

FRANCISCAN SISTERS, T.O.R. *of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother*



from the desk of *Mother Della Marie*
JUNE 2021

BIRTH INTO ETERNAL LIFE

Dear Friends,

My dad, Patrick Joseph, passed away on April 10, 2016, during the Easter season. I miss him so much, but I know he is living his eternal destiny. There is so much about my dad that reminds me of his namesake, St. Joseph. I saw in him a desire to do God's will in all things and to serve Him with all of his heart, mind, and soul. I owe so much to him for my faith formation, much of which came through his witness.

My dad lived by the gospel and meditated on it daily. He let it guide him. I remember, one Christmas, my parents sheltered a mother of three boys, pregnant and about to give birth to twins. We already had a full house, but my parents made room. On cold mornings, Dad would wake up early and start the fire so the home would be warm before our 6:30 a.m. family devotion time. My dad encouraged me to read Scripture daily and helped me to apply it to my life, just like Joseph must have done for Jesus.

In 2011, Dad began to experience significant memory loss, resulting from water on his brain. In 2016, during the Easter Triduum, he began to dramatically decline. I traveled home on Easter Sunday to help my mom and sisters care for him. When I arrived, his responses were limited to "yes," "no," and "I don't know." He had not been able to carry on a conversation for a few years, but now he could barely communicate. I knew he wouldn't be with us much longer and I cherished every moment I could be with him.

A couple of days before my dad passed, he surprised us with a couple of sentences: "I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me;" "You bring me joy," spoken to my sister Natalie as she cared for him; he said "Amen," as he made the sign of the cross before receiving Holy Communion during last rites.

We were able to keep vigil with my dad for the last two nights of his life on earth. On the second night, some siblings went home, so I had extra hours in the night (3 a.m. - 6 a.m.). I prayed, cried, told my dad over and over that I loved him, and I thanked him for being open to life (for my amazing eleven siblings and my own life). I experienced deep peace in just being with him, which lessened my fear of death. I had a holy envy that he was so close to being face to face with God.

Close to the end of my vigil time, my dad's breathing became very shallow. I hurried and woke my mom, my sisters, Patricia and Natalie, and Natalie's husband Jeff. We prayed an Our Father together and my dad breathed his last. I felt deep peace, mixed with sorrow, and the longing to be with him soon.

I treasure the memory of being with my dad at his passing as a sacred moment in my life. When I remember those last moments, I feel the strong presence of Jesus, Mary, and St. Joseph, and I'm filled with awe and gratitude at being at my dad's birth into eternal life. It was surreal. The ultimate definition of a happy death is to be accompanied by the love and prayers of Jesus and Mary, the blessed privilege of St. Joseph, which he shares with us, his adopted children in the faith.

Accompanying a loved one in the dying process can be especially difficult because of the limitations due to the pandemic. I've heard several experiences of this that are heart-wrenching. In the midst of this suffering, I also hear about God's provision and grace and I know God has not abandoned His children. I know losing a loved one is really hard. My heart longs to be with my dad again and yet I know



Mother Della Marie as an infant, surrounded by her parents and siblings, in 1972.

he is alive with God and is present with me through his intercession.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph's presence with our loved ones in their passing is at our disposal - we need only ask. Every time we are at the bedside of a dying loved one, we have the opportunity to relive the mystery of Joseph's passing. There are special graces during this year of St. Joseph and one is an abundance of favor for the dying.

I pray you will experience many graces and intimacy with St. Joseph during this special year in his honor. We are so grateful for the way St. Joseph has provided for us, from the beginning of our community and especially during these difficult times. Joseph has made his provision felt through your love, prayers, and generous support of us. We could not live our consecration to God without you! I know God will overflow his blessings upon you as you share in our life of intercession, reparation, and atonement, through your support of our way of life.

In a special way, we ask St. Joseph to intercede for you and all your loved ones as they near death, and grant them the grace to know the love and care of Jesus and Mary, as they accompany them from this valley of tears into the final purification and the happiness of life in heaven. May God answer your prayers and meet your spiritual and material needs through the intercession of St. Joseph and according to God's loving will for you.

In Christ's love,

Ms. Della Marie Doyle, T.O.R.

Mother Della Marie Doyle, T.O.R.

Reverend Mother



Mother Della Marie with her parents, Rose Marie and Patrick, at her perpetual profession in 2002.

Never Alone BY SR. CHIARA JOAN RIFFON, T.O.R.

I recently had a very major surgery. Another patient waiting for surgery tested positive for COVID, so, even though I had my own surgery booked about 2 months out, they were able to get me in sooner, which was quite an answer to prayer. I had less than 2 days to get a COVID test, pack my belongings, clean my room, let my loved ones know, and find coverage for my various duties.

When I was in the pre-op room, I found myself a bit anxious about the upcoming surgery. Of course, I had thought and prepared and had all of my questions answered up to this point, but there's only so much you can have prepared in less than 48 hours. In the midst of the hustle and bustle, getting my allergies recorded, getting an IV put in and all of the paperwork signed, I found myself feeling rather alone. How I longed to have a loved one there with me to talk to me and keep me calm during that time! However, between my surgeon, the anesthesiologist, and all of my nurses, I heard multiple times, "Sister, when you're on that operating table, we will never leave you alone. Not for one minute will you be by yourself." I hadn't had this concern before, but in that moment of feeling so alone and vulnerable, I found it as such a consolation. It's the cry of the human heart to never be alone, especially when



we feel so vulnerable. I think the moment when we experience the utmost vulnerability is the moment that we die. A person may be given weeks to live and actually have years, one may be given years and have weeks, a person may die unexpectedly when he or she is totally healthy, or one may be unhealthy and live a long life. Some people are surrounded by loved ones when they pass and others are alone. Death doesn't discriminate.

When I was a young sister and doing nursing home ministry, I had the remarkable privilege to be with someone who would have otherwise died alone. She was a resident I had never met before. The nurse simply stopped me as I was on my way down to Mass and asked if I could pop in and be with her, since she would be dying at any moment. She was the communion I was meant to receive that day.

I had no idea what this woman's religious or cultural background was, but I knew, whatever she believed in her life, she needed God's mercy and protection. I prayed the Divine Mercy Chaplet, Our Fathers, I prayed through the intercession of the saints, and, right as I was about to repeat some of these prayers, I remembered that St. Joseph is the patron saint of a happy death. I began to beg for his intercession that he would come and be with her. While her family and loved ones didn't care to be with her and were OK with leaving her alone at such a vulnerable hour, I prayed that St. Joseph would be with her, to comfort and console her.

Shortly after, she passed. This is the one and only moment in my life that I have been with a person who died in front of me. There was a sacredness in the room, and above everything else that had transpired in that 30 minutes, I truly felt the presence of St. Joseph, not leaving her orphaned or abandoned, but taking her in as his foster child, just as he did with Our Lord. In her most vulnerable moment of death, she was never alone. Even if the nurse hadn't pulled me into the room that day, St. Joseph would have been with her, leading and guiding her to a peaceful and happy death to live eternally with Our Lord.

LIVING THE RISEN LIFE WITH MARY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

BY SR. MIRIAM O'CALLAGHAN, T.O.R.

“Let us not stay imprisoned within ourselves, but let us break open our sealed tombs to the Lord – each of us knows what they are – so that he may enter and give us life. Let us give him the boulders of our past, those heavy burdens of our weaknesses and falls ... the Lord is alive and wants to be sought among the living. After having found him, each person is sent out by him to announce the Easter message.” -Pope Francis

~~~~~

Prayer is the scissors that cuts through the “fabric” of our self-imposed security blankets and ruptures the “boulders” that block us from the Lord and others, allowing the Spirit to flow freely through us and overflow to others.

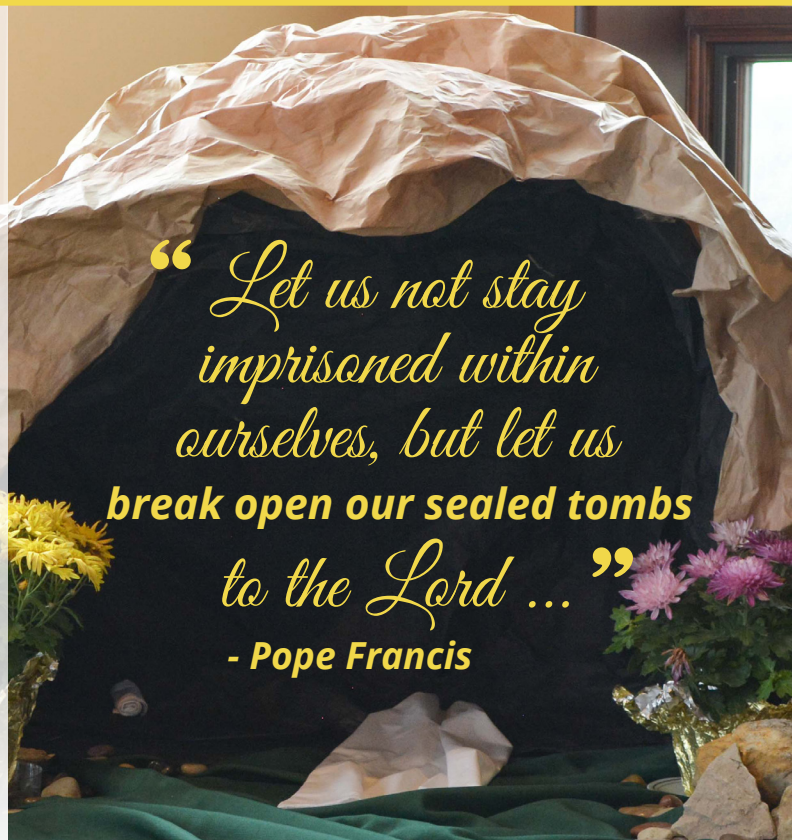
Some years ago, I was enclosed in one of these “sealed tombs.” I would like to share a somewhat embarrassing personal struggle that I experienced regarding Our Lady. Rivalry between a woman and her mother-in-law is the subject of many jokes! When I was discerning a call to religious life, I experienced the struggle of trying to compete with an objectively perfect mother-in-law (Our Lady)!

I kept a “boulder” between myself and Our Lady because I felt that she was the perfect woman that I could never be. In my awkwardness, I decided that I didn’t really need to be close to her. I was better off not being constantly reminded about just how inferior I was. So I kept her at arm’s length, until, one day, I prayed and admitted to her that there was a wedge in our relationship, which I strongly suspected was my fault!! I told her that I was tired of seeing her as the competition that I could never measure up to. I told her that I wanted a real relationship with her and that I wanted that relationship to lead to a closer relationship with her Son.

I thought that it would take maybe months or at least weeks, but literally, before I got up from my knees, I could feel a shattering of the “boulder,” a softening of my heart and a maternal warmth and tenderness surrounding it. It filled me with a deep sense of peace and confidence that’s hard to explain to myself to this day.

In the third glorious mystery of the rosary (Pentecost), we reflect on the new life received by the Apostles when they were constrained by fear within the “sealed tomb” of the upper room. The rush of the Spirit upon them prompted them to burst open the door to spread the Gospel message and draw others into this new life. At that moment when I personally met Our Lady, the Lord brought me out of a tomb and into new life – a deeper understanding of her motherhood. The Holy Spirit gave me the grace to open my heart to her in honesty and everything changed.

As we go forth from Pentecost into Ordinary Time once more, we recall how prayer cuts through the “linen cloths” that keep us bound and dissolves the “boulders” that block us from receiving new life in the Holy Spirit, life that overflows into the lives of those we love and care for.



“*Let us not stay imprisoned within ourselves, but let us break open our sealed tombs to the Lord ...*”  
- Pope Francis

## WAYS TO FOSTER A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE *Holy Spirit*

FROM SR. SOPHIA GRACE, T.O.R.

### Look to Our Lady

Mary, the spouse of the Holy Spirit, is our model of cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

### Ask!

Ask for more of the Holy Spirit in your life and see what will happen (Luke 11:9-13)!

### Silent Prayer

When we make room for silence, we are more peaceful and sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

### Scripture

Study and pray with passages that describe the Holy Spirit’s ways, such as the *Acts of the Apostles*.

### Be real with God

Let Him see you, love you, and heal you.

### Cultivate awareness of the Holy Spirit

Call Him to mind throughout the day.

### Obey His inspirations

Be ready to listen and respond.

### Listen online:

Sr. Sophia Grace’s full talk, “From the Empty Room to the Upper Room: Intimacy with the Holy Spirit” is on our website:

**FranciscanSistersTOR.org/news/audio**  
under *Event Talks: Lenten Retreat 2017*

FRANCISCAN SISTERS, T.O.R.  
OF PENANCE OF THE SORROWFUL MOTHER  
369 LITTLE CHURCH RD.  
TORONTO, OHIO 43964  
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORG  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Mailer's Choice



Check out our Novena to St. Joseph on our website:  
[FranciscanSistersTOR.org/Events/Year-of-St-Joseph](http://FranciscanSistersTOR.org/Events/Year-of-St-Joseph)

"I faithfully followed along with you, each day,  
very much enjoying and drawing nourishment  
from this devotion."

-John Francis G., Sheffield Lake, Ohio

CONTACT US! (740) 544-5542  
[WWW.FRANCISCANSISTERSTOR.ORG](http://WWW.FRANCISCANSISTERSTOR.ORG)

*"To Glorify God and Make  
Known His Merciful Love"*



# SHARE HIS MERCY VIRTUAL BENEFIT

## LIVING BY FAITH: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST. JOSEPH

### SATURDAY AFTERNOON, SEPTEMBER 25

**Livestream  
and In-Person options**  
on our social media and  
both indoors and outdoors  
at Our Lady of Sorrows  
Monastery



**Event program starts  
at 3 pm**, both in person  
and livestreamed,  
including stories and  
music from the sisters



For those attending  
in person,  
**Lunch at 1 pm** will be  
prepared by our friends  
and fabulous Italian cooks,  
Fr. Tom Sparacino and  
Angela Gaughan!



**Vigil Mass at 4:15 pm**,  
celebrated by  
Fr. Joe Freedy from the  
Diocese of Pittsburgh  
(also livestreamed)



We will keep you posted! Plans are subject to change, based on our state and local guidelines for large gatherings.  
We are working to keep safety a priority as we plan for our annual event.