



## Sister Rita Walsh, SC

Entered eternal life on August 14, 2021

On behalf of Father Peter Wells and myself, we wish to express our condolences to the members of the Smith and Walsh Families, to all of Sister's friends and colleagues, and to the community of the Sisters of Charity.

What an honor and a privilege to be able to celebrate Sister Rita's life with you this afternoon here in the Holy Family Chapel at the Motherhouse. Sister Rita and I were colleagues at Marist High School in Bayonne.

It should be known that I am not on the periphery when it comes to the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth. From 1948 to 1956 my mother, Frances, was educated by the Sisters at Sacred Heart in Jersey City, and she continued at the Academy of Saint Aloysius from 1956 through 1960. As a

youngster I can remember well her talking about her teachers during those years: Sister Helen Celine, Sister Loretta de Sales, Sister Maria Josephine, Sister Maria Rosa, among many others, and of course her principal at ASA, Sister Mary Canice.

But like for so many students going through Catholic school after graduation, her connection to the Sisters of Charity became peripheral as other events in life took center stage.

But that would change for her in the mid-1980s while working as the secretary to the assistant principals at Marist High School in Bayonne. The story goes that in the mid-1980s as Sister Rita Walsh completed her tenure as principal at Saint Aloysius High School in Jersey City, Sister was hired as a teacher of English and Latin at Marist. On the day of her hire, the principal of Marist at the time, Brother Michael Mullin, brought Sister over to my mom's office to introduce her. That dialogue, which was often remembered with great joy by Sister Rita, went like this: "Fran, I would like to introduce you to Sister Rita Walsh from Saint Al's who will be on the faculty in September." My mother responded: "Brother, it's about time you hired a Sister of Charity!"

It was at that moment that my mom was reconnected to the vine that is the Sisters of Charity and a friendship with Sister Rita began. Although perhaps the better word is *companionship*.

All of those who encountered Sister Rita found in her a true companion - someone who shared the journey with you, listened to you, encouraged you, and sent you forth knowing that you were loved and cared for, much like that experience of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus, meeting up with a companion, Jesus, and after listening, and sharing in a meal together, are able to go back to Jerusalem and face what they have to face and do what they need to do.

Yes, Sister Rita was gifted by God to be a good listener: a woman of sage wisdom, a practical wisdom. "It's not eternal life," she would say after you would explain a challenge you were facing. "It's not eternal life." In other words, don't sweat the small stuff. Whatever you are facing you will get through it. And because Sister said it, you knew that would be true.

Sister Rita was first and foremost a *magistra*, a teacher, and while her ministry had her work in Morris and Middlesex counties, I think her heart was always in Hudson County where she served so well for many years both at Saint Al's and at Marist.

As a classicist, Sister Rita appreciated, as Edgar Allen Poe would say, the *glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome*, but her scholarship and keen intellect never distanced her from her care for the human person. She knew that all of her students had personal stories, personal challenges which called her to use the gifts she was given and the charism of her community to be a woman of immense *caritas*...charity. Not in terms of offering a handout, but in terms of offering compassion, kindness, patience, understanding - all of the gifts that Saint Paul refers to in the second reading. When you would ask Rita, "How are you?" She would respond, "I'm fine, but how are *you*?" And she sincerely meant it when she asked the question.

If we took that second reading from First Corinthians, we could justifiably replace the word *love* with the name *Sister Rita*.

*Sister Rita is patient, she is kind,  
she is not jealous, she is not pompous.  
She is not inflated, she is not rude.  
Sister Rita does not seek her own interests,  
she is not quick-tempered, she does not brood over injury.  
She does not rejoice over wrongdoing  
but rejoices with the truth.  
Sister Rita bore all things, believed all things,  
hoped all things, endured all things.*

How blessed were Sister's students to have had such a teacher...such a companion on the journey.

We saw her role of companion beautifully unfold in the care that she had for and love she shared with her sister Anne and Anne's children and grandchildren. Rita and Anne were a unit: sisters devoted to each other, who shared in each other's struggles and challenges, rejoiced together in the good times, and shared in many laughs and lighter moments. Rita and Anne shared together in a beautiful ministry.... the ministry of *presence* to each other.

And, of course, Sister Rita had her companions in her community, the Sisters of Charity. Seventy-two years in religious life. Seventy-two years ago, she said, "I will." Only the privileged few can say, "We have." As Sir Francis Drake said: "There must be a beginning of any great matter, but the continuing unto the end until it be thoroughly finished yields the true glory." How true those words are for Sister Rita.

Yes, as we go forth from this chapel today and continue to live our lives, we must prove ourselves worthy of the love and companionship we received from Sister Rita Walsh. And so, we give thanks to God through Jesus, and in the spirit, for the gift of Sister Rita: she who always kept us *on the vine* so we could also stay close to the Lord. We offer our thanks within the context of this *Eucharist*, the very Greek work that means *thanksgiving* - the very sacrament that nourished Sister Rita in body, mind, and spirit; the very sacrament that allowed her to experience on this earth that new age that Jesus says we will see in its fullness in the life to come.

May the all-loving Lord who sees all the good that Sister Rita did, the faith she kept, the love she shared, the hope she instilled, now bring her into that place in the Father's house - where the bonds that knit us together can never be broken; where we will know no sorrow or separation but the joys of eternal life.

Yes, whether you knew her as Camilla Rita, Sister Anna David, Aunt Mill, or Sister Rita, she was a companion to us all.

Sister Rita passed from this life on almost the Vigil of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. When I proclaimed the Gospel on Sunday - the gospel containing Mary's Song of Praise - I thought of Sister Rita and that when she met the Lord face to face, she would have said this, perhaps in this way:

*Magnificat anima mea Dominum;  
Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.*

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*

Well, Sister Rita, because we were privileged to have you as our companion on the journey, our spirits, too, will forever rejoice. God bless you.

Reverend John R. Job  
Pastor  
Church of the Most Blessed Sacrament  
Franklin Lakes, New Jersey