

## **Traveling Companion: A Mimosa for a saint**

Fr. Michael Tracey

She loved her church, her God, and her mimosa. She loved bread pudding, chicken salad, meatballs and spaghetti. She loved her heavenly Mother and she lived as an earthly mother in a special sense.

One day, the pastor asked the elementary school children who was the mother of the church. One enterprising and practical young child simply said, "Miss Flo." Obviously, the young child was not theologically correct. But, through such innocent eyes, Miss Flo was the mother of Our Lady of the Gulf Church, at least.

Miss Flo was a real mother too. She was married and had one son, Larry. But she adopted many other sons; sons of other mothers. Who were these other sons? They were priests with freshly oiled hands, ready to embrace their first assignment at Our Lady of the Gulf parish. She groomed these sons, corrected them, even bossed them; but, most of all, she loved them

Her early years were spent in an orphanage in Mobile. One never heard a cry for sympathy from her. One never heard a complaint about her early and obviously traumatic childhood. Instead, one heard stories of the goodness, example, dedication and faith of the sisters who ran the orphanage.

As Sacristan at Our Lady of the Gulf for six decades, she ruled with an iron fist and, in later years, with a walking cane. She didn't need any book with guidelines about what should be done and when. She had committed it to memory. She oversaw the placing of poinsettias for Christmas and lilies for Easter. Those who helped her jumped at her commands. Altar servers behaved correctly. Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist dressed appropriately and with dignity. If not, they would receive a tongue lashing. She distained people talking and visiting in church when they should be praying.

During her decades of service to the church, she saw many changes, changes in personnel, in personalities and in the liturgy. In spite of such changes, her faith never wavered. She wore out several rosary beads; scuffed several prayer books from overuse; taped together novena cards that were falling apart because of persistent use. Her life was a constant meditation on the mysteries of her faith; contemplation on the lives of the saints and a committing to memory of some of the classical gems of our faith.

Miss Flo died recently and we all celebrated her life and her journey into eternity.

Reflecting on her life, I am always deeply touched by the faith of her generation. I love to listen to the faith stories and journeys of the octogenarians to be and beyond in our parish. I discover a strong but simple faith; a faith that was taught and passed on to them often by immigrant parents. These people reflect on the significant persons in their faith journey. So often, such significant persons include religious brothers and sisters who shaped them from an early age. They share stories of how religious brothers and sisters took a special interest in them; allowing them to have a Catholic education even when their parents could not afford it.

We live in such a fast-paced world where time is measured in milliseconds. We compute. We email. We blog. We schedule. We run. We exhaust. We feel guilty if we stop.

When I listen to the faith stories of the pre and post octogenarians in the parish, I am always inspired by their rooted faith. I listen to their stories of relationship with a God and their faith in him; a faith that is purged by life's challenges. I can count on their presence at any Mass or any celebration in the parish. They love their God, their faith, their parish. They show its depth, a depth that is like a deep flowing river.

We need to sit at the feet of such disciples and have the opportunity to be enriched by their experience and their journey. We need to salute all the Flos of life with a mimosa and sainthood.