



### **Eulogy of Sister, BVM**

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Aug. 20, 2024

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Patricia L. Fitzgerald.

Patricia Louise Fitzgerald was born on Dec. 29, 1933, the second child of Lawrence and Lorine (Rivard) Fitzgerald of South Bend, Ind. She joined a sister Jeanne and was followed by a brother Kenneth.

Pat attended Holy Cross Elementary School in South Bend, Ind., through seventh grade. Due to her father's health, the family moved to Phoenix in 1947 where she attended St. Francis Xavier School and was introduced to the BVMs. During her years at Xavier High School, SM Agnesita (Margaret Mary Whelan) had a significant impact on Pat's life as she entertained the idea of a religious vocation and soon answered the call.

Pat entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1952, and received the name Chrysostom at her reception on March 19, 1953. She professed her first vows on March 19, 1955, and lived 71 years as a BVM.

Pat taught in the younger grades for 14 years with missions at Our Lady of the Angels in Chicago; Our Lady of Lourdes in Tujunga, Calif.; All Saints in Tucson, Ariz.; and Annunciation in Kansas City, Mo. She completed a bachelor's degree in art with an English minor from Mt. St. Mary's College in Los Angeles in 1968.

In 1969, Pat accepted Sister Ann Christine Heinz's invitation to teach high school art at St. Mary's Center for Learning in Chicago. "What an adventure that was!" commented Pat. She recalled those days as being ones of profound change. Both of her parents had died within a year and a half of each other and there were many changes within the congregation as well.

Pat stepped away from the classroom to complete her master's degree in visual education with a minor in photography at the Illinois Institute of Technology. She then returned to teach at St. Mary's before moving on to St. Callistus in Chicago and St. Eulalia in Maywood, Ill. At all three schools, Pat directed the art program she had developed as part of her master's thesis. She also taught art St. Malachy in Chicago, and volunteered at the Oak Park Conservatory in Oak Park, Ill. Her favorite ministry was teaching in minority neighborhoods and schools.

Reflecting upon her role as an art teacher, Pat wrote,

The quality of the educational experience is regarded to be as important as the future it seeks to prepare the student for . . . Most of [my] students will not become professional artists or designers, but they will live in a world that is changing more rapidly every day. These students will be better equipped to cope with this expanding world because they have been opened to it and can respond to it in a more creative way."

Drawing on her own creativity, in 1984, Pat began her career as a professional artist specializing in fiber art, more commonly known as weaving. Little did she know that her life and its threads of artistry, service, and leisure would become a unique tapestry treasured by so many.

As an artist, she engaged in dancing, chanting, drumming, and playing guitar, as she led spiritual dance and prayer groups. The Spiritual Journey to Wellness Program at Resurrection Hospital in Chicago was among her ministry sites. Pat was active within her parish serving on the liturgy committee, as a Eucharistic minister, and participating in study groups.

To supplement her “starving artist” salary, Pat secured various jobs, but always in service of those in need. She worked at the Austin Career Education Center in Chicago preparing adults for the G.E.D. exam and taught in the adult education English program at Morton College in Cicero, Ill. She also worked as the office manager for Education & Intervention/ICAP, the Immigrant Child Advocacy Project.

In 1993, Pat became a nationally certified massage therapist and served AIDS and hospice patients through Loyola Hospital. This ministry eventually expanded to minister to people in the western suburbs of Chicago. Pat called massage a “sacred touch,” and described it as an “art of anointing, . . . an experience of touch that opens possibilities for healing on the spiritual level.” She firmly believed that “In a religious, ministerial context, massage reenacts the Creator’s original touch.” Personally, she found that this form of ministry deepened contemplation and prayer; healed psychic wounds; and promoted integration of the mind, body, and spirit.”

Pat approached life enthusiastically with great hope for the future. Even though she was an introvert, she had the courage of her convictions and was not afraid to articulate them. She was deeply concerned about the wellness of the earth and of its people, especially the disenfranchised. Pat was an explorer willing to take risks, yet always striving for perfection. She had the ability to integrate her creative intuitiveness with clarity of vision. She was a woman of prayer who lived humbly and faithfully.

In a reflection on leisure, work, and celebration for the 1976 community assembly, Pat wrote,

I believe in leisure. I believe that leisure is my true and highest work. I believe that the degree of my wholeness as a person is the degree in which I am able to celebrate. . . Leisure is freedom. It is a vision of life that frees me to say, ‘Yes’ to life, ‘Yes’ to now. I believe that life is gift, and it waits to be received and shared in love. . . Leisure allows my spirit to grow. . . It is in my growing, wondering wholeness that I come to celebrate. I am alive. I reach out. I share myself, my life, with others. A spirit of festivity surrounds us, and we play, we pray, we create life, now, we redeem life, now.

As Pat reflected on her 70 years as a BVM during her Diamond Jubilee in 2022, she expressed that she was most grateful for being “a part of this circle of friends” and being “a part of the set of ‘52.” She was also thankful for the great kindness shown to her by the staff and sisters when she came to Mount Carmel.

Someone once remarked, “There is only one Pat Fitzgerald.” Today as we celebrate Pat’s unique and varied gifts, we turn to *The Message’s* version of Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus calls, “Come to me. . . Walk with me and work with me. . . Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. . . Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” (Matt. 11:28-30.) Pat, wholeheartedly offering all the threads of her life, accepted these invitations. In turn, our loving God, the Creator, Artist, and first-weaver, completed the tapestry we knew and loved so well and will cherish her forever.