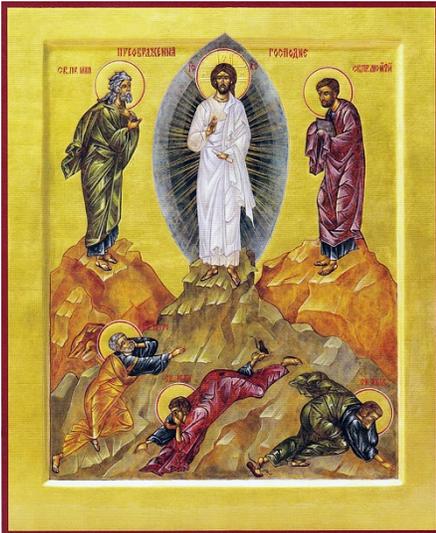


**SR. VERONICA BYRNE, DW**  
*Sr. Veronica of the Cross*  
**70<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Celebration**

**AN OLWA VOCATION**



After graduating from P.S. 121, Veronica applied to Our Lady of Wisdom Academy, but the family was told that there wasn't any opening for her. Shortly afterward, when she went to her family doctor for a physical exam, she happened to mention how disappointed she was. Dr. Flanagan immediately called the school, and that call resulted in a small 'miracle'. The school informed the doctor that one student had not shown up, and so it was that Veronica became a freshman at Our Lady of Wisdom Academy. Would she ever have become a Daughter of Wisdom if she had never had the chance to meet one?

During the four years she spent as a student at Wisdom, she was very impressed by the Sisters' prayerfulness, and especially by their devotion to Mary and their kindness and concern for their students. One year after her graduation in August 1946, she entered the Novitiate in Ottawa, Canada, and made profession on February 2, 1948. Her first assignment was to St. Mary Gate of Heaven Elementary School – right across from Our Lady of Wisdom Academy and also very near her family. During her early years of religious life, she was grateful for the inspiration of her sisters in community and of the community chaplain, Fr. Joseph Sadowski. Both of these influences helped her to grow in her devotion to Mary and to Jesus, Incarnate Wisdom.

**SEVEN DECADES OF RELIGIOUS LIFE**

Sr. Veronica's religious life falls neatly into seven periods of ten years each (give or take a few months). The first decade was at St. Mary Gate of Heaven in Ozone Park, the second at Our Lady of Wisdom High School in St. Agatha, Maine. Then came FOUR decades at Christ the King Diocesan High School, and finally a decade of semi-retirement and volunteer work at our convent in Elmhurst, followed by full retirement at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Convent in Sound Beach.

Because Sr. Veronica loved music and had a great singing voice, she was put in charge of the choir that sang every Sunday at the 9:00 a.m. Mass in Gate of Heaven. Her gifted organist companion was Olga Conti, and between them they created a singing group that delighted the parishioners. But the choir did more than that. Once, when a third grader died unexpectedly, the children's choir sang at her funeral mass, and the parents of that child were truly consoled and comforted, especially when they sang the hymn, 'Guardian Angel'.

In the beginning at St. Mary Gate of Heaven, she taught a new grade every year, proceeding through Grades 2, 3, 6, and 7. But she is still remembered most as the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher because she taught the 8<sup>th</sup> grade for so many years. Ken, one of those 8<sup>th</sup> graders of the past, still comes with his wife to visit Sr. Veronica.

She tells one amusing story about her time at Gate of Heaven. In those days it was not customary for the sisters to talk to the parish priests. But one morning, in the yard between the church and the Montfort Fathers' residence, Sr. Veronica had a short conversation with Fr. Bernie Blood. At that precise moment, the Provincial Superior of the DW's, Mother Marie, crossed the yard on her way to church. Fr. Bernie reacted instantly and humorously. "Just tell her we were talking about recruiting vocations," he said.

**A BEACON FOR HER LIFE**

During all these first years, Sr. Veronica was strongly and affectionately supported by her mother and father, Veronica and Harry Byrne and by her three brothers, Jim, Harry, and Tom. The closest to her was her youngest brother, Tom, and he was the one who helped her most in a big crisis of her life. Then Sr. Veronica received her assignment to St. Agatha, Maine and had two problems to deal with. The first was, “How can I tell my mother this news?” Maine was so very far away and extremely difficult for her family to get to. So, it was Tom who broke the news to their mother, and Sr. Veronica could heave a sigh of relief.

Her second problem was that she really didn’t feel like leaving St. Mary Gate of Heaven, and she even felt a bit fearful about traveling off to the unknown. It was then that her brother, Tom, gave her this word of Wisdom: “Why are you afraid of going to Maine? There are souls waiting for you up there.” Sr. Veronica never forgot that word. Throughout her life, whether the calls or changes were big or small, she would say, “Why should I be afraid. There are souls there waiting for me.”

### **SNAPSHOTS FROM ST. AGATHA, MAINE**

At St. Agatha, Sr. Veronica began to teach history and physical education at High School level. About her initiation to her new surroundings, there is bad news and good news. The bad news is that in Maine they start school in September but then in October they suspend school so that the pupils can help with the potato picking. On her first day in the potato fields, Veronica fell flat on her face. The next morning, she was looking and feeling awful. Sr. Bernard, (Agnes Schaefer) who helped her get out of bed said comfortingly, “Don’t worry. You’ll be all right, here.” And she was!

The good news is that the boys in her class, who knew she was from New York, assumed at first that she wouldn’t understand their French and that she would be an ‘easy mark’. But Veronica had done her novitiate in French, and the boys had a rude awakening. They gave her an affectionate nickname, ‘La Masse’, which in French means – the sledge hammer!

### **CHRIST THE KING DIOCESAN HIGH SCHOOL**

Joyful and enthusiastic, Sr. Veronica was a truly great teacher of civics and history. She encouraged her students to get involved, to keep up with current events, and to write letters to the Long Island Daily Press. One of her pupils, Debbie Carlin went on to become a NY Judge and often came back to CK to help with courses in government. Another ex-pupil, Marilyn Tiffany is seriously involved in politics to this day.

Sr. Veronica was also put in charge of the Glee Club, which was renowned for its prowess. During those years, Sr. Ann Gray put on several excellent musicals including, among others, *The Sound of Music*, *Anna and the King of Siam*, and *My Fair Lady*. It was Sr. Veronica’s job to teach and rehearse the soloists. She recalls with amusement a boy who was expected to sing “On the Street Where You Live”. He was making a mess of it, until Sr. Veronica realized that he didn’t know it was a love song! Once he ‘got it’, he was a great hit and went on to show business where he later worked with Neil Simon.

Sr. Veronica, probably because she had been a physical education teacher, was put in charge of the CK cheerleaders for the basketball team. Under her tutelage that group won a cheerleading competition.

### **ONE MORE WORD**

When we talk to Sr. Veronica Byrne, known to us most of the time as ‘Ronnie’, we realize that she doesn’t have a clue about her giftedness and popularity. She has always been unfailingly generous, affirming, and hard working. She is one of those people who always gets the best out of her pupils – one of those people who, just by the fact of talking with you makes you feel bigger and better.



*Thank you, Sr. Veronica*