Sister Dolores (James Richard) LaVoy, OP
(1924 – 2014)

Sister Dolores LaVoy – born June 20, 1924, in Toledo, Ohio, and baptised Dolores Jean – was the fourth of nine children born to Isadore and Matilda (Meinig) LaVoy. The family lived in the homestead farmhouse near Erie, Michigan, that had been built by their grandfather. It was also the place where their father was born.

The LaVoys belonged to St. Joseph Parish in Erie, Michigan, where the children attended the parish grade school staffed by the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters of Monroe, Michigan. They went to Central Catholic High School in Toledo. Sister Dolores said that because their parents were committed to giving them a Catholic education they drove the younger children five miles to parish grade school in Erie and then five miles in the other direction to Catholic Central High School in Toledo. This was a 40-mile trip each school day until their older brother, Jim, was able to drive them to school.

When asked about her vocation, Sister Dolores said, “The only Adrian Dominicans we knew were our three [cousins], the LaVoy nuns: Marie Gilbert, Marie Lambert and Pauline Mary. I had been thinking about being a sister, and after I decided to join, my cousin, Sister Pauline Mary, helped me with the admission paper work. The last person I had to see was the doctor to get the physical and I flunked it because he discovered a heart murmur. He said, ‘No, you have to wait a year.’” The following year, Sister Dolores was cleared to enter the postulate in 1944.

At her reception Dolores received her religious name, Sister James Richard. Her first assignment as a novice was to reorganize the pantry shelves in Benincasa Hall. She thought, “I didn’t enter the convent to do this…when others are taking classes.”

Later when she was asked to get a degree in home economics, she was glad to learn not how cook but how to sew. Eventually, she became so skilled she was able to make priest vestments.

After first profession in 1946, Sister Dolores taught elementary grades for the next thirteen years in California, Michigan, Illinois and Virginia. In 1959, she received what she called, “the biggest shock in my life.” She had been appointed to St. Isidore School in Mount Clemens, Michigan, as the school principal and superior. In her biography Dolores wrote this account of her new assignment.

_I was appointed to go to St. Isidore in Mount Clemens as the principal, superior, and one sister was going with me, Sister John Agnes (Mary LaMantia). There was a $100 bill inside my appointment envelope and a little note that said, ‘to be returned to the Motherhouse.’ This was my starting out money. I went limp, the other two sisters held me up and I wondered why Mother [Gerald] would ever do this; I was just a first grade teacher! When we got [to St. Isidore I realized] I had to open it; there was nothing there, just the [empty] shell of the school and convent._
The first year St. Isidore School opened with one hundred twenty children enrolled in grades one through six.

After completing her term as principal of St. Isidore School in 1965, Sister Dolores returned to the classroom and continued teaching elementary grades in Michigan and Ohio schools for the next seven years.

In 1972, Sister Dolores changed the focus of her ministry and for the next twenty-three years she served in parish and religious education programs. The first two years she was on the pastoral team at St. Mary Parish in Swanton, Ohio.

Sister Dolores spent the remaining twenty-one years in Florida. From 1974 to 1983, she was religious education coordinator at St. Hugh Parish in Miami. In 1983, she moved to Little Flower Parish in Coral Gables, where she served as director of religious education for the next seven years. From there she moved on to Lake Worth, Florida, where she ministered at St. Luke Parish as director of religious education for five years. In her 1992-1993 Annals, Sister Dolores described the program:

*This year my CCD enrollment reached 500 students and 40 teachers. My goal is to provide a good religious education program for the children of this parish. Helping to dress and feed the poor has been very satisfying to me also.*

Two years later, Sister Dolores wrote in her Annals: “This year, I came to the realization it was time for me to cut back my workload and go into part-time ministry next year.


After Sister Dolores retired, she continued to volunteer at St. Luke Parish, where she visited with four poor elderly women, cooking meals and providing transportation for them.

In 2010, Sister Dolores realized she needed more assistance and care and decided to return to Adrian to live at the Dominican Life Center/Maria. She died on December 16, 2014, at the age of ninety.

The morning after her sister died, Sister Joyce LaVoy, OP, wrote this reflection:

*Little spirit is wrapped in the arms of the God Spirit,*
*No more captive of the body.*
*Eternity now!*
*Surrender to New Life’s Love!*
*How could a person not believe in God…* 
*Looking into death’s face?*
Sister Joan Delaplane began her homily by recounting a conversation she had with Sister Joyce regarding her sister’s choice of scripture readings (Col 3:12-17; Lk 7:11-17). The readings, Joyce said, “show the gentle compassion of Jesus, and Dolores was a gentle and compassionate person.”

*What a beautiful epitaph, I thought; and wondered what two words would God and others use to describe my gift of life at its end. And you? What two words do you think God and others would use to describe your life?*

*It is true, isn’t it, that the ending of every physical life near and dear to us, causes reflection on our own life and death. The question always surfaces for me: “So what matters now for her/him?” And what should matter for me?*

All four Gospels give witness to the compassionate heart of Jesus wherever he encountered suffering or pain, but considering the profound love for his mother, the thought of Mary suffering like this widow, may have added a particular poignancy. This seemed true for Dolores as well. Like her Master, she often perceived someone in pain or with a heartache and reached out quietly and gently in compassion. In fact, as we shared remembrances of Dolores yesterday, one Sister remarked that Dolores said: “I just cannot pass a person in need without helping if I can.” To be that sensitively thoughtful of others most likely speaks of one who has personally known suffering or pain, and let God in to heal or comfort her. It is only when we can receive the compassion of God that we are able then to BE the compassion of God for others.

And now I believe that Dolores sees those compassionate eyes of the God she served so well gazing upon her with infinite Love. She would probably repeat to us today the words of John Donohue: “See yourself with the same gentleness, expectation and compassion with which the Divine beholds you at every moment.”

Father James Hug, SJ, offered the following prayer of Thanksgiving for Sister Dolores’ life during the funeral liturgy:

*Our Loving God, Father/Mother of all creation  
Loving Source of all families, of all loving relationships  
of all gentle and kind concern,  
We have come together today from far and near  
to celebrate our sister, Dolores,  
to thank you for the wonderful gift of her time with us,  
a time of loving attentiveness and generous concern,  
a time of prayerful dedication and Gospel proclamation,  
a time of gracious hospitality and energetic service,  
and, finally, a time of letting go of all she treasured into Your Peace.*

*Let the grace and loving care of our lives join with her  
in compassionate, creative, and generous care,  
in expectant openness and practical service, and  
in faithful commitment to You, the saving 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 Dolores, now and forever. Amen.

May God Bless us all with a full and generous share in Dolores’s Gracious, gentle, welcoming spirit of hospitality. Prayerful dedication to God. High ideals and committed determination to achieve them. Quiet, unassuming and generous service to meet people’s needs.

Amen! Alleluia