" she said, "it will be the most glorious sunburst that has ever happened."

On April 28 Sister Anne's sister and cousin returned to Ireland and on the 30th she celebrated her fiftieth birthday. Two days later, on May 2, shortly after midday, Sister Anne quietly and simply surrendered her soul to be with God whom she loved so much and with her parents whose love had always surrounded her.

Sister Rosaleen Cummins lived with Sister Anne for many years and they shared a deep friendship. She recalls:

Sister Anne was so sincere and loyal and I always knew where I stood with her. I could say she loved God and she loved her neighbor -- fulfilling the two great commandments. Her acceptance of her illness and her willingness to share all she had during those long years of suffering, made a deep impression on me, and no doubt on many others too, helping us all to be better people. Sister Anne hid so much behind a cheerful exterior; one could say she was a ray of sunshine in the midst of deep suffering. Because of circumstances in her life, she went through a purifying process which she accepted and which matured her into the beautiful person she became before God called her home.

Sister Anne's wake and funeral were a beautiful tribute to a life lived in fidelity. In his homily at the Mass of Christian Burial, Bishop Angell, auxiliary bishop of Providence, said:

... Jesus said that a condition of discipleship was that we have to carry our own cross. Sister Anne embraced her cross and lived as a true disciple - a witness of the Lord Jesus. There have been many beautiful tributes to Sister Anne, all of which portray a religious woman who lived and truly believed all that Jesus taught. She knew that "there's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will."

Even in her intense suffering she was always the faithful loving servant of the Lord. Her life has been a powerful example of the worth and beauty of a religious vocation. So many lives have been touched, enriched and gladdened because Sister Anne said YES to the Lord! YES to His call to follow Him.

Sister Anne made her religious vocation her life. As a woman, as a bride of Christ she was truly a Sister of St. Joseph of Cluny. With a touch of humor and a warm heart, she brought to others the tenderness, kindness, forgiveness and true joy of her Lord and Master. How could we ever forget her!

And so we cannot forget our sister - who could laugh and play with us, reflect and pray with us, teach us and learn from us, who was with us and has been called from us so that her plans and dreams which could not be fulfilled in this life might be fulfilled beyond all her expectations in the Reign of God - our sister who still seems very close to us.