



Sister Imelda Sheridan, MM

Born: April 10, 1902

Entered: October 14, 1919

Died: July 17, 1977

Once again the Lord speaks to us through the death of Sister M. Imelda Sheridan, the third veteran Maryknoll missionary to Chinese who responded to the Father's call within a week. She died peace fully at Bethany around 11:00 a.m., Sunday, July 17, 1977 just as Sisters Barbara, Mary Paul and others were praying the Salve. She had returned to The Center from Taiwan in March of this year, "I'm sorry to leave here (Taiwan), but God has His plans which are always for the best. I had prepared so hard for an apostolate here and haven't been able to put it to use since I've come – a proof that God expects only our good will to bring people to His knowledge and love and that was the only reason why I wanted to return to Taiwan."

Mary Crescentia Sheridan was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania on April 10, 1902; educated in the Public Schools there and entered Maryknoll on October 14, 1919; the 35th Sister to enter a Congregation which was then only in its 7th year! She made her vows on October 5, 1921 and was one of the first six Sisters assigned to China that year. Her whole missionary life, nearly 50 years in Hong Kong, mainland China and Taiwan, plus 7 years in Chicago, Chinatown, was spent with and for the Chinese people to whom she was sent.

As we celebrate her death, the passing over of her life to the fullness of peace and joy with the Father, what message does her life give us? What enables a human person to continually strive to live out her ideals amidst the ambiguities that are part and parcel of daily living? Each of us who knew her would have certain memories and particular anecdotes which give us answers to these questions while at the same time they form a relationship which enable us to relate differently with God and others because of this encounter.

As I reflected on Sister's death as a call to us to live wholeheartedly our commitment to the Lord and His people, three characteristics of her life seemed to be outstanding. These are a deep faith life based on a personal relationship with God; creative obedience through the use of all her creaturely gifts; and a joyful trust in the Lord. These became apparent to me during three periods of her life that I was privileged to share with her, These, I feel, were times of deep questioning, searching and dialogue with her Lord and with others.

The first period was in 1973 when she was assisting the Community of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary towards self Government. There were contradicting advices from within their own ranks as well as from our Sisters and other members of the local Church; but she managed through this maze saying, “As far as I, myself, am concerned, I’m leaving myself quite open to whatever is decided for the advantage of the Sacred Hearts Sisters, and I earnestly pray that during these months ahead God will give them grace and courage to launch forth on their own.” This Congregation, begun in 1958, was firmly established with its own Constitutions in 1973.

The second period was the time of her furlough when she was discerning what the Lord was asking of her during her ‘golden’ years, Our exchanges showed me a woman, who believed deeply and sincerely that God had called her to mission through Maryknoll, and she desired to respond fully in a different way now, but age was not to be the determining factor. She said, “From personal experience at Maryknoll from 1919 to my present situation, I have never experienced restrictions in creative thought and action. In fact, I was rather encouraged in every phase of my development to be creative. Our Founders’ reverence of the individual Maryknoller made one aware of one’s own dignity as a person and the responsible freedom proper to a human person. Their openness to the charisma of their sons and daughters and to each other, made Maryknoll expand and overflow with a dynamism, which could only come from a divine source.” From this basis stemmed her belief that, at this time of her life, she could still respond with loving concern to the people in Taiwan whom she could meet socially as well as through her ministry. Basically, she felt that “in all activities we are reaching out to the person; that the human person is too sacred to be a means to an end.” Her conviction was that she had striven throughout her life on being a real person, authentic – a person who is ‘other-conscious’, alert not only to spiritual values, but to the sociological needs in one’s environment. Her past life experiences would now enrich her presence. And so her plans were to spend her furlough in perfecting her Mandarin and in Scripture study, as the University students she’d be in contact with, were interested in Scripture reflection rather than philosophizing about religion. Though she desired to return to Taiwan, she was willing to remain in the States if the Central Governing Board decided otherwise who could say, no?

The third period was these few months from March until the end when I experienced being with a woman of deep peace and joy in the midst of approaching death through much pain and suffering. Her childlike trust in the Lord never wavered, and her interest in what was happening in the broader Community continued to spark her eyes which were now becoming her chief means of communication.

These are only a few reflections and don't give you the facts of her life but, hopefully, these reveal a person who challenges your mission vocation. Seek the various resources available to you and let her spirit and principles influence your way of being with the Lord in mission.

At the Eucharistic celebration which we offer for Sister Imelda, let us thank the Father with Jesus for her life with us and for the challenges it gives us. It is a heritage which states clearly in human terms that a life of dedication to Jesus and His mission is possible. Let her words to a reporter resound deep within us as we, too, strive to live our ideals. "I've enjoyed what I have done. It's been rewarding, but also frustrating at times. There were many obstacles to hurdle. But faith, perseverance and a 'smidgin' of woman's intuition goes a long way."