

The First Flower Plucked by the Divine Gardener

(By Catechist Margaret Molloy)

Catechist Mary Stickling, the first member of the Society of Missionary Catechists of Our Blessed Lady of Victory to be called to her everlasting reward, responded to the summons of her Divine Master with a happy "Fiat," and so passed to rest forever in His Sacred Heart, the day following the Feast of the Epiphany.

Catechist Stickling died in the first year of her vocation. A Probationer in the Society at the time she became ill, it was decided, when it became apparent that death was imminent, to invest her as a Junior-Catechist in the Society.

On the morning of her death, in the presence of the community gathered about her deathbed, the Reverend Spiritual Director of the Society celebrated the solemn ceremony of Investiture. The prayers having been said, the promises made, and the blessing given the crucifix was then placed in her trembling hand, and her dying lips were the first to kiss it. In conclusion the "Magnificat" was recited by the assembled community. To those who uttered them in the hushed stillness of the room and in the presence of one, whose soul during life "had magnified the Lord," and "whose spirit was now to rejoice in Him as her Saviour," forever the familiar lines of Our Blessed Mother's own song look on a new meaning and a new beauty.

Surely she, who left as a priceless legacy to her Sister-Catechists the memory of her cheerful, prompt obedience, could sing with exultation now and for-

ever—"The heath regarded the humility of his handmaid."

The end came in the early afternoon. Very quietly and calmly she passed away, with a little sigh, such as a tired child might give sinking securely to rest in the arms of its mother, her head nestled lower on the pillow, and then—she rested forever in the loving arms of Mary, her own Dear and Blessed Mother. So easily did she lay down the burden of life, that her Sister-Catechists, who were reciting the prayers for the dying, were not aware of her passing until the shadow of death began slowly to creep over her countenance.

After Catechist Stickling's death, her remains, preceded by a solemn procession of the Community,—the Consecrates bearing lighted candles as emblematic of her inspirational life and the happy Eternity just beginning to unfold its delights to her,—were conveyed to the chapel, where they lay in state until the funeral the following Saturday. During the three-day interval between her death and burial, her Sister-Catechists maintained a guard of honor, night and day, sending up an ever-burning incense of intercessory prayer for her soul to the God of Mercy.

The funeral Mass of Requiem was celebrated by a cousin of the deceased Catechist, Rev. Edward Berthold, pastor of St. Mary's Church, Maple Park, Ill. Fr. Rev. Msgr. John F. Noll, L.L.S. D., editor of Our Sunday Visitor, preached the panegyric.

Choosing for his text the words of the Epistle of the Mass, "Comfort ye one another," Monsignor Noll commented on the different viewpoints with which the

spiritual and worldly-minded man would view the death of Catechist Stickling. "The worldling," he said in part, "failing to look beyond the immediate deprivation of her services to the Society,—the number of whose members is pitifully inadequate in face of the immensity of the work to be accomplished,—would say, regretfully, 'Too bad!' The truly spiritual man, on the contrary, would look beyond this transient loss, recognizing in her call to Himself the evidence of God's approval of the Society. For had He not summoned this early in its foundation, one of its members to represent it in His Heavenly Court, and to be there an intercessor, not only for the Society itself, but also for the abandoned little ones of the flock, to whose salvation the members devote their lives?" Monsignor Noll therefore recommended that her Sister-Catechists pray, not only for her, but to her as their representative before the Throne of the King.

The remains of the deceased Catechist were interred in the cemetery of the Institute—Victory Rest. The Consecrates in the funeral procession carried lighted candles,—forming a guard of honor—while the Probationers and Professed Catechists served as honorary pall-bearers. In the quiet seclusion of the cemetery, which lies high on a slightly wooded knoll, she was laid to rest with a last "Salve Regina," and a final "All for Jesus, through Mary," and there, with the silent trees for sentinels, in an enveloping peace, which seems to bear a lingering trace of that of Heaven, her body awaits the resurrection day.

Catechist Stickling's home before her entrance into the Society of Missionary Catechists, was at Ambia, Indiana. A sister, Miss Elizabeth Stickling, and three brothers, John, Frank, and Joseph Stickling, survive her.

"Gentle Jesus, Mother Blest,
Grant to her eternal rest."

Educate our Mexicans in the Faith before they are educated away from it by Protestants.