

SISTER ANTONY

OF JESUS

GARIBALDI



BORN TO EARTHLY LIFE:

FEBRUARY 4, 1918

BORN TO ETERNAL LIFE:

FEBRUARY 13, 1990

SISTER M. ANTONY GARIBALDI
Province of U.S.A. & Canada
1918 - 1990

Sister Antony Garibaldi, who was the epitome of the strong women of God Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey urged us to be, who embodied strength of soul and body, who was fired with the dynamism of love and service, who, many prompted to say "will never die" did just that on February 13, 1990. She broke the bonds of earth quietly, serenely and with dignity, and touched the Face of God, in the room which had been hers when she had been Director of Formation. As Provincial Secretary to three provincials, and having held positions of responsibility in the congregation here, she contributed a great deal to forging the spiritual shape of the Congregation in the United States. With her death another chapter in the founding of the Province of the United States and Canada was closed, but, her indomitable spirit will live on as we remember and recall many anecdotes of her days among us.

Born Rosa Angela Garibaldi on February 4, 1918 in Stafford, England, she received her education from our sisters in St. Joseph's School in the same town. She entered the Novitiate in Ferbane in 1936, and was professed in the Mother House on March 20, 1939. It became quite evident from subsequent episodes in her life that a great love for Blessed Anne Marie had been nurtured during her years of formation and her consuming desire to do God's will was indicated in the rich and varied years she gave so unstintingly.

The community of her home town, Stafford, was to be her first field of apostolate for seven years. There, she taught commercial courses to the young girls with a dynamism which was so characteristic of all subsequent apostolates. Her drive to get down to business was notorious. She had a job to do and she was definitely going to do it! sister Antony, with a brisk: "Good morning girls," was known to sweep up the aisle of the classroom with such momentum that papers were scattered in all directions, and prompted this whisper before her arrival, "Hold on to your papers, girls, here she comes!"

Mount Sackville School in Ireland saw her next, as a teacher in the Secondary School, and Dean of Discipline. One of her past pupils recalls that she was strict and fair and did much for the girls to make their school life worthwhile and memorable. She organized the school into "houses" and so gave opportunity for in-school competition. Assemblies were initiated. The merit system was established which was an incentive she used for good behavior as well as excellence in academics. Sister was always forthright in her dealings with the students. If a reprimand had to be given it was and then the incident could be forgotten. Sister's life was spent with the girls - she planned field trips, games, walks and seemed to enjoy the festivities as much as the youngsters. Sister was respected by all. She did not play favorites although relationships were established during those years that lasted during her lifetime.

Then in 1950 a new foundation was opening in Australia and Sister Antony was appointed to go there. However, God had other plans for this young nun who was so open to His love, and instead of Australia, the state of Rhode Island in the United States was to be her mission field for the rest of her life.

First of all she worked in Manville in a retreat house directed by the French Canadian province of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. This was indeed a far different environment from either Stafford or Mount Sackville and must have been quite a cultural shock. The language did not pose much of a problem (she was conversant in French) but the living quarters of the sisters was another story. The "convent" consisted of one large room and two smaller ones on the top storey of the office building for the retreat house. Living in these cramped quarters in the overpowering heat of summer as well as the biting cold of winter - two elements to which the sisters were not accustomed - must have been unbearable. However, Sister seemed to see the bright side to it and her buoyancy, her irrepressible wit and sense of humor kept the spirit of the small community of three alive. After three years of ministering to retreatants, and after a brief period of service in Stella Maris, a guest house and convalescent home for ladies in Newport, the time came for

another kind of service, the molding of young people to follow in the footsteps of Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey.

When an American Novitiate was established in Newport, Rhode Island, there she spent another ten years as Director of Music and later as Director of Formation. Her love of music became legendary. A true liturgist, perfection in the execution of liturgical music was her goal. A devoted, loyal scholar of Gregorian Chant she exacted preciseness and delicacy in every nuance of phrasing. The injunction was "soften your endings to a whisper!" Her enthusiasm during singing practices whether it was Gregorian Chant, Latin motets or secular music was formidable, and each one tried to measure up to her expectations. Yet, for all her seeking after perfection she was amazingly tolerant of those who did not share her fervor nor her giftedness ... "do the best you can" she'd say and somehow one did just that.

One would think that the changes in the church and the more prevalent use of the vernacular would leave her bereft. Not at all. Once again her detachment became evident and with her undaunted enthusiasm and sense of decorum she ventured forth to ferret out the better vernacular hymns, those that were theologically sound and in good musical taste. And, with the same verve and drive, she proceeded to exhort correct phrasing and pronunciation as she had done with the Latin. But, her first love was the chant and Latin motets and many a good sing-along the community enjoyed, Sister Antony leading with gusto from the Liber Usualis and Latin Masses! She really became even more alive then.

Her instructions to her novices in the novitiate could be summed up in one sentence: "Develop a personal love for Jesus or you won't make it." A simple statement, but one with which her life was imbued. She knew where she was going; there was no pretense about her. She indicated by her example as well as in words that if one wanted to be a Cluny sister then one must be prepared to seek God's will only. She reiterated many times that if one had or one was determined to acquire a strong faith, a generous spirit, the willingness to obey and a good common sense, then probably with a great deal of help from the Lord one could turn out to be a real Cluny. She often said, "The daughters of Blessed Anne Marie

Javouhey cannot be jelly fish." An echo of an exhortation of Blessed Anne Marie herself to us, her sisters, not to be "femme de paille".

As well as this serious side to her, her novices remember her inimitable enthusiasm ... the first to enjoy a joke ... give courage to the more timid ... to apply a witty sally, she was the life of any gathering. On a day when the heat of summer would be intolerable, she was quick to note the wan faces and call for a picnic at the Big House (Mr. James' mansion on whose estate the Novitiate was, and which now lies derelict) or to the beach. She was a very good swimmer and delighted in a "dip" in the ocean whenever an opportunity arose.

They also discovered the depths of her kindness. If she noticed one of them feeling gloomy, a whispered "would you like to call home", or an unexpected hot drink before bed, or a suggestion to "sleep-in" in the morning. All this was done in her own undemonstrative way, and, as she was well known not to molly-coddle anyone - herself included - these thoughtful overtures were much appreciated.

After ten years of total dedication to the work of formation, she was missioned to teach Music and English at Cluny School and to become Director of Vocations. Again, she gave herself unstintingly to her work with her customary verve. So well did she train the choir, that the music supervisor from the Providence Diocesan Office used to call her visit to Cluny her "dessert". As Director of Vocations she was indefatigable in her zeal to make the Congregation known, and traveled great distances for that purpose heedless of weather or mileage.

In 1967 she was named Superior of the community. At that time Cluny School was heavily in debt, and one way to defray that debt was an annual Country Fair. Nobody worked harder for any Fair than did Sister Antony. She scouted for donations, went on radio to raise the consciousness of the public to the event, initiated "pot-luck" suppers to inject enthusiasm into the parents. Sisters all over the province helped with the Fair and past pupils from overseas or across the continent sent donations. Yet, all that work only yielded enough money to pay the

interest which seemed to soar higher each year. In all of this which must have been a great burden and a worry for her, she never cautioned or complained and it certainly never made her "stingy". The sisters had good wholesome food every day and treats were to be had on feast days and holidays.

Undemonstrative by nature as hitherto observed, who pooh-poohed anything that savored of sentimentality, she belied all that by her thoughtful kindnesses, her keen observance and her sensitivity to the need of each sister.

These were the "stormy sixties", the years of turbulence and doubt, of change and transition. The words "liberal" and "conservative" were bandied around and used to label those who favored a more progressive form of religious life and those who wanted to follow the more traditional way. She hated those labels and it hurt her deeply to be labeled. Many and long were the discussions. She was true to her own convictions, loyal to the congregation, and articulated her views clearly and fearlessly. However, she never seemed to allow differences of opinion to degenerate into personality conflicts. Once a discussion was over, it was over. The changes must have been difficult for her to accept, but her equilibrium and peace of mind remained undisturbed.

As well as being superior, she was also provincial secretary. And, it was a time of our pilgrimage when preparations were made for provincial and general chapters. Therefore, the responses from the many questionnaires sent out to the communities had to be typed and collated on color coded paper. On her shoulders fell this responsibility, and the endless papers were typed with great exactness, and each person's point of view faithfully and accurately presented.

When she finished her term of office as superior, she remained on in the community for another three years. During this period she found time to visit the sick and shut-ins in the area, and to distribute meals-on-wheels to those who could not venture out. Her energy was boundless and, when in 1976 she was called to a mission in Providence, the sisters

in the community constructed a huge daisy, each petal representing a service she had rendered. The petals were numerous and the expression of appreciation very sincere.

Yes, she left her beloved Newport, and joyfully undertook the directorship of St. Margaret's Home, an establishment run by the diocese for women, mostly elderly. She was also superior of the community. She committed herself to her work with the same zest, devotion and generosity as she showed in Newport.

After six years, she laid down the responsibility of St. Margaret's and was given a well-earned rest with her family. During that time in the Fall of 1982 she took some renewal courses in Hawkestone Hall close to Stafford and returned refreshed after Christmas 1982. She was assigned to the Cathedral Rectory.

For the next few years she taught religious education in St. Peter's Parish and became school secretary in St. Paul's School. These were two strenuous occupations to which she gave herself whole-heartedly. She loved her work. The parents of the children attending St. Peter's were always eager that their children would be placed in Sister's religion classes. The principal at St. Paul's avowed that there was never a secretary like her. She could cope with any emergency, handle any situation from treating a youngster with a cut finger to placating a querulous salesperson, and she got more work done in a day than anyone else. She learned the complex workings of the computer and utilized her training for office work. No wonder she was regarded as a "treasure". These two strenuous situations she committed herself wholeheartedly to until major surgery in 1987 forced her to resign and come to Newport.

Retire ... resign ... take-it-easy. These words did not exist in the vocabulary of Sister Antony. As soon as her health returned, she seemed to be everywhere at once, fired with dynamism of love and service. With her customary gusto she shouldered the responsibilities of Provincial Secretary/Treasurer. She was invaluable to the provincial and helped greatly to alleviate her work. She made herself thoroughly versed in the

intricacies of all the financial transactions that needed to be dealt with, and God help anyone who entered ten cents into the wrong account. But her reprieve was short-lived. Two years later, with no suspicion of the shadow that was overhead, she celebrated her Golden Jubilee gloriously. But in a few short weeks, she was once again undergoing major surgery. She recovered enough strength to make the journey to Paris to follow the sessions for the English speaking sisters, and subsequent visits to the Sources and to Lourdes. This was a dream much longed for, and though she suffered some discomfort, nevertheless she wouldn't have missed it for anything. It was a time to say the last good-byes to her family and friends.

When she returned to the community in September it was obvious that the struggle she made so valiantly for her health was being lost. She bore the miseries and discomfort of chemotherapy in the same matter-of-fact way that she faced up to all the events of her life. In a few months it became apparent that the chemotherapy was not having the desired effect and she discontinued it. It was now only a matter of time. While she still had some strength, she prepared all the details of her funeral Mass, including the celebrant, Father Peter McGuire, former chaplain to the novitiate and personal friend, the liturgy, the Requiem Chant, the pall bearers and the committal prayers, and even her obituary notice! Nothing was left hanging!

Ever thoughtful of others she prayed that her time would be short as she did not want to be a burden to her sisters. She, who was always so independent, so strong, accepted so humbly and with touching gratitude the little services that the sisters did to make her comfortable. And, the Lord heard her prayer. After a four day period of semi-consciousness and in total submission to God's will to the end, she gave up her courageous soul to her Creator. Her dynamic energy in work, song, play, even in walking was such a force-filled element that when it ceased, the silence was deafening.

Sister Antony's consuming desire was to do God's will. This was evidenced in her beautiful acceptance of the various tasks which she

assumed under obedience, with total disregard of her preferences or the hardships and frustrations she knew would accompany each one. She has left the witness of a life so much in love with the Will of the Father, that she had only one fear, like our Foundress, not to do His Will.