

## REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF SR. VERA HEINTZ – Sept. 3, 2010 (Wake service)

--by Sr. Kathleen Hickenbotham

Every person that God has created is a revelation of the mystery of God in some way. I am always aware of this mystery when I read the biographies and oral histories of our Sisters. Being Sr. Vera's buddy made me even more aware. I knew her mostly in her last years, as her mental and physical health were waning. In the last 2 years she seemed more and more to live mostly in the "eternal now", content, accepting what was, pleasant, sweet, and full of wonder as though seeing things in her environment as ever new. One of the Sisters described her as "without guile" like Jesus described Nathaniel in the Gospel. She loved to read, and since her memory faded quickly, she would read things over and over thinking she had not read them yet. When the Sisters at Marty House gave her the recent Bishop's Bulletin to read which contained the pictures and write-up on the jubilarians, she saw her picture and exclaimed, "Why, that's a picture of me! Why is it in here?" They explained that it was because of her 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of profession. She liked to have fun. There did not seem to be any frustration or anger in her. Except in one area, that of being so far from her family, and no longer to be able to travel to visit them.

During the great depression, and after Sr. Vera joined the community, her family moved out to Yakima, Washington. All her life she felt left behind, with such a great distance in between. Occasionally I would take her to Sr. Penny's office to use the speaker phone to call her sisters Joy and Jenny in Washington. She didn't say much at all but mostly listened to her sisters talk, but at some point would express her desire to have them come to see her since she could not travel any more to spend time with them. This was very hard for her to accept.

Sister Vera valued community life, and wanted to be where the community gathered – prayers, Mass, meals, meetings, educational programs, concerts, plays, care center activities, Marty House recreation and meals, parties and etc. She visited other Sisters in the Care Center, especially Sr. Bernice, her life-long friend, and Sr. Verena, and she read to Sr. Verena each day after Verena's eyesight deteriorated right up to the time of this last illness before her death.

Sr. Vera was obedient to her call from God. She notes that she was baptized at St. Augustine Church in Bowdle, SD. She mostly attended public schools, but spent one year, living with her grandmother in Aberdeen where she attended St. Mary's Catholic School where she was taught by our Sisters. Of this year she wrote, "Certainly my fourth year at school, spent happily entirely amid Catholic surroundings, was a year of grace for me. It was that year that I received our dear Lord for the first time and also made my Solemn Holy Communion as was then yet the custom to do". She also wrote, "How happy and fortunate for me that I had at least that one year at St. Mary's School." Other important occasions she mentioned as highlights of her life

were the profession of vows, jubilees, and consecration of virgins. She was faithful to Liturgy of Hours, Mass, and private prayer. She was so happy that “ In 1968/69 I had the happy privilege to return to Hoven to be present for three of my former pupils celebrat[ing] their first Holy Masses. It was a joy also to visit many of my former pupils, many of whom have large families.”

In 1933 Sr. Vera was in high school when she felt the call to the Benedictine way of life through one of her friends. She wrote, “One of my girl friends entered Sacred Heart Convent, and I had the opportunity to visit the convent when she came. [Her friend became Sr. Bernice.] I was much impressed by what I saw and heard, so the next summer on July 14, 1933, I answered the Lord’s call“. Her obedient and generous spirit lead her to a long career of teaching in SD, ND, NE and CO, mostly children in the primary grades, which she always loved. She taught in various circumstances, sometimes in very poor situations where the Sisters worked long hard hours and had little in the line of comforts or salaries, yet Sr. Vera was always happy it seems.

One of the Sisters who lived and taught school with her described her as very energetic in her younger years, her heels clicking rapidly as she moved through the school halls. As with other Sisters whose biographies I have read at the time of their deaths, I wish I had known Sr. Vera in her younger years, but I feel so privileged to have known her now as I have seen a woman who served and lived the monastic life faithfully. In Sr. Vera I saw a beautiful integrity of person, a simplicity, an acceptance of the circumstances of her life, enjoyment of being with others, delight in experiencing something new, continuing her education even though it was soon forgotten in these last days. I am grateful to have been her buddy and her sister. Some of her last words to her sister Joy I here appropriate also for us, “I guess we will see each other in heaven.” Yes, that we will and I have this mental image of her as she enters heaven, with her eyes growing wide and sparkly with joy and her jaw dropping in amazement as she meets the Lord face to face and sees all her loved ones standing around to welcome her with open arms.

Sr. Vera’s biography and oral history are full of interesting details about her mission experience, and other things. I encourage you all to read and enjoy more of this life well lived.