

Memento for Sister Catherine Lash, CSC (Sister M. Assumpta)

October 9, 1919 – November 2, 2018

These memories were shared by Sister Catherine Osimo, CSC, at the funeral on November 12, 2018.

Sister Catherine Lash was not famous or highly visible even though she had a title or two. She was one of the countless Sisters of the Holy Cross who served in low-profile positions without whom the Congregation's mission and ministries could not have been sustained. And she liked it that way. Her niece, Kathleen Lash, verifies that "Aunt Catherine preferred being behind the scenes never seeking glory. She worked quietly..."

A sister's life has traditionally been immersed in the mission and ministry to which she was assigned. The convent archives more often recorded the institution's apostolic vitality rather than the individual sister's personal biography, relationships and spirituality. Whether notable or not, most sisters have rarely found any glory in their public ministry or positions. As the saying goes in our community, "No cross, no crown."

Listen to how Sister Catherine Lash summed up her life in one paragraph at age 71. She titled it "From Music to Numbers."

"I was born on October 9, 1919, to Kathleen Hasson and Joseph Lash in Alexandria, Virginia, the oldest of five children. Holy Cross Sisters were my teachers through grade and high school at Saint Mary's Academy, Alexandria, Virginia. After entering Holy Cross in 1938, I did my college work at Incarnate Word College, San Antonio, Texas, during many summer sessions where I earned my Bachelor of Music Education in 1954. I taught music in high schools and worked with all grades of students in glee clubs most of my community life in Texas, Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, and Virginia. For 17 years, in addition to teaching, I was treasurer at Saint Mary's Academy, Alexandria, Virginia, until 1975. Next, I was Eastern Regional Treasurer for six years; then was the accountant and teacher at St. Patrick's Academy, Washington, D.C., from 1981-1984; and then superior for the next six years at our retirement home at Saint Angela

Hall, Kensington, Maryland. In Fall 1990 I returned to Saint Mary's, Notre Dame, Indiana, our motherhouse, and am working for Holy Cross Services in the accounting department. I often recall the many wonderful sisters in Holy Cross with whom I have shared fifty-plus years of living, praying, learning, teaching, and working."

Had Sister Catherine updated her life after age 71 she might have mentioned that she served in Holy Cross Services for 21 more Septembers. She retired to Saint Mary's Convent, Notre Dame, Indiana, at the end of 2012, transferring to full-time ministry of prayer. Sister died at 99 years old, having lived in community with other Holy Cross women for 80 years.

We turn to her family, friends and the sisters who lived or ministered with her to fill in the rest of the story.

Vicky Isakson worked with Sister Catherine for five years in Holy Cross Services. After Vicky retired the friendship continued until the day Sister died. "Sister was an easy person to work with. She never got upset, even when people came in with complaints. When the person still wasn't satisfied, Sister Catherine would ask, 'Dear, what is it you want?' Then the complainer was left speechless and left!" Sister told Vicky that her father loved the University of Notre Dame and they used to listen to the games on the radio in her childhood. However, in her adulthood, she watched the games alone, "because the other sisters were too noisy." She worried about the players getting injured and would light a candle for them in the chapel.

Sister Catherine loved her "numbers." Sister Rachel Anne Callahan wrote from Silver Spring, Maryland, "Catherine was a whiz at numbers and so incredibly tolerant of our mistakes in that area. She did all the scheduling—without a computer—kept the books and ran the bookstore. Amazing!" The sisters were glad to have had her do house, school and regional accounts. According to Sister M. Veronica (Kerwin) and others, Sister Catherine was patient, kind, gentle, generous and extraordinarily compassionate. She was a calming spirit, easy to talk to and friendly. Her friends drew her out from her natural introversion. She was known to make a daily holy hour in Augusta Hall Chapel where the quiet and peace renewed her spiritually.

Sister Rachel Anne continues, "Catherine was one of the most beautiful persons I have known. Her gentleness, her calmness, her deep faith and generosity certainly blessed me and so many others. Her family helped

found the church in Arlington, Virginia, in that we had Mass in their home. Her mother used to spoil us in Alexandria with cake and/or soup every Sunday.”

Catherine outlived her brothers Joseph and Carroll, and her sister Ursula. Her brother James Lash is still living but seriously ill and represented here today by his son Steve Lash. Kathleen Lash, Joseph’s daughter, asked that we share with you family memories of her aunt which follow:

“Aunt Catherine was the matriarch of our family and the mother figure in my life. She was our spiritual guide, the angel on our shoulder and my biggest cheerleader.

“With her strength, she sustained me after the loss of my father. She was the one constant presence in my life for all the years that followed. We had wonderful visits here at Saint Mary’s where we reminisced about good times and bad, our family, and her early years as a sister.

“My Uncle James recalls his visits to Saint Mary’s when he was a boy and Aunt Catherine was a novice. He remembers skipping stones on the creek during his days here and that his parents were so proud of her, but they were never fully able to express their feelings. He recalls how they had crab feasts when she came home to visit and how she faithfully rooted for the University of Notre Dame football team, win or lose.

“Her life was filled with music. She was an accomplished pianist. She played the cello and loved to sing. Mozart was her favorite. She taught music and Glee Club to students in Texas, Washington, D.C., and Virginia. At Saint Mary’s Academy, she recorded several Christmas albums with the students.

“She loved roses, ice cream and funny stories about all the animals on our farm. Oh, how she would laugh when I told her of the mischief that my dog had caused eating an entire box of Twinkies, getting tied up in electrical cords or stealing ribs off the grill!

“She had her health struggles and challenges, along with the loss of her brothers and sister. But she handled it all with a quiet dignity based in her deep faith. She will be missed most by her nieces and nephews, her brother James and his son Steve. Aunt Catherine gave us all many gifts in her 99 years of life. Her greatest gift to us has been her love and faith in God.”

As her niece, Kathleen said her aunt loved roses. Vicky Isakson said that Sister Catherine said the Lash family home always had roses, especially red roses. The roses were a touchstone of home. Sister used to ask Vicky to cut roses for her out of the convent gardens, but Vicky was afraid that she'd be scolded by the nuns. Catherine insisted, "Don't worry, this is my home and I own the place!" Eventually, the gardeners planted a couple extra rose bushes around the convent to assuage Vicky's guilt.

Sister M. Dorothy Anne (Cahill) was a dear friend of Sister Catherine Lash. The Cahill clan included Sister Catherine in their family. For that reason, I looked up the personal file of Sister Dorothy Anne who died at 92 years old on October 26, 2004, 14 years ago. I discovered a large manila envelope with Sister Catherine Lash's name on it. The envelope was full of miscellaneous bookmarks and cards imprinted with various poems of Sister Dorothy Anne. No doubt, Catherine saved and collected her friend's poems.

Kathleen Lash asked us to share this stanza from one of Sister Dorothy Anne's poems titled "After Bethlehem."

*Only the memory now
Of star and song:
And yet
How blessed, far;
All those who wait on silent
Hills
That never heard the song;
Who conquer the dark
With faith
Their only
Star.*

In the olden days, it was assumed that sisters would leave behind family and friends as part of our renunciation of the world. Faith being our only star seemed to be sufficient guidance in our vowed life as women religious. Not really. Under those habits beat hearts that never, ever let go of our first loves found in family life. The bonds of love with parents and siblings helped conquer the dark, but we cast our lot with other women with whom we were not related by blood, but by faith, friendship and mutual regard. Earlier in this service, we placed Sister's vow formula in her casket near her

hands. Her vows were made not only to God, but to God's people and to us as her religious family. Years and years ago, we stood with her in support and promised we would never abandon our sisterhood with her. And all of us here today, whether religious or lay, can probably find our own feelings expressed in this last stanza of another poem by Sister Dorothy Anne. The title is "At Parting."

Miss you?

Ah! Yes, and every day

And night and year,

For there were many hours

We dreamed, my dear.

And though we may not dream

Again, we two,

I cannot keep my heart

From missing you.