**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**



**Sister Renee Caron**

(Sister St. Marcella)

August 30, 1917 - October 6, 2011

*"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. For now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time for singing has come."* (Song of Songs 2:10-12)

3

Sister Renée Caron's (Sister St. Marcella) life on earth began on August 30, 1917, in the city of Lawrence, Massachusetts. The register at St. Anne Church in that city reads that on August 31, 1917, Renée became God's loving child in baptism and was given the name Marie Renée Marcelle. The Reverend Father Charles Leflem, S.M. officiated at her baptism. Present were her godparents, Miss Albertine Vanasse and Mr. Joseph Voisine.

Her mother and father emigrated from Canada when they were nine and ten years old respectively. Her mother, Angeline Valcourt, was born in Notre-Dame-du-Lac and her father, Carl Caron, came from Trois-Rivieres, Québec.

Renée was the youngest of the family of nine. She had three sisters: Marguerite, Theresa and Madeleine and five brothers: Lionel, Gerard, Raymond, Armand, who was a Marist Priest, and Joseph, her closest brother.

Her Aunt Marguerite Valcourt, her mother's only sister, livedin the same house with her grandmother Aglaée Valcourt. These two had a great influence on the young life of Renée who lost her mother to illness and surgery when she was only fourteen years old. At an early age, Renee learned the way to St. Anne Church where she loved to attend daily Mass and pay visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

Renée's most cherished memories are from her warm and loving family life where the gospel had a primary place. Its influence on their daily lives was rewarding. Renee's mother and father were a couple whose qualities complimented each other. They were people who were happy in a simple home. This happiness communicated itself to each of their loving children. Angeline and Carl Caron bequeathed treasures of faith to their family: courage in times of misfortune; an abandonment to Divine Providence; a loving ambiance of warmth in the home, hands extended to each other, hands of faith, hands in prayer. Renée fondly remembers kneeling with her parents with the family to pray. Their example, encouragement, and gentle reminders affirmed their children. They learned that God is ever approachable and that He is ever with us as a loving Father. Prayer was important and God's Will could be recognized in daily events. They were taught about loving service to one another, to neighbors and to the Church. Dad was an usher and a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Mother shared her sewing and cooking skills in the neighborhood. They reminded their children that love is merely a word until we act upon it. This was the legacy left to their children.

One spring day when Renée came home from school, she found her mother pacing back and forth in front of their grocery store. She was beautiful to behold with her lovely white hair set in a French roll and her spotless white apron wrapped around her motherly figure. Renée was able to detect a preoccupied, sad look on her mother's face. Getting in step with her mother, they continued walking back and forth. Finally, Renée asked the reason for mother's worried look. Her mother replied "Things are what they are and not what I would like them to be." She was telling her young daughter that she must accept what could not be changed. Within a few days, she would undergo major surgery. It was not long after this encounter that her dear mother passed away.

Renée attended St. Joseph grammar school and high school in Lawrence, Massachusetts. She was an outstanding student. She graduated from high school in 1936. During her high school years she was deeply touched by the kindness and devotion of the Good Shepherd Sisters who were her teachers. This example of love and goodness coupled with the example of her parents, her attendance at daily Mass and her reception of Holy Communion all graced her with the call to religious life.

4

Sister Renée embarked on her journey with the Lord who pursued His beloved. She entered the postulate on August 25, 1937. In August of 1938 she became a novice and prepared for the consecrated life of a Good Shepherd Sister. Then, on August 15, 1939, Sister St. Marcella made her profession, pronouncing the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a Good Shepherd Sister of Quebec.

*"0 Lord, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
You have overpowered me
and you have prevailed"*(Jer 20:7-9)

Sister Renée studied at St. Joseph College in Windham, Maine and earned her B.S. in Education. Later, she studied at Boston College and earned her M.S. degree in Education, specializing in Administration.

For many years she taught in Grand Isle, in Old Town, and in Van Buren, Maine, where she later became principal of the grammar school and Sacred Heart High School. She was then assigned to St. Anne High School in Lawrence, Mass., for four years and then was appointed principal of St. Joseph High School in Biddeford, Maine. The dedication of the Yearbook of St. Louis High in 1965, speaks highly of the respect and admiration of the student body. It follows:

*"Sister Renée commands the respect of the faculty and students alike by her efficiency and her progressive outlook on education. She envisions her central task as that of sharing responsibilities to advance human freedom, initiative and leadership, especially in the field of religious endeavors. Many* a *latent ability has been brought to light under her instigation and persistent efforts."*

It was after these assignments that she was named on the Provincial Council with the role of Supervisor of Studies. During this time she also served as Supervisor of the Diocesan High Schools under the supervision of Msgr. Armand Cyr, Superintendent. During this time Sister was also named Secretary of the New England National Catholic Association of Secondary Schools. After serving two years, she was appointed Chairwoman of this same association.

In 1975, Sister Renée was called upon by the General Superior to Quebec to become the bilingual secretary to the Apostolic Nuncio of Haiti and the Antilles. His Excellency Msgr. Luigi Conti was Nuncio at this time. During her four-year stay in Haiti, she was stationed in Port-au-Prince at the Nunciature.

Upon her return to United States, Sister Renée worked at St. Anne Home in Methuen, Massachusetts, and then in Old Town and South Portland, Maine. Her last community was at Marie Fitzbach Convent in Biddeford, Maine. From here, she volunteered to work with Hospice, at the food pantry and with the lonely home bound. Renee shared, "I know now that my life has been planned, prepared and presided over by a God whose love continues to urge me on...this is what I celebrate

after 64 years of religious life...a lived experience of God's faithful love! My heart leaps with gratitude and joy!"

5

At this stage of life, Sister Renée's health continued to decline and she resigned herself to transfer to Good Shepherd Pavilion where she continued to live fully every moment of her life of prayer, dedication and edification to everyone there until the call of the Beloved beckoned her to her heavenly reward.

In 1967, Sister Renée was asked to speak of her vocation to a group of college freshmen at Husson College in Bangor, Maine. This address beautifully summarizes her vocation and life of dedication and love. It follows:

*I can truthfully and sincerely say that we in my community are truly happy religious. I cannot say that in my life I have not met with difficulties, trials, lonesomeness and even crises. Yet, I do not remember ever having given the thought of taking back what I deliberately and joyfully gave to Christ on my profession day. God's strength and grace saw me through it all.*

*Mine has been a strong faith and this is thanks to God's special graces to me given at baptism, nurtured in a Christian home, deepened by spiritual readings, meditations, Mass in my life, the Blessed Mother and my vows to God.*

*As a young religious I set my goals: wanting, and this with determination, to develop solid and wholesome attitudes as well as a good philosophy of life. I looked around for true, warm and understanding friendships, models of sisters who inspired me and gave me courage to do likewise in their endeavors to follow Christ.*

*Motivating forces which I wanted to strive for: 1) To love Christ, really love Him and fill myself with his compelling love so that through me, He may be found and loved a wee bit more. 2) The desire to give of myself wholeheartedly to others, to serve the Church and this with genuine giving. I suppose today we would call this witnessing but I call it sheer joy in* ***SERVING CHRIST IN OTHERS.*** *3) My love for people especially those who make up my religious family and where I received the strength needed because I always felt that they too were here for the same purpose—to give everything to Christ in order to serve.*

*No matter what we do or even if we go "where the action is" requires that we not come empty-handed. This brings me to one of my favorite topics,* ***a genuine prayer life,*** *which is a prayer life that culminates in* a *deep relationship with Christ. One of the obstacles to prayer is our fear of being honest and open, of being ourselves and acknowledging and accepting our very real gifts and limitations, our unwillingness to share self, to take the risk and to let go, to trust others and to allow God's transforming action to take place in us.*

*I have often pondered and prayed for positive attitudes and a wholesome philosophy of life. I wanted to develop an optimistic, refreshing outlook on life. I greatly desired this because I wanted a full life of friendship with Christ, not a haphazard or aimless goal. I knew I was desirous of following in the footsteps of Christ and our Foundress, Mother Mary of the Sacred Heart. Having drawn up my own philosophy of life, I found great inspiration in a number of valiant, dedicated, generous women with whom I share community.*

Sister Renée's last entry was entitled "Testimonies and Thanksgiving" and follows:

*I count among the most significant events the fact that I have "realized" religious life, the effect prayer and community life have on the people whose lives I touch either in formal ministry or in connection with all who come to visit, gifting me with their presence or other special remembrances. I have learned the depth of God's fidelity to me and that is always an eternal discovery and eternal growth.*

6

*In my many years of religious life, I realized that I continue to learn, to believe, to trust God. I have experienced the presence of Jesus and long to walk with Him and for Him. His call has brought me to this particular way of journeying and my gratitude is as endless as is my desire to live it well.*

*God called me into existence and I go through life celebrating life and hope. I am a pilgrim journeying toward a goal where I continue to discover life and love. To love, to give love, and life...this is my hope, my destiny and I return to God from whom I came. Love is all that matters for He is love. "My soul has the glory of bearing the image of God and of being a sigh from His heart so full of love."*

*I truly believe that my prayer life now flows from the total person that I am and there is no longer a separation between prayer and life. Prayer has become a way of life—a response and an attitude toward living. I can face the despair, the discouragement, the lonely days to come by listening to my heart and responding to it. By reflecting on my hopes and dreams, joys and sorrows, accomplishments and failures, I can find my true self and the God who lives within me. God and I have walked together through a half century and more of mystery and discovery, not without struggles. We have walked together in Love. May His Name be praised now and forever.*

A later entry from Sister Renée refers to death and its impact on her life. It reads:

*I am a person in love with life and living it to the full. At present, on the eve of my eternal life, I have come to grips with the term* ***death.*** *Death to me has taken on a new face, one revealing Life—a life that is changed, a continuum of life and the fulfillment of life. This revelation gives me life here and now because I am experiencing this Life within me like never before.* ***The kingdom is here!*** *A favorite reminder which keeps me powerfully focused, alive and brimming with Life is:*

**0 my soul, you have the glory of being the image of God, of being a sigh from His heart so full of life!**

Sister Renée Caron's long and fruitful life drew to a close at St. Joseph Convent on October 6, 2011.

Her Mass of Christian Burial took place on October 10, 2011 at St. Joseph Convent. The Celebrant and Homilist was our Chaplain, Father Normand Richard. Concelebrants were Fathers Ron Labarre, Roland Lajoie, S.M., and Paul Plante.

Sister Sharon Leavitt, S.C.I.M.

First Sunday of Advent November 27, 2011