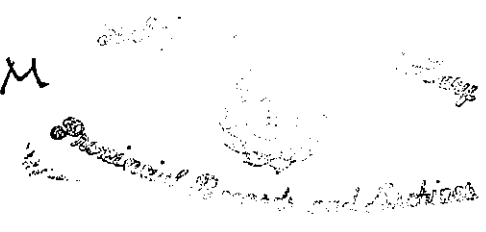


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SISTER CAMILLUS, RIM (Kate Mannion)

1904 - 2001



How does a shy little girl who grew up in the early part of the 20th century in a small country village in Galway, Ireland, manage to live in the "Big Apple" (New York City) for 70 years of her religious life? "Very well, thank God!" she would say. "I loved every minute of it!"

Sister Camillus Mannion was born on July 1, 1904, one of three children of John Mannion and Margaret Martyn. She was baptized in St. Bernard's parish in Galway and given the name, Catherine. However, she was always called "Kitty" by her family. An interesting bit of trivia is added here. On her Certification of Naturalization (citizenship papers), her name appears as "Kate Mannion." Sounds quite the daunting Irish lass, indeed!

A bright, but shy student of the Sisters of Mercy in Galway, Sister Camillus met the Religious of Jesus and Mary, who had just been newly established in Ireland at the time, through a friend who was considering entering the community. The young teenager, Kitty Mannion, was impressed by the genuine friendliness of the sisters, and then and there she sought admission to the community. The entrance date was September 8, 1924; the place Crossmolina, Co. Mayo. It was there, in Crossmolina that Sister made her novitiate, pronounced her first vows and made her final commitment as a Religious of Jesus and Mary. (She once shared a novitiate fear. Having read the life of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, she prayed every day that God would NOT come to her in apparitions!) For two years after profession, Sister ministered in Crossmolina, and from 1928-1931 she taught at Willesden Green in England.



In the meantime, at St. John's School in Kingsbridge, New York, where just about every child's name revealed Irish ancestry, the enrollment was quickly increasing. This created a great need for the Religious of Jesus and Mary. The school had been opened in 1903 with only a few students. And now, in the early 30's, it was beginning to bulge at the seams. Teachers were needed; teachers who felt comfortable with the English language. Sister Charles Collins had already been

sent to St. John's as a missionary "for two years," and on her return home for visits to Ireland, she would wax eloquently on the wonderful parish and school in Kingsbridge. And so, when the young "Kitty Mannion" was asked to come to New York to add her growing talent as a teacher to the faculty at St. John's, she felt she already knew the place by heart. As Paul Harvey says, "...and you know the rest of the story." Sr. Charles, Sr. Camillus, and eventually Sr. Gabriel Burke were the three chosen from the Irish Province to come to New York. They found themselves very much at home in the Irish enclave of Kingsbridge, but they came thinking the mission was only temporary. They came, and "never looking back" gave their all to the mission of education at St. John's School.

Sister Camillus's experience was extraordinary. Many of the alumni of St. John's still refer to her as "the best teacher I ever had." The record shows that she taught full time for 46 years (1931-1977). (And just for the record, in 1950 she had sixty-four 8th grade girls in one room!) Though she "retired" in 1977, she spent ten more years as a substitute teacher in the school she loved so well. She also was co-worker with Sr. Mary Vanasse at the Senior Citizen Center in the Parish. Then too, she tutored! Did she work her individual students hard! Among them could be found a darling little girl named Kathleen, who would rather "play" than study, or an intense young priest from Vietnam who wanted desperately to learn fluent English. Under Sr. Camillus's tutelage, ALL emerged better qualified than when they had started. She made sure of that!

Sister Camillus was a friend to all those who came into her presence. She was particularly fond of children, no matter their race, color, or creed. Walking along the neighborhood sidewalks, going to Church, to school, or to the Senior Center, she would frequently stop to talk to a child, and would often say good-bye with a hug. This friendliness endeared her to the neighborhood people, but often frustrated her walking companion who wanted to be on time!

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Sister Camillus was faithful – to her friends, to her aides, to the children, but especially to God. Even before her last years when she was quite incapacitated, when we would come home into the convent during the mid-morning, we could be sure where to find Sister Camillus. She would be in chapel, in the presence of her faithful God, praying quietly, often with an open book on her lap. And during those last years, she might even be found sleeping in The Presence.

Sister Camillus had the gift of writing. She wrote songs, addresses, poetry. We end this simple story of a life spent for the most part in the midst of a parish in New York City, with a poem she wrote when she was 85 years old. She was still living in the convent on 230th Street, and one day she showed the superior “the fruit” of her mornings’ prayer. Thank God it was kept, for it reveals a part of a soul who loved deeply, but simply, as is the way with saints.

Growing Old

*Someone is failing, struggling, growing old at this moment,
not in Africa, or South America,
but at 275 West 230th Street in the Bronx.*

Room 210.

*It is February in Room 210, with its cold arctic winds,
sharp as needles,*

telling me winter is still here.

*Yet, the sun is shining with its golden beams
in a sky of dazzling blue.*

*The new day is all mine to use for doing good to others,
or to waste on self-pity.*

*My aching bones tell me the hours glide by too slowly
as I wait*

*for a rich and beautiful moment of grace and joy,
while I listen to the inspiration the Lord is giving me.*

*The rhythm of the gentle motion of the shade tells me
the Lord is near, “Go out to meet him.”*

He is here.

*My little room has become his sanctuary
where every nook and corner has its precious memories
and the simple stirring of the window shade
is the gentle echo of his voice.*

*Now the minutes are too brief
for I want my communion with my Lord
to last forever.*

February, 1989

Perhaps the novitiate fear of “apparitions” had dissipated over the years, and had happened, unknowingly, during this time of intimacy in prayer.

On August 24, 2001, Sister Camillus was called Home to the God she loved and served so well. She went home to celebrate the 75th anniversary of her religious profession on the next day, August 25th.

Mary Immaculate Vanasse, RJM
Margaret Mary Quinn, RJM
January 21, 2002