

# **Sister Grace Watson, CSC** **(Sister Marie Anthony)**

October 13, 1932–August 14, 2019

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**These memories were lovingly prepared by those who knew Sister Grace Watson, CSC, and shared their reflections. They were written and read by Sister Frances B. O'Connor, CSC, at the funeral on August 20, 2019.**

Some years ago, WNDU ran a contest to determine who was the best teacher in St. Joseph County. Viewers were asked to nominate a teacher in 50 words or less. Ironically, at the same time, The Family Circus comic strip ran a cartoon showing parishioners singing “Amazing Grace,” with the little daughter asking her mother, “What did Grace do that made her so amazing?” Several of us who knew Sister Grace well, decided to submit her name using this cartoon as the theme.

Well, she won, and WNDU broadcasted live from her second-grade classroom as they announced her the winner. You can imagine how excited her students at South Bend’s St. John the Baptist School were when they were on television and also received a cash prize.

So now, many years later as we lay Sister Grace to rest, I am once again reminded of just what it was that made her so amazing. My friendship with her goes back to 1960 when I entered graduate school at the University of Chicago and was living at the convent at Saint Theodore Parish nearby. Being from Detroit, I knew nothing of the city and Sister Grace took me around showing me which bus routes to take to both the university and the library in the city.

Sometimes in our lives, we meet someone who inadvertently shows snippets of genuine kindness, never realizing the profound effect they have on those they touch. That’s the kind of impact Sister Gracie had on me and all whose lives she touched. As you

all know, Sister Gracie was gifted with a good sense of humor which was not only evident to those of us who lived with her, but also to her students and friends.

For more than 50 years, Sister Grace taught primary grades in the Midwest. Whether it was at Saint Theodore School in Chicago, Saint Paul Catholic School in Valparaiso, Queen of All Saints School in Michigan City, Indiana, Immaculate Conception School in Morris, Illinois, Holy Cross School or St. John the Baptist School in South Bend, it was clear that teaching was her greatest call.

To a casual observer visiting her classroom for a brief period, her teaching style may not have seemed much different than that of other sisters in nearby classrooms. But anyone who spent an extended time there could not help but notice what the highest level of teaching excellence looked like. She had a presence that was both gentle and powerful at the same time. She had command of the classroom and had control of every student's attention. She had an ability to make every lesson incredibly interesting and profoundly important to each student. Sister Gracie was generous with positive affirmations and demonstrated how to be compassionate with struggling students. For many students it was the first time they had ever heard words of encouragement from a teacher. You can do anything; You are highly creative; You will be successful—words that can make the biggest impact on an adult life.

Woven into Gracie's religious life were the many friendships she treasured and interactions she so enjoyed with her students. It was quite clear watching her lead a class, or seeing her lend an extra hand, that she truly loved her students. There is no doubt that Sister Grace was an exceptional teacher.

She was truly gifted in the art of delivering knowledge and imparting skills to a huge variety of students with diverse personalities. Every mind was important to her and she searched

for just the right keys to open each mind, making learning fun and exciting for each student.

Often, we sisters who don't have children of our own are thought to live a lonely life. However, if people make that assumption about Sister Grace, they would be very wrong. You see, Sister Gracie did have children and led a very rich life. She had more than 1,000 children and treated each one of them as her own. She was able to use her own creative gifts to inspire hundreds of children to become doctors, lawyers, teachers, artists, business leaders and innovators of today, as well as men and women religious.

Outside of the classroom, Sister Grace touched many hearts as well. As you know, she had three aunts in the community with Sister M. Lorraine (Black), CSC, here with us today. Sisters M. Antonella (Black), CSC, and Sister M. Anna (Black), CSC, preceded her in death but remained great influences on Sister Gracie's life as well.

No one knows Sister Gracie better than Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, with whom she has lived and ministered for many years. They shared their gifts of teaching, outreach to the materially poor and their love of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, especially those in the infirmary or in need of special attention.

Sister Grace's teaching assignments are detailed in her obituary. I have tried to focus on what I believe made Sister Grace truly amazing! Above all, Sister Grace was known and loved for the quickness of her wit; for the merriment and laughter that she bestowed on any gathering, effortlessly and with kindness.

I conclude by saying that I was honored to give the reflection for the celebration of Sister Grace's silver jubilee in 1978, and I am honored to give her memento today.

There are many things that will catch our eye, but only few will catch our heart. Sister Grace caught our hearts and she will be forever missed!