

Words of Remembrance – Sister Irene Hollis

11th Oct.1924 - 17th June 2011

Today it is my privilege to speak the Words of Remembrance for Sister Irene, The story of each person's life is a sacred story and most of the time we only catch a glimpse of the full meaning and purpose of that life.

I have chosen two quotes from Scripture that will help us in this reflection.

Jesus said *"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*Jn.10

He also said *"You must take up your cross daily and follow me."*

Times of searching and times of suffering were two strong qualities found in Irene's life.

I will give a very short overview of Irene's life and its influence on others. Other details can be found in the Mass booklet.

Irene grew up with her family in the Hastings district. Her Parents, Ethel & George Hollis and her brothers and sisters, Phonse, Des, Len, Mary and Dot have all pre-deceased her and we are very pleased to have Mick, her youngest brother and several nieces and nephews as well as friends from Merriwa, ex-students and some parents present here today. Irene enjoyed life on the farm.

As a three year old she endeavoured to join her brothers as they jumped off a log into Pappinbarra Creek – Phonse came to the rescue and plucked the adventurous Irene from the water.

Irene and Dot were great playmates with only two years the difference in their ages. They walked to the little public school or sometimes hitched a ride on the horse. Irene developed a fine style of handwriting and was often commended for this skill in her own teaching days.

Dot and Irene were prepared for their First Communion by their mother, assisted by Sr. Maria Joseph and companion who would give Catechism lessons to the children after Mass at Beechwood on a Sunday. Irene completed her schooling whilst boarding at the Convent at Port Macquarie - during this time she was also confirmed.

In 1939 Irene's parents and the four youngest members of the family moved to 152 High Street, Wauchope. Irene worked in the office of Mr. Percy Bourne, a timber distributor. Dot told me Irene was a great one for playing tennis and that she loved dancing. During this time her first nephews and nieces were born so Grandma and Irene were kept busy lending a helping hand.

In the fullness of her youth Irene chose to enter the Sisters of St. Joseph at Lochinvar on 1st January, 1944. During Lent that same year Bob Trotter was at home on leave from the army. He did not tell Dot that he was taking instructions for the Catholic Faith from Fr. Bill Peters, the army chaplain. The first time that Irene knew Dot was married was when she received a small piece of wedding cake in her Easter mail.

After two and a half years in the Novitiate Irene was professed on 2nd July, 1946. Her first appointment was to a fifth grade class at Cessnock – one of her pupils was Mark Smith who has been the long term chemist at Merriwa. Her next mission was to Merewether followed by Swansea in 1950. Tom Shannon would transport the Sisters by row boat up Black Ned's Bay to catch a bus for Belmont. Taree was the next challenge for Irene as she took charge of the boarders and prepared for new subjects in the secondary school.

The Staffing of the first secondary school at Aberdeen was very special to Irene. She had many happy memories of the staff and the pupils. Her association with St. Joseph's, Aberdeen has continued over the years. Whilst in care at Sandgate senior students from Aberdeen would visit the Nursing Home as part of their yearly retreat. I will now read a reflection the students sent to Irene after one of their visits -

Thank you Sr. Irene for telling us your stories. We really enjoyed hearing about your time at St .Joseph's Aberdeen - Hearing about how you were one of the Sisters working at the school was very interesting. It made us more aware of the changes that have occurred here. We loved hearing about your childhood and your family. Hearing about your family dairy farm was fascinating, as many of us don't get the chance to experience farm life. You also made us more aware of what it was like to be a nun. Telling us about the rules and the vows you take and the life you lived. In our eyes you were very dedicated to God and you're a lovely person. We will pray for you.

Thank-you. Student Retreat Year 11

In 1978 Irene became the Boarder mistress for the senior students at Lochinvar. This appointment led to a deepening of her understanding of teenagers. She tried to encourage the girls and to listen and support those who were finding life difficult at the time. In 1996 Irene celebrated her Golden Jubilee of religious profession. It was good to celebrate with Irene. There was a great gathering for a Mass of Thanksgiving followed by a luncheon in the old Church hall at Wauchope. Family was important to Irene and she took a great interest in each and every one.

In the noontide of her life Irene experienced much suffering - she accepted her many setbacks with patience. I received a card this week from Sr. Eucharua who lived with Irene at the hostel at Swansea:

Kindly accept my prayers and sincere sympathy at dear Irene's death. May her gentle, noble soul rest in peace. What a valiant, faith-filled, patient sufferer she has been over the years. She is now rejoicing, living in the Divine Presence of our loving God whom she loved and served so well.

I know Irene would want to thank each one who has been part of her life especially all who are here today and also those who could not make her farewell. She would like to thank in particular the Staff at St. Joseph's Home Sandgate and Dr. Adam Frost, the Chaplains. Fr. John and Fr. Peter and the Pastoral Care team under the leadership of Beth Beveridge who is here today.

As I quoted in the beginning happiness and suffering are both part of life - through them we grow and learn the lessons of life - I found this quote that had been copied out by Irene - 'Pain can move us to an openness to the pain in other people's lives - without suffering we cannot reach the depths ourselves – suffering can draw us to transcendence.' Meister Eckhart.

Go in peace Irene - all the love you have shared will live on in our hearts – all shall be well - Go now in peace faithful friend of God.