

Sister Hiltrudis Powers C.P.P.S.

Born: June 14, 1920

Professed: August 10, 1940

Entered into Life: December 31, 2011

Verse on her memorial card: ***“I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of your house and the place where your glory dwells.” Psalm 26:8***



December 31, 2011

Dear Sisters,

“I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of your house and the place where your glory dwells.” (Ps. 26:8) The expression of her love of beauty through art is a gift that our Sr. Hiltrudis Powers leaves with us as she entered the eternal house of God at 4:50 a.m. this morning.

When young Faye Marie Powers, the daughter of Harold and Margaret (Rogers) Powers of Quincy, Illinois, joined the community in 1934 as a teenage aspirant, she was deeply awed by the beauty of St. Joseph Chapel, the convent chapel of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. She recalled sketching the chapel the day after she arrived and enclosing it in the unsealed letter she gave to her directress for mailing. The very next day, she was assigned to make liturgical posters! Throughout her life Sr. Hiltrudis expressed gratitude to God that her first superiors recognized and nurtured her inborn gift for artistic expression, enabling her to combine her vocation as an artist with her vocation as a religious.

Sr. Hiltrudis was born on June 14, 1920, and remembered how, as a small child, she delighted in the fact that flags lined the streets of Quincy on her birthday. She also delighted in saying that most of the significant events in her life happened in a decade year. She was baptized at St. Peter's Church on August 8, 1920, made her first vows on August 10, 1940, and celebrated 70 years as a professed Sister in 2010. The exception to this pattern was June 15, 1945. On that day Sr. Anselma, the director of the embroidery department died, and just a day after her 25th birthday Sr. Hiltrudis became the young director of the Ecclesiastical Art Department. This would become her life's ministry.

Fortunately, Sr. Hiltrudis' superiors had foreseen the need to prepare her to head this ministry for which the congregation was already widely known. They sent her to Fontbonne and then to Rosary College where she graduated with a major in art and a minor in education in 1942. Later, in 1956, she earned a master's degree from the Catholic University of America. There Sr. Hiltrudis honed her skills with metal, fashioning several metal and enamel reliquaries. Her later metal work included copper and enamel crests for bishops, metal sculptures for churches, and the tabernacle canopy, altar tester and former sanctuary grille and gate for the St. Joseph Chapel renovation in 1962.

One of Sr. Hiltrudis' first decisions when she became director of the embroidery department was to exchange the spacious studio located on the south side of the hall for the smaller room on the north side where the Sisters who did hand embroidery worked. This provided them with better lighting for their work. Her act of thoughtfulness, repeated many times during the 55 years she spent as director, endeared her to her faithful staff. And not only to them. Sr. Hiltrudis always seemed to find time and just the right bit of thread, needle, eye glass screw, tape, glue, hammer, nail, etc. to assist the many Motherhouse Sisters who came to the studio door in the evenings as she worked on her designs with an ear tuned to the Cardinal baseball game on her radio.

Sr. Hiltrudis capably steered the department through many changes over the years, making new designs and adapting vestment fabrics and styles to meet the needs of the many Catholic churches both in the United States and abroad. More recently she had the great honor of being asked to design and make the stole and miter which were presented to Pope John Paul II at the time of his 1999 visit to St. Louis. During her tenure she enlarged the scope of the department by painting murals, designing stained glass windows, and making silk-screened banners and other liturgical items in addition to vestments and paraments. The greatest change, however, occurred when, in the new spirit of ecumenism after Vatican II, an invitation came to make stoles for the seminarians at Concordia Lutheran Seminary. Sr. Hiltrudis requested and received permission to serve anyone who "asked in good faith." In the years that followed she designed many of the thousand or so stencils that filled her studio drawers to fill requests from Methodist, Episcopalian, United Church of Christ and Baptist ministers as well as the Lutherans. She also responded to the request to assist Sisters from Africa in learning skills and establishing their own department.

Meanwhile, Sr. Hiltrudis shared her love of art and her capable draftsmanship during fifteen years of teaching a class for students at Assumption High School in O'Fallon (1944-1959) and fourteen years in St. Mary's College (1956-1970). In her 80th year of life, at the turn of the millennium, Sr. Hiltrudis retired as director of the Ecclesiastical Art Department. However, she continued to assist with designing and machine embroidery. After the death of the department "Moses" in January 2002, she was given the mission of being this special prayer intercessor for the Ecclesiastical Art Department.

When she moved to St. Joseph Retirement Center in July 2002, Sr. Hiltrudis continued to be available when visitors came to tour. While guiding them through the department, she took delight in telling them stories of how the "Lutherans kept us in business" through some of the lean times. In answer to their questions, she would recount climbing scaffolding in St. Joseph Chapel to paint the murals on the sanctuary walls and the stars on the ceiling, as well as daily drives to Frei Studio in St. Louis to paint her designs on the stained glass, "a window a week." She described how she so respected the work of Gottfried Schiller, who designed the original chapel art, that she wanted to make sure her designs for the new addition harmonized with it.

Sr. Hiltrudis never retired from her service to others and even after she became a resident in the infirmary she was seen doing acts of kindness there. Throughout her long and fruitful life, she maintained close ties with her family and particularly enjoyed her Christmas vacation visits with them. The second of four siblings, she was preceded in death by her parents and her brothers Howard, Harold (Junie) and Wayne. She is survived by her brother Francis, sisters-in-law Joanne, Arlene, Shirley, and Jean and beloved nieces and nephews.

Sr. Hiltrudis' body will be brought back to St. Joseph Chapel on Wednesday, January 4, at 3:30 p.m., and we will gather there for a Prayer Service of Thanksgiving at 7:00 p.m. The Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated on Thursday, January 5, at 11:00 a.m. As we unite with her family to say our farewells to Sr. Hiltrudis in the chapel she adorned, we join all those who have been enriched by her art and her gracious presence in praising God for the gift of this warm and wonderful woman.

With gratitude,

Sr. Mary Cecile

Sr. Mary Cecile Gunelson, CPPS
Council Member