Sister Anne (Mary Pius) Herringer, OP
(1916 – 2014)

Speak, move, act in peace, as if you were in prayer. In truth, this is prayer.
— Penelon

Sister Anne Herringer, baptized Anne Mildred, was born on February 28, 1916, in the village of Arthur, Ontario, Canada. Her parents, George and Bridget (O’Neill) Herringer, along with her two-year-old sister Mary, welcomed Anne into this world.

After her father died in 1918 during a flu epidemic, Anne’s mother began taking in boarders to support the family. Among the boarders were her mother’s sister Annie, and her brothers Jim and Eugene (Dude). Annie and Jim ran a bakery and grocery store and Eugene worked for the railroad. During the wake service Sister Anne’s niece, Ann O'Donnell-Beckwith, recalled those early years.

As you can imagine things were very difficult financially. When Sister Anne and her sister Mary were teenagers, their mother, Bridget, then took in two children who were about to become homeless—my mother Peggy, 28 months old and her brother Johnny, a new born baby. Sister Anne’s mother opened her heart and her home to the two children.

When Anne was in high school, her mother became seriously ill with a heart ailment and died in 1933. Now their mother’s sister Annie and her brother Jim took on the role of mother and father for Anne, Mary, Peggy and Johnny.

After graduating from high school, Anne enrolled in St. Joseph Hospital School of Nursing Program in Guelph, Ontario, with the financial help of her sister Mary who was now a registered nurse. She completed her studies in 1940, and was certified as a Registered Nurse.

In 1943, Anne found work at Mount Carmel Hospital in Detroit, where she met and shared night duty with Sister Madonna Maier. Sister Madonna told her all about the recently opened Sisters Hospital in Santa Cruz, California. Anne had thought often about joining a religious congregation and now, through Sister Madonna, she found the perfect combination: sister/nurse.

Anne entered the postulate in Adrian on November 20, 1943, and at reception received the religious name, Sister Mary Pius. In 1945 she received her first assignment: to Sisters Hospital in Santa Cruz, where for the next fourteen years she ministered as a nurse. During six of those years she was the hospital administrator. In a section of her autobiography entitled, “Just a Few Memories,” Sister Anne described those early years at Sisters Hospital: “[They] were hard but happy years as the Sisters cared for patients, worked in OB, ER, Surgery, Switchboard, and kitchen — cooking and serving breakfast, cleaning rooms, etc. etc.

In 1959, Sister Anne was sent to Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital, located near the downtown area. The Congregation had purchased this second hospital from a physicians’ group in 1950,
about ten years after opening Sisters Hospital. Here, Sister Anne would serve as assistant administrator and surgical nurse for four years.

Sister Anne’s entry in her autobiography reads, “And then came another hospital on Soquel Avenue. It had been named Santa Cruz Hospital, so we named it Dominican. We had to still use the words Santa Cruz because the sand blasters couldn’t remove [the words] Santa Cruz to insert Dominican—thus the name of our present hospital—Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital.”

From 1959 to 1967, the nursing Sisters were rotated between the two hospitals, e.g., in 1963, Anne returned to Sisters Hospital to be the administrator for the four years and then returned to Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital in 1967, where she served as administrator and surgical nurse for the three years.

To provide room for future growth, the Congregation purchased a 17-acre site on the outskirts of the city of Santa Cruz and built a new Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital that was dedicated in December 1967. Now all services from the two older hospitals were consolidated in this new facility. Sister Anne was put in charge of surgery in this new facility for two years and eventually became Director of Nursing.

In 1970, after the General Chapter of Renewal, Sister Rosemary Ferguson, Prioress, and her Council asked Sister Anne to come to Adrian to do a needs assessment of the clinical services and staffing at Maria Hall that would be required to meet the projected health and retirement needs of Sisters in the future. She began by obtaining her Certificate of Licensure as Nursing Home Administrator in the State of Michigan.

During the next three years, Sister Anne developed personnel policies, provided in-service programs for staff, established physical therapy and podiatry programs, and renamed the residence Maria Health Care Center. St. Clement Infirmary was renamed Roncalli Hall. She also served as a resource for local health organizations: volunteer nursing service to Health Clinic for Migrant Workers and the underprivileged of Lenawee County and American Red Cross Blood Mobile.

In September 1973, Sister Anne enrolled in a ten-month Clinical Pastoral Program (CPE) at Marianjoy Rehab Hospital in Wheaton, Illinois. She returned to Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital in 1974, where she would continue to minister for her last fifteen years of active ministry. During these years, Sister Anne served in several roles: surgery supervisor, coordinator of patient registration, and finally patient representative.

Sister Anne retired in 1990, and lived at Dominican Oaks, a retirement facility located on the hospital property, for nineteen years. She returned to Adrian in 2009, and lived at Dominican Life Center/Maria, where she died on October 27, 2014.

Sister Jo Gaugier, Chapter Prioress of Holy Rosary Chapter, opened the wake/remembrance service with highlights of Anne’s seventy years of vowed life and ministry. She said:
Anne will be remembered along with so many other Sisters as part of the cornerstone of our hospitals established in Santa Cruz. This was her life, one of caring for newborns, the sick, the dying, and the poor—all God’s children. ...We experienced her here as quietly present to this time of deepening spiritually. She will be remembered as a woman gracious, who loved with tenderness, kind, who reached out to others, who connected in a special way nurse to nurse with co-workers here who cared for her. Professional to the bone and one who in her youth was Sister Pius, [she] would say: “I’m Pius no longer—call me Anne.” Thank you, Anne, for gracing us with your presence among us.

Ann O’Donnell-Beckwith, Sister Anne’s niece, spoke about family home visits and the women who influenced her life. Here are excerpts:

As a young girl I watched as my family prepared for Sister Anne’s home visits. Those home visits were some of the happiest times of my childhood. Her visits were marked by tremendous anticipation, intricate preparations, including all of Aunt Anne’s favorite foods! There was much laughter, so much company and her visits always ended with many tears when she and her companion would have to leave.

On a personal note: As I grew up in the 60s I had four strong, capable women frame my world view: Sister Anne, her sisters my mother Peggy and my Aunt Mary and my Aunt Dolly. These four amazing women unveiled possibilities for me that did not reflect the stereotype at that time. For that I will always be grateful to these strong able women.

Sister Judith Benkert, Dominican West Chapter Prioress, preached the homily based on readings Sister Anne had selected for her funeral liturgy:

Anne chose these readings as her last and most important message to us. Jesus said, “Whatever you do, give water, food, relieve pain, offer your hand to those in need.” This is where Anne ministered for years and years at Sisters Hospital and Dominican Hospital for the persons in Santa Cruz: fishermen and their families, former GI’s. Anne was a nurse before there was an 8 or 12 hour shift, before policy books even existed. She helped people who came to the hospital because of injury, pain, illness, and childbirth. Sometimes people in need came to the front door and sometimes they came to the back door, but no matter. Anne was a nurse to the very least in the kingdom, without cost, not without worry. She always opened the door.

How did she manage? We have a second message. It’s written in the letter to Corinthians: Love is patient, love is kind, love is enduring, does not seek its own interests. Do you think these words popped into her mind when she answered the bell at the ER late at night after a busy day in surgery or helping women in labor? No, these words were her very being as a nurse, a Dominican Sister. She preached with her hands and reasoned with her heart to touch and heal the very least in the kingdom. And with this last message Anne Herringer nurse, sister, aunt and friend asks each of us to do the same, without fear, without worry. It is our call and responsibility.

Father Jim Hug, SJ, offered this opening prayer at the funeral liturgy:
We have come together today from far and near
to celebrate our sister, Anne
to thank you for the wonderful gift of her time with us,
a time of sisterly attentiveness and subtle humor,
a time of dedicated and tender nursing care,
a time of wise and supportive administration
a time of prayer and Gospel proclamation,
a time of grace and service
a time of letting go of all she treasured into Your hands.

Let the shape and loving care of our lives join with hers
in compassionate service and sensitive commitment to the needy,
in skilled and gentle care for each other
in commitment to You, the healing Mystery of our lives.

We make our prayer in the name of Jesus and the communion of your
Spirit where we all are one with You and Anne, now and forever. Amen