

*A letter from Sister Betty Ann Maheu  
dated July 13-16, 1979  
from Perugia, Italy:*

I am finishing my second week in Perugia and so I thought I would give you a little account of how things are going around here. I keep busy with one thing or another ...

Everything is available here in Rome. With the exception of travel, things are quite expensive. Travel is cheap. For example, yesterday I went to Assissi which is 23 kilometers away and I paid about 60¢ U.S. Can't beat that!

Now I want to tell you something about Perugia and Language School. Presently, I am studying in Perugia at the University for foreigners (Universita per Stranieri). This is a "new" university dating only from the 1700's which, in a place like this, is like yesterday. If you can believe what the maps tell you, this City has been around since before the IV Century. It was a major Etruscan City and part of the Decapolis. Needless to say, it was sacked many times and it has the "dubious" honor of having held Francis of Assissi a prisoner during one particular skirmish with its neighbor, Assissi. The Popes have had a great deal to do here. It was one of their favorite places and where - as the story goes - the very first papal conclave was held. It is most picturesque. I only have to look out any window to be at once transported to the 11th and 12th centuries.

The narrow streets are full of glorious arches which span the space from the houses on the left to those on the right. It takes no imagination at all to see a knight in armor come dashing up on his horse and stop to talk to his beautiful lady looking out her window; (the Italians seem to love leaning out their windows and I can hardly blame them because in so doing, you see right into your neighbor's house on the other side of the street as well as everything else going on--and something is usually going on --in the street below.)

The University as a physical structure is a disaster. It would never satisfy the Ossining Fire Department, the Board of Health or any other Agency you can think of. On the other hand there is nothing to distract you. Everyday, the doorkeeper solemnly opens the door at 07:45 a.m. The 3,000 (approx.) students make a mad dash for the one stairway in the entire University. I climb 157 steps to get to my "aula" (classroom). The classroom, according to our teacher, is painted green. According to me it is grey! We sit on hard wooden upright benches. There are 4 students to each bench. (Sometimes, we sit 3 instead.) For 2 or 3 solid hours (the Italians must be the world's most vocal people) we are lectured in the intricacies of Italian grammar. No word of any other language crosses the teacher's lips. A student quickly learns to understand, if not speak the language. Actually, I am doing very well and don't find the language very difficult.

My class, made up totally of foreigners, is an interesting mixture of people. We have all ages at the University from 19 to 75. The

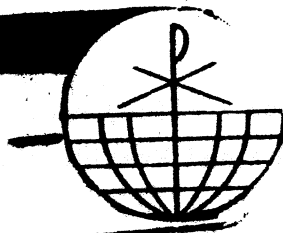
young and not so young people in my class come from Greece, Iran, Korea, Russia, Mexico, Costa Rica, USA, England, France, Germany, Japan, Lebanon, etc., etc.

I am very proud of our young Americans - some from Holy Cross, Yale, etc., who are studying very hard. Many students are studying Art, especially Medieval Art.

In my class, there are 2 young Polish priests who come from the only Catholic University in the whole of Poland. They are Luca and Stanislaus. Sitting with them often--and somewhat oddly enough--is Alexandro, a young Russian Orthodox priest, who will be studying at the Gregorian Papal University in Rome in September. This was a surprise to me. I have since learned that young Russian priests are much encouraged to study in Rome. There's a lot of ecumenism going on about which we are unaware! Paolo is a young and very friendly Korean priest. Often sitting with him is another Luke, a young Japanese priest, which brings me to one of those strange coincidences which occasionally happen in our small world. Luke and I were sitting near one another last week and Luke asked me what Congregation I belonged to. When I said "Maryknoll" he told me he had been baptized in Japan by a Maryknoll Bishop, now long dead. His name? Bishop Patrick Byrne! I mentioned that Bishop Byrne had died in the "long march". Luke told me his father had told him. As we spoke I mentioned that Bishop Byrne was the man whom the Japanese had requested to go on radio to calm the Japanese as the Americans occupied Japan. He looked at me almost incredibly and said, "It was my father who made that request of Bishop Byrne." The course of histories converge at strange intersections. Luke and I have become good friends. He is a Marianist and a good friend of Fr. Nakagawa whom the Maryknoll Sisters educated in Hawaii.

Yesterday, I went to Assissi. It is a marvelously inspiring place - to walk the streets where one little man, raised by God to save the Church, continues truly to live today even as he lies in his humble tomb. I remembered all of you lovingly and prayerfully.

(s) Sister Betty Ann



# Report from Rome

December, 1980

The following "Report from Rome" will be for all of you, I hope, a source of consolation and pride. The recent deaths of Ita and Maura, Dorothy and Jean compel me to express to all of you not only my own sentiments of grief and hope but those also of so many others. The deaths of these wonderful women have revealed to me something of the depth, the solidarity, the unity of love and concern of religious here in Rome. First, I want personally to express my sympathy to the CGB on whose shoulders so much of the weight and burden of these martyrdoms have fallen, also to those Sisters in Middle and South America, especially Chile who in recent months has given two of their "volunteers" back to God. My prayers are with all of you. I think also often during these days of the parents and relatives of those who have given their lives in the service of the Lord and for those they loved so well. My prayers are also for those whose hearts filled with violence lead the innocent to death knowing that God's mercy and forgiveness are infinite.

These deaths have revealed to me that Maryknoll is known and loved, that we have given other religious an enviable legacy which is at once humbling and a challenge: a challenge to be what the Lord in his infinite love and mercy has called us to be--missioners and religious.

Expressions of sympathy have come to me from all sides. I have received phone calls, visits, letters, religious men and women stop me on the street to express their shock and their promise of prayer. It is generally accepted by religious that when we opt to be missionaries, we opt in a way to die--if need be--but when God calls us to this, it is something both terrible and wonderful.

As soon as I received the news, I called the Secretariat of State, Propaganda Fide, Justice and Peace and Vatican Radio. On the whole it would seem that the media have been accurate and sympathetic. The Osservatore Romano carried the news as did the secular and Catholic Italian and other language papers. By 7:00 a.m. Roman time, the BBC had already announced it. Vatican Radio spoke about it for several days.

On December 8, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Holy Father praying at the foot of Our Lady's statue at Propaganda mentioned "those consecrated persons who have lost their lives in El Salvador". Masses have been offered in abundance by Propaganda and many religious communities. On Friday morning, December 5 in the chapel of Regina Mundi, Father Miguel immediately offered Mass, not so much for the women but that violence might cease on earth. Last Friday, Father Lang said Mass here in our little but beautiful UISG chapel in which he spoke of how proud he felt of being a Maryknoller--but he did not forget also Dorothy and Jean!

I would like to quote one letter here (translated from the Italian) sent to me by Father Gabriele Ferrari, Superior General of the Xaverians and President of SEDOS. This beautiful letter is typical.

Rev. and dear Sister:

Last night I learned from you and today I found the confirmation in the newspapers of the sad news of the death of your Sisters in El Salvador. I wish to express my own fraternal condolences and those of my Xaverian Brothers.

These women are authentic martyrs for our faith, the victims of violence in our society. They are also examples for us missionaries of how we ought to "love even to the end."

Please send these expressions of condolence to your Mother General, assuring her of our prayers and our sharing in her grief.

May the Lord bless your congregation with other missionaries of equal courage and witnesses of the justice and peace of the Gospel to replace those who have given their lives.

I take this occasion to express my best wishes to you for the coming feasts and for the New Year.

Pray for me also.

Gabriele Ferrari, sx

Father Bill Hallidan, Columban, former superior in Chile in the house where Sheila Cassidy was arrested and who himself has known the fear of violent death, told me that he could not pray for Ita. He was very fond of her. When he heard of her death he went into the chapel and said a Te Deum. He then called Sheila in England to inform her.

Sister Mary Grace, an Ursuline with whom Maura had stayed when she was doing Mission Education, came into my office and wept. She recalled the impression Maura had made on her, the community and the students in school.

A lay woman, formerly with the diplomatic corps in Chile came to my office (Alice Mulhern in case some of you know her) and gave me a check for \$100.00 U.S. as a little memorial for the Sisters. She thought we would want to have something to remember them by.

As I reread this I see that the account in no way is adequate to convey sufficiently the love and esteem which so many have expressed for these four women and for us as a community.

Someone has offered to carry this to the States for me and so I close asking the Prince of Peace to bless all of us and to help us live up to the confidence and love He and others have placed in us!

Sister Betty Ann Maheu

Rome December 14, 1980



# **Report from Rome -**

No. 1 January-February

Rome, Italy 1981

Dear Sisters,

So many of you have written asking me what is going on here in Rome that I have decided to let you know via this little communication.

## **JOAN DELANEY LEAVES ROME**

By the time this reaches you, Joan will have left Rome for Ireland, England, USA, England again--if all the groups at the Roman airport, that is, ever decide all to go to work all together on the same day--otherwise she might have to keep a permanent residency here! I shall miss her! We used to get together almost weekly. She has now completed her contract with SEDOS and is moving on. Joan has done a splendid job here. As Maryknoll's "woman in mission in Rome", she has managed single handed to make Maryknoll an important part of the Roman scene. Now, I am looking forward to Rose Marie Cecchini's coming to pursue her research in April.

## **JOHN PAUL II**

Some of you have also written asking what John Paul II looks like from here. I think for the most part reactions here are more positive than what sifts through to us from the USA. There is no doubt at all that J.P. II stands out as a charismatic figure of major proportions. Even those who disagree with him readily admit that he has a power that is nothing short of extraordinary! He wins the respect and the hearts of thousands weekly as he walks or rides through the huge crowds that gather to hear him, see him and touch him. He does this with something of a veteran actor's confidence and a man whose identity is sure! This is one thing that strikes a person like me that has occasion to see him fairly often--he knows what he is about. Reports from the USA always seem to cast him in a very conservative light. I think this is only partially true. While certain elements in his background tend to make him conservative along certain lines (doctrine for instance), he is quite liberal in other aspects. (social justice and development). When he believes in something, he seems fearless in speaking out. The other day he called for the release of Magistrate D'Urso, held captive by the Red Brigade for over a month, with such force that I wondered whether he himself was not courting death! D'Urso was, in fact, released. No doubt many reasons featured in his release and the Pope may or may not have contributed to his freedom.

The D'Urso saga was like a soap opera--only it was for real! Every morning we would hurry to find out what had happened as the Red Brigade sent the police scurrying into the garbage cans to get the latest message. President Pertini has accused the Soviets of instigating the terrorist movement in Italy and other European countries. They are furious. Pertini is a socialist and they don't always get along too well here with the communists who have lost some of their clout in this country.

## **Singing With the Vatican Choir**

I had promised to sing with the Vatican choir during the Christmas season--as I often do during the year. You can see that they are not too fussy! I sang for the Midnight Mass and for the New Year's Eve Mass at the big Jesuit Church, the Gesù where the Holy Father says that Mass every year. Cardinal Vagnozzi dropped dead the day after Christmas and so I sang for that too remembering that he had been the Holy See's man in the United States before Jardot. By the way, I ran into Jardot at the Notre Dame Sisters the other day. He still loves all the Maryknoll Sisters and really misses his friends in the USA

### Taizé Youth Group Comes to Rome

Some 40,000 young people from the Taizé Youth Group spent six days in Rome the week after Christmas, "to get closer to the See of Peter". They prayed daily for unity in the major churches and spent a couple long vigils—one with John Paul II in St. Peter's

Brother Roger, of course, was also here and had an audience with the Holy Father. That man is really proving that unity is possible. He is very inspiring.

### Pueri Cantori also Meet in Rome

Somewhere between 7,000 and 12,000 young singers (and some not so young, it seemed to me) converged on Rome at the same time as the Taizé Group! Walking down the street was like being caught in some fairyland where, at long last, the fountain of youth had been found! At least 7,000 sang for the papal Mass on January 1. Many of the choirs gave special concerts in different places. I attended one featuring about 17 different groups. The best, at least to my tastes, was the Japanese, followed by the Austrians and then the Mexicans.

### Ecumenical Shift

It almost seems as though the general attitude on ecumenism is changing. I do not know if the same thing is happening everywhere, but here there is not so much talk about unity meaning, "Get the net out fellers, and haul them all into the Roman fold". Rather there is talk of the different gifts, contributions and dimensions each brings to Christianity. Some even seem to think that any Church that can live in harmony with both Jesuits and Dominicans already has more diversity than any Protestant group might bring to it!

### Promotion of Women

The UISG Task Force on the Promotion of Women is studying the Convention Against all Discrimination of Women, the U.N. document, and trying to ascertain the meaning of the document for the Church. To explore the matter further, I have invited Bishop Josef Cordes and Lucienne Sallé from the Council of the Laity to join us at the March meeting. Bishop Cordes and Lucienne headed the Holy See's Roman delegation to the UN Conference in Copenhagen last summer.

If you are doing anything on the promotion of women that you would like to share with the rest of the world, write and tell me about it and we will publish it in our news-sheet. If you would like to know what is going on here, write and we'll put you on our Task Force mailing list.

### UISG-USG Joint Commission: Justice and Peace

Our main task so far has been to try to keep the generalates informed on various issues in the hopes of conscientizing them a bit. But we are asked to do so many things that it is difficult to know just where to concentrate our efforts. We are now doing some research in the hopes of resolving the problem. We are asked to write letters, send telegrams, get people out of prisons, etc., and we do not have the personnel to research these requests sufficiently. We had a good meeting with Amnesty International when they were here recently. They also would like us to collaborate with them. They came for an audience with the Holy Father and hoping to get a strong statement from the "total" church against the death penalty. They spoke of Peg Healy in Washington. The Secretary General had just called her re Salvador. He was very sympathetic!

I sent the Salvador telegrams to the "two" Presidents, etc., as Annette had requested from this Commission and did it from the Vatican Post Office hoping it might bear a bit more weight!

I want to keep this to one page so I shall say ARREVEDERCI DA ROMA!

*Sister Betty Ann Thacker*



# **Report from Rome -**

No. 3 May - June , 1981

Rome, Italy

## **TRAGEDY STRIKES THE CHURCH IN ROME**

The attempt on the Pope's life on Wednesday, May 13th was only the culmination in a series of tragedies to strike the Church in Rome recently. Shortly before Holy Week a sensitive, promising, intelligent and much loved French seminarian and a student at the Gregoriana Jesuit University were found dead, strangled by their own hands. Two days later a young Scot seminarian, also studying at the Gregoriana, hung himself in an abandoned house on the grounds of the Scots College. Just before, the young (42 year old) rector died after being run over by a car. The morale among the seminarians was already running low when, during Easter Week, three first year American seminarians at the North American College, also students at the Gregoriana, went south for a few days of vacation. They rented some motorcycles. One (Texas) failed to negotiate one of the many sharp curves along the Amalfi Drive, perhaps the most beautiful in Italy, and plunged hundreds of feet to his death on the rocks of the ocean below. To add to this tragedy, one of the fifth year students from the North American College, in Tennessee, was brutally murdered in a rectory and as everyone all over the world now knows, the Pope was shot during his Wednesday audience on May 13. At Mass on Saturday night at the North American, the young seminarian sitting next to me said, "Sister, I've had it! It's just too much!" One of the professors later told me that this young man was expressing what was in the hearts of just about everyone.

## **JOHN PAUL II SHOT**

On Wednesday, May 13, the Piazza of St. Peter's was crowded, as usual with thousands of pilgrims and tourists, among them a friend of mine with a group from Maine. The Holy Father had just shaken hands with one of the group when shots were fired. Since we were in the midst of our International Regional Councillors' meeting, I had not gone to the audience with my friend. I had, however, invited her to supper. I was returning from the market around 5:30 and found myself at the Conciliazione, the street which leads directly to the Piazza of St. Peter. Traffic was stopped; people were running away from the Piazza, but no one was saying anything or making any noise. I knew instantly that something was wrong. One glance at my watch told me that the audience could not yet be over. I crossed the bridge and met a religious who told me what had just happened. I with two other Sisters went to the Piazza to join the many people who had stayed there to pray. Later I went to pick up my friend at the hotel. I noticed that people were walking in a daze holding their transistors to their ears to catch every shred of news on the Pope's condition.

Yesterday, Sunday, the Holy Father recorded the Regina Coeli from his hospital bed so that the thousands gathered in the Piazza might still have a word from him. I have, of course, heard him many times, but this time, I was literally moved to tears. His voice was still strong, but he spoke with obviously tremendous effort and pain and emotion as he prayed for and forgave "my brother who shot me". He then expressed his distress that others had been wounded with him. He has sent someone daily to visit them. (I went to see if they needed help the other day but their families are now with them.) One is still very sick!



### ON THE STREETS WHERE I LIVE

So many of you have asked where I live. Here is the answer. I live at the UISG where one floor is reserved for Sisters who do not have a residence in Rome and who work at the Union. Those who have visited me have admired and marvelled at the view from my office window. From here I can see the dome of St. Peter's, the Pope's apartments-- I know when he's in and when he's out--, the Castel S. Angelo (Hadrian tomb's later "baptised" into the Angel's Castle). I don't know just what happened to Hadrian's body but along the course of history the Castle fell into Papal hands. Eventually, it served as a papal prison where in the "good old days" the Popes kept their political prisoners. The place is now a military museum--among other things--and Paul III's bedroom is still very much intact! You get to the Castle by crossing the pedestrian bridge right across the street where I live and where frequently some movie company is out in full force and where daily the gypsies manage to clean out the pockets or pocketbooks of many an unwary visitor lost in contemplating the beauty and grandeur of the castle. The bridge crosses the Tiber where three times since I've been here persons have decided to jump to death from the angels' wings, or whatever, into the Tiber below. The last one changed his mind and swam himself to shore like an olympic contestant! You see, it takes considerable discipline on my part not to stop working entirely and just watch the world go by from my window. The only problem is I have another window which looks out on the Piazza di Ponte S. Angelo. Here tourists gather to study the statues on the bridge and other sculptural marvels only to become the "victims" of young thieves on motorcycles that make a living stealing pocketbooks from the tourists lost contemplating these marble marvels! A wild scream shakes me from my desk as another poor tourist is left without passport, air ticket or money! When I go downstairs, the window of my bedroom looks out on Via di Panico (Panic St.) which lives up to its name. Here the beauty of the castle, the Bridge of the angels, the Piazza all disappear into a hotbed of political activity. Here guns sometimes go off and police never appear! Here cars are stripped almost nightly and you don't look out--if you do you are likely to get some car part through the window. Clemmie got the spark plug through hers! Clea got a rock. Here getaway cars are left on our doorstep. (My finger prints and RoseMaries are on the last one!!!!) One night the burglar alarm under my window went off--it's for the antique shop below--it was still going at 7:00 a.m. and the police are just one block over! So these are the STREETS where I live and this is Rome, a place of beauty and charm, of grandeur and history, a place of pettiness and crime where everyday brings something of life at its best and at its worst!

### SUPERIORS GENERAL MEETING

We just completed the annual meeting of superiors general. It was really quite good and furnished an truly international experience for all. We had 450 religious congregations represented from 51 different countries with an attendance of about 700. Theme: Apostolic Spirituality: Call of the Gospel. The Africans this year made some significant contributions as did many others, but the quality of their feedin and feedback was quite refreshing. Some were quite vocal and even eloquent!

### AN EMBRACE FOR ALL OF YOU

The other day at the regional councillors' meeting the Brazilian representative, after finding out that I was a Maryknoll Sister, came to me and said, "May I embrace you?" She then added, "In so doing I am embracing your entire community and saying thank you for <sup>the</sup> hope your Sisters have given us in Latin America. We want you to know that they have not died in vain!"

*Armederci, Sr. Betty Ann*