

SISTER ANDREW

OF THE PASSION

CREAN



BORN TO EARTHLY LIFE:

JANUARY 24, 1942

BORN TO ETERNAL LIFE:

MAY 4, 2015

Sister Andrew Crean
Province of U.S.A. & Canada
1942 - 2015

A visual image of Sister Andrew that resonates with those of us in the community is of her seated in the kitchen with eyes closed, her rosary dangling, and with a wistful smile as she waited for a loaf of Irish soda bread to bake. This image of Irish soda bread best captures our collective memory of Sister Andrew.

Grains of wheat are ground together to make the flour which is the basis of bread. There were many grains of wheat, the grains of personal history in the life of Margaret Crean known as Peggy to her family.

Sister Andrew came to know suffering when her father died while the family were still very young. The deep faith of her mother, extended family and friends left a lasting impression on her. A life of hard work and lack of comfort was no stranger to the family and neighbors that surrounded her. From their example, she learned a deep and abiding trust in Divine Providence.

Her call to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny inspired her to deepen and widen her desire “to do a little good” in the world. With the encouragement of her aunt, Sister Gemma Crean who was a Sister of Cluny, she left her beautiful Mayo countryside and entered the Novitiate in Gallen Priory, Ferbane, County Offaly in 1960.

She never lost her slight Irish brogue, even though she had resided in the United States for more than fifty years. Her deep love and attachment to all things Irish was apparent and was appreciated by her community when she arrived in Providence, Rhode Island to join the sisters in the diocesan residence that was the home of the Bishop and priests. Her daily work, lovely smile and gracious hospitality was appreciated by the clergy and visitors.

In Rhode Island, she served in the diocesan residences in Providence and Stella Maris and obtained a Nursing Assistant Certificate. After twenty-eight years of dedicated service, she responded to an obedience to move to California where she worked as a nursing assistant. She missed the beauty of nature that had surrounded her in Rhode Island. A “stray” infection picked up during her work resulted in a hospital stay and permanent physical disability. A chronic lung condition set in to cause distress, so her last years were more sedentary and very uncomfortable.

She was always ready to participate in social functions and she enjoyed winning in raffles and card games. Gardens and flowers were an ongoing interest and a joy for her, but during the last three years of her life she suffered from infections, disabilities and chronic lung distress. On February 21, 2015, she was admitted to San Pedro Hospital, which was followed by a stay at Los Palos Nursing Home for physical therapy and to increase her stamina and strength. On May 3 she returned to the hospital with an infection that invaded her whole body and on the following morning, surrounded by her sisters, she was embraced by a loving God.

To the flour of ground wheat one adds buttermilk (and/or cream) to knead the two ingredients into the soda bread. The richness of the milk was the kindness Sister Andrew both experienced from others and gave to others. Kindness and simplicity consistently practiced was real in her service to others.

Care for others in her life was first, as the only sister of her brothers; as a religious woman serving in the diocesan residences of Providence; as a Eucharistic minister to shut-ins and the poor elderly; as a nursing assistant and her quiet visits to the elderly. Her ability to sit over a cup of tea and to make others feel “at home” was a kindness and service that brought a sense of peace and comfort to those who experienced those moments. She was at ease with people and enjoyed the friendship of others from bishops to whoever would cross her path. With a memory for names and people, the past was never far away; as an avid reader she acquired a wealth of knowledge and would often add interest and depth to conversations.

Flour and milk alone do not make soda bread; to these are added the rising agent of baking soda and salt. These very small and seemly insignificant ingredients combine to create the nourishment of the wheat and milk.

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth”. Sister Andrew was salt through her life of prayer. Her favorite image of God was that of the Sacred Heart. It was the icon of her understanding of God’s love for her. She was faithful to her prayer in the Divine Office, the Eucharistic Celebration, reading of Scripture and the rosary, day in and day out. Her presence at the side chapel was the silent witness of fidelity, as each day she shared the Bread of Life as a part of our community of faith.

The rising agent of baking soda, that mysterious chemical action of drawing all things together was the ingredient of suffering for Sister Andrew: the suffering of loss in the deaths and good-byes of those people and places she loved and of physical suffering. While she did not “feel” the great consolation of being part of the sufferings of Christ, she gave herself in faith to those moments, hours and days and months of the daily dying in imitation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The wheat of personal history, the buttermilk of lived love, the salt of fidelity and rising of suffering all combined to create her life of bread, broken and shared. As we remember her life and thank God that she was a part of our lives, we know that the words of Jesus, “...I am the Bread of Life, the one who believes in me shall never die...for where I am, you also will be.” have now been totally fulfilled in Sister Andrew Crean.