

# **Sister Florence Mary (May), CSC**

(Julia Cecilia May)

July 17, 1938 – October 28, 2020

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**These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Joan Marie Steadman, CSC, who read them at the funeral on November 5, 2020.**

We hold Sister Florence Mary's family in our prayers and our hearts. Knowing how much they long to be here, we are grateful they are participating in this liturgy with us as it is livestreamed. We look forward to the day when we can welcome them to Saint Mary's to share prayer and stories.

Sister Florence Mary, Julia Cecilia May, was born on July 17, 1938. She was the first child of Florence Adams May and Irvin May — the older sister of her brother Dennis and her twin sisters Joyce and Janice. Her father called her his "little Jewel." To many of us she was Flo. Julia entered the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross on August 1, 1956. She received the name Sister Florence Mary on February 2, 1957, and professed first vows on February 2, 1959.

Florence Mary loved her family very much and kept in close contact with her siblings, their spouses, and her nieces and nephews, of whom she was very proud. Growing up on a dairy farm in Johnsburg, Illinois, gave Florence Mary the experience of the beauty and closeness of nature, which she carried with her the rest of her life. She delighted in the change of the seasons and the unique beauty nature displayed day by day.

Whenever I think about Florence Mary, the Scripture passage that comes to mind immediately is John 1:47. When Jesus sees Nathanael approaching, he says, “Behold an Israelite in whom there is no guile.” In my heart I know these words are a perfect description of Florence Mary. She was simply a loving, kind and honest person without guile. She was a devoted and faithful Sister of the Holy Cross — a woman of prayer and action.

She was ready with words of welcome and encouragement for whomever entered her life and with a smile that could light up a person’s day. In the three years that I lived with Florence Mary I never heard an unkind word spoken about another person. She knew what she believed, valued and held dear, and she could share that in a way which respected the diversity alive in our community.

Sister Angela Golapi Palma, CSC, recalled the loving care and smiling welcome Florence Mary extended to her when she came to live with us at Andre East. Sister Golapi cherished this interaction, which made her feel at home. She too experienced what many of us did when we visited Florence Mary in Rosary or Saint Mary’s Convent — delight, a bright-eyed smile and an enjoyable time of sharing.

Sister Rita Bray, CSC, described Sister Florence Mary as generous, welcoming and very good to people. These themes are repeated over and over by those who knew Florence Mary. Rita recalled that she liked to converse and read widely, so conversations with her were interesting.

Florence Mary served others generously over the 51 years of her ministry and in the local communities in which she lived. She was no stranger to moving, having done so

20 times in order to respond to the need where she was called to serve. Through her ministry as an elementary school teacher, religious educator, school secretary, office manager, assistant superior, adult educator, tutor and community service volunteer, Florence Mary touched the lives of people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. Sister Florence Mary and Sister Sara Joan Van Osdol, CSC, embraced a life of simplicity as they served together in ministry in Kentucky and remained friends thereafter. She prepared adults for their GED tests and visited the sick in nursing homes and hospitals. Her telephone ministry to shut-ins was just one of the many ways she expressed care and concern. In the true spirit of Holy Cross, she and Sister Sara offered hospitality to women seeking a place to pray, read and discuss issues of concern.

Florence Mary made a lasting impact on people's lives. Maureen McFadden, a local, long-time television news anchor for WNDU, recalled that Sister Florence Mary was her very favorite teacher. I can just imagine Florence Mary in the first-grade classroom at Saint Joseph Elementary School in South Bend, where Maureen and her classmates experienced the enthusiasm, joy and care of Sister Florence Mary as a young teacher with an encouraging smile.

Sister Florence Mary's family sent the following reflection to share: "Everyone has special memories we will cherish about Sister. We all knew Sister was there for each of us in prayer and spirit. We all loved her many phone calls and enjoyed her visits with the family. We will cherish the many visits to go see her in the different locations she served for the Lord, including Indiana, Peoria, Kentucky, South Bend and Michigan. She loved showing everyone her puppies, the Appalachians, and the

places she worked. Sister was a beautiful person who always was a friend as well as my sister. She cared about family, always praying for us, wanting to know what was happening to us, our kids and our grandchildren. Sister was always happy to come home to McHenry [Illinois] and enjoyed many delicious meals at home. She loved her mom's delicious pies. She always took an interest in all the kids and what they were doing. We will always love her for her caring, kindness and love of family and will miss her many phone calls, visits and time spent together.”

Sister Florence Mary was the presence of Christ to others and she recognized Christ in the faces of those she knew and loved — those she encountered in her ministry and those around the world whose stories touched her heart and were enfolded in her prayer. She knew what St. Teresa of Avila expressed in this beautiful prayer.

Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Florence Mary, we thank you for the blessing you have been in our lives, for being the presence of Christ. Now you are experiencing the fullness of life in Christ, whom you loved and served wholeheartedly.