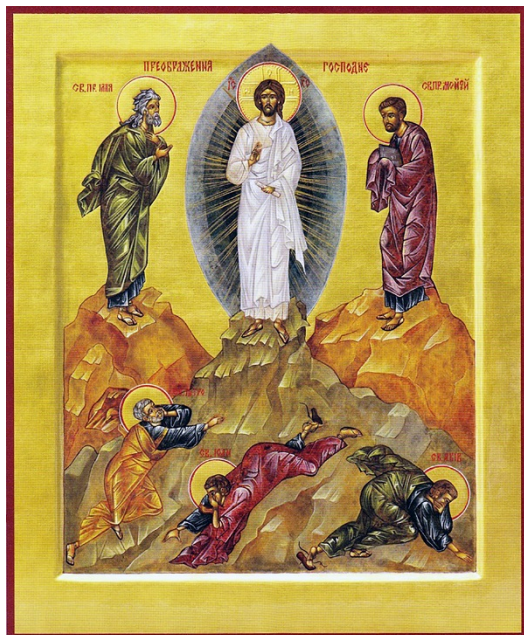


TEXT FOR MARY JO OCONNOR
Sr. Maria Christi of Wisdom
60th Jubilee Celebration

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL



Mary Jo was a bit in a hurry for her arrival into this world. Due some time in January, she arrived three months early on October 24, 1937. She weighed in at two pounds, ten ounces, which in those days was truly an 'iffy' weight. Then followed several tense weeks in an incubator. Worried and anxious as she was, her mother has always said that she never thought for one minute that her spunky newborn daughter would not make it.

So, when Mary Jo was asked about her early years, it is not surprising that she wrote: "My parents' deep faith and religious practices planted the seed of Wisdom's gift in me. During most of my childhood, we prayed together every day."

Mary Jo's professional ministries as a Daughter of Wisdom fall neatly into two parts: Nursing from 1962 to 1983 and Chaplaincy from 1984 until the early 2000's

NURSING, 1962-1972

In 1962, having earned her RN at Maryview Hospital, Portsmouth VA, Mary Jo continued to serve there as a staff nurse. Those of us who remember the critical nursing shortage in that year will appreciate the stress and overtime that made her beginning a kind of 'baptism with fire'.

From 1963 to 1970, she widened her professional experience by serving at Holy Family Hospital as Home Care Coordinator, Relief Supervisor, and, finally Head Nurse. During this time, she earned her Bachelor of Science Degree with a major in nursing, graduating *cum laude* from Adelphi University. She then served for a year at Methodist Hospital in the Outpatient Department as a senior staff nurse.

NURSING CARE FOR THE ELDERLY, 1972-1984

Then her nursing career took a new focus as she began to concentrate more specifically on geriatric patients and the problems they faced when they truly needed to be admitted to a hospital or when they needed care after being discharged from the hospital. She had already done pioneer work in this field at Holy Family hospital, beginning the coordination of home health care. But from 1972 to 1975, she hit the sidewalks, working for Catholic Charities of Brooklyn, NY, as a Community Geriatric Health Nurse.

Mary Jo still fills up when she recalls visiting people whose families never cared for them at all. Some lived in bare rooms with almost nothing; others in clutter and unimaginable squalor. Some of them were listless, almost catatonic; others were bitter and aggressive; others, miraculously, remained calm and serene. Some of these elderly patients, she was able to help; others, no one could help. To this day her heart aches for them.

Having had experience in the field, she was ready to tackle the problems of elderly sick people from an administrative point of view. From 1976 to 1983, Mary Jo worked for the Office of Social Development in the Archdiocese of Washington as a staff associate. At that time, she was also involved with the Interfaith Conference Task Force on the Elderly. This was a widely ecumenical group including non-Christian faiths.

HOSPITAL CHAPLAIN, 1984-ABOUT 2008

In 1984, Mary Jo achieved an M.A. in Pastoral Ministry from Boston College. As part of her course work she did a chaplaincy internship at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston.

Having achieved her qualification as chaplain, she worked for three years 1984-1987 at Our Lady of Mercy Medical Center, Bronx NY as Chaplain in the Pastoral Care Dept. Then she spent a year in a related facility, spending 1987 to 1988 at Mercy Catholic Medical Center in Philadelphia also as a member of the Pastoral Care Department.

But her most important chaplaincy work was carried out in St. Peter's University Hospital New Brunswick NJ where she served as a Chaplain in Pastoral Care Dept for more than twenty years. Of this part of her life, Mary Jo says, "I am very grateful for it. Sharing people's journey to God is very rewarding both for them and for the chaplain. Families so often express real gratitude because often the patient feels freer to talk with a non-family member, and talking is such a healing experience for many of them." Mary Jo ministered to people of all faiths, cooperating with priests, ministers, rabbis, and imams.

THE MIRACLE

Mary Jo often tells the story of the biggest miracle she ever saw. It happened while she was working as chaplain at St. Peter's University Hospital in New Jersey. One evening, while Mary Jo was with a patient in the ER, she heard a loud screeching. As the ambulance jolted to a halt, the emergency team literally raced in with a patient; they didn't even stop at explain themselves at the desk. Their patient was a woman who was hemorrhaging badly.

Mary Jo excused herself from the patient she was with and ran to see what was happening. The woman was six and a half months pregnant, and her blood pressure was down to almost nothing. The woman passed a blood clot, not even six inches in length, and the nurse had put the basin to one side. then the nurse heard a swishing sound from the blood clot, which, upon examination, proved to be a tiny fetus.

They got the tiniest diabetic needle possible and started to put fluid into the fetus. One of the orderlies took the smallest plastic tubing available in the hospital and put one end in the baby's mouth and the other in a ventilator. Nobody had much hope that this tiny being would survive. it would take months rather than weeks, but this baby did survive. In 1999, at a Hospital Reunion, Mary Jo was astonished to meet this child. Now two and half years old, now an attractive curly haired toddler, she was running and talking a mile a minute.

If you have heard this story before, it's because Mary Jo can't get it out of her mind. She will never forget the sight of that small clot, and she will never stop marveling at the little girl that emerged from it in the end.

THE JUSTICE OF WISDOM

About her spiritual life, Mary Jo had this to say:

"I have always felt the joy of Wisdom in my prayer life with my sisters and others who also delight in Wisdom. My deepest joy as a Daughter of Wisdom is my commitment to Jesus Wisdom. In my ministry to the sick, the dying, and the broken-hearted, I have truly felt Wisdom's love for wounded humanity."



Thank you, Mary Jo!