



## Carmelite Spiritual Center

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### Life is Worth Giving

GRATITUDE IS THE MEMORY OF THE HEART

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

The notice, when it came, was very simply stated: "Just wanted to let you know that your dear friend and former teacher, Sr. Mary Leo, died this past week."

It was a simple notice that brought back a veritable flood of memories: Fifth grade at St. Aloysius Grammar School on the West Side of Jersey City, N.J. She was a Sister of Charity endowed with great love, patience and Faith which she shared in great measure with her students. A teacher who about us cared, and demanded that we care, about ourselves. The best English grammarian I have ever encountered.

I really didn't start off Fifth Grade with Sr. Mary Leo, but had been transferred to her class because my Mother and Father didn't want my brother, Desmond, and I to be in the same class. My parents made the request; I received an undiguised blessing!

There were few, if any, excuses accepted in Sr. Mary Leo's classroom. Perhaps a serious illness or a grave family crisis might be considered a reason for homework not being done, or a spelling test not being passed, or an assignment not being completed. Nothing else would really do.

Fr. Kevin/ LIFE (Gratitude)/ 2

"This assignment isn't worthy of each of us," Sr. Mary Leo would sometimes say in her strong Irish (West Cork) brogue. It was then that one of her students realized that he or she had not only failed to live up to Sr. Mary Leo's expectations but ~~also~~ failed to fulfill self potential. The assignment was swiftly re-done not only to meet the ability of the individual student but also the expectation of the teacher. No excuses!

But to be a student in Sr. Mary Leo's class was not a dour and joyless experience, it was rather an opportunity to fill one's mind with both facts and understanding. The daily newspaper was the prelude to a ~~quiz~~ geography or history quiz. In those last years of the 1930s, the world was filled with war and <sup>up-</sup>~~heaval~~ heaval and we needed to know what was happening and where. If Russia invaded Finland, we had to know where both countries were and point them out on the map chart. If Hitler threatened to invade the Rhineland, or Austria, or Poland --- in the next class we would be required to point out these places on the world globe in class.

The daily newspaper also served as a place the learn percentages by following the Stock Market each day. Sr. Mary Leo also introduced us to a lifetime of reading enjoyment in such novels as those of Fr. Francis Finn, S.J.

But to be a student of Sr. Mary Leo was also an invitation to live <sup>a</sup> a life of Faith. As the war clouds gathered over Europe, we prayed for peace before World War II; we prayed for the poor who were the refuse of the Great Depression; and we prayed that we would fulfill the great potential that God had placed in each of us. No routine prayers in Room 103!

Fr. Kevin/ LIFE (Gratitude/ 3

And Sr. Mary Leo never seemed to forget her students, even when we visited her years late at St. Anne's Villa in Morristown, N.J., where she lived to be almost 100! She was, indeed, a great teacher and exemplar who shared her knowledge and Faith with her students and who taught us that "Gratitude <sup>is</sup> the memory of the heart."