

Sisters
Parish Diary
May 25, 2012
Fr. Peter Daly

Fr. Peter Daly says we should celebrate and thank the nuns, not criticize them.

My parish does not have any nuns anymore. We used to have two sisters of the Holy Cross who lived here in semi-retirement. Sister "Jo" was in her 90s. She had taught school for more than 60 years. Sister Judy McDonough was in her 70s. She had taught school for more than 40 years. Together they had more than a century of service to the Church in the most humble and difficult jobs.

Sister Jo was always active, strong and athletic. Even in her 90s she would walk her little dogs around the parking lot of their apartment complex. Josephine has now gone to the Lord.

Sister Judy was always calm and always positive. She had a practice of finding uplifting quotes from the saints and from scripture, which she prints out on her own homemade "holy cards." She still sends me some from her retirement home.

Sister Jo always loved to swim. Even in the days when she was in full habit, she would find a pool somewhere and to go swimming. For much of her life she taught school in the South, where summer heat in a head to toe habit was oppressive. It felt good to her to get in the water. She said it was liberation to her when she did not have to wear the confining habit anymore.

Sister Judy is a reader and thinker. She is always doing some spiritual reading. Her whole life is a long retreat. She is also dedicated to service projects. She is an example of charity and prayer.

Neither one of them wore a habit, but they always dressed simply. They always wore the symbol of the Holy Cross order around their necks. There was no mistaking them for anything but nuns in their sensible shoes and modest clothes. No tailor made suits or fancy vestments for them. For them chastity meant a modest style too.

In our parish their living situation was very spare. They lived in a moderate income garden apartment complex. In real estate parlance, "garden apartment" means "walk up." It was nothing fancy. Their two bedroom apartment was super clean and simply furnished. Their life style would put most clerics to shame. They really did live evangelical poverty. The nuns lived with the poor and like the poor. They really were poor. How many priests live so simply?

Our nuns drove a tiny little Chevy. It was the absolute bottom-of-the-line car. But it was serviceable transportation. It got them to church and the store. How many priests drive luxury cars?

Our nuns were given over to prayer every day. If I went by their apartment in the evening, they were usually completing the liturgy of the hours. They kept their books of Christian Prayer and spiritual reading beside their recliner rockers in the living room. Even in her 90s, Sister Jo was faithful to mass. She and Sister Judy never missed mass unless they were sick.

In some circles these days, it has become acceptable to criticize the nuns. Some people say they are too feminist for wanting to be heard. Others say they are unorthodox or they are too lax.

Maybe, some are. But the nuns I have known all my life and the nuns I have worked with in three parishes and at Catholic University are the best Christians and Catholics I have every met. They really do live the gospel. They put us priests to shame.

There are not that many nuns left these days. Their median age today is 70. Before they all die and go to God, we should celebrate and thank them, not criticize them.