

Reflection for the feast of Philippine Duchesne
Houston TX November 17, 2000
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- “...unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

This gospel was chosen for Philippine’s feast because so much of her life was about dying to her self and about letting go of places and people she loved in order to bring good news to other people and places she believed in.

- The images we have of Philippine, in word, paintings and statues:
 - Sitting with the map in her lap, as in the painting in the library
 - With a little Indian girl next to her
 - With two children, one a child of Midwestern traders, planters or frontier families and the other an Indian child
 - As a child, sitting in a school much like this one and listening to bishops from the new world talk of the need for missionaries and feeling her heart burn with desire to go “over there”
 - Several powerful images of her at prayer:
 - One, in the mountains of France, in her imagination taking the chalice of Christ’s blood to people all over the world, so eager was she to share what her faith taught her; the other, the image of her all night at prayer in the small Potawatomi village in Kansas ---- so fascinating to the Indians that they dropped pieces of paper or corn on her skirt to test their question: did she really stay there, without moving, all night? Indeed, since nothing had moved by the next morning, she had.
 - In Florissant, Missouri, in the convent which is now a museum you can visit, a small room under the staircase, which was her bedroom, chosen because she wanted the least good room in the house ---- probably also because she spent little time there at night, for while the other nuns slept, she mended the clothes of the children and made clothes for the poor.

So the images we have of her are of the intrepid missionary who brought the Society to this country and worked until her dying day spreading the love of the heart of Christ. Even after she returned from Sugar Creek, when her biographers talk about her feeling like such a failure, she still had 10 years left and the record clearly shows that she didn't take to her bed, but rather spent the ten years translating French books into English, teaching in the parish school, and encouraging other missionaries.

But the real question is: what difference do these images make to us; what difference does it even make to celebrate this Mass in her memory; what does this strong passage about the grain of wheat, unless it fall into the ground and die, remains just a single grain ----- what does this have to do with us, in Houston TX in a school named after her?

I suggest three things for your prayer:

- We are the fruit of her single grain --- we are her harvest, and we are truly given the same call by God, to be missionaries in our day. The question is:

Who are you called to share the good news of God's love and mercy with?

Who are your Potawatomi? What does your heart tell you when you pray with a map on your lap or in your heart?

I don't think it's an accident that we have someone in the Upper School who answered a call this summer; Claire Johnson felt called to share her education with children in Togo; not only did she serve, but she brought home names of children desperate for penpals who could give them a bigger view of the world and help them improve their English; now, today, most of the sophomore class have pen pal communication with these people. Togo is now people, not a dot on the map.

What call do you hear?

- A second point for your prayer: from the foundation in this country, women like you went on to establish Sacred Heart schools in Mexico, South America, New Zealand, and other cities in the U.S. outside of Missouri; today, though education is more

universally available in our country than in 1818, still children live in poverty and without the loving care you and I know. Is it possible that God is asking us to share this education and to establish other places where this education is available to others?

What call do you hear?

- A third point for your prayer: It was Philippine's prayer that often drew people to ask about God's presence. She believed, you might say, in wasting time holding people in her heart before God and in simply sitting before God in silent prayer. Even the little prince taught us that it is the time we waste on our rose that is most important. So don't you think her feast calls us to be more deeply men and women of prayer, people who really do show in our lives and our daily behavior that God is active in our world and still has great dreams for us?

What call do you hear to deepen your life of prayer, so that your heart becomes wide enough to live God's dream for you in your life?

Let us give Philippine for her feast day a commitment to deepen our prayer, to let ourselves be grains willing to die to our self-centeredness and make room for others, and finally, if we're really serious about studying and working in a school bearing her name, let us ask seriously: where shall we go next to bring good news?

Philippine

Reflections on Rose Philippine Duchesne
16, 2001

Houston – November

A Winter Saint. Not only because her feast is celebrated in November, but also she lived the gospel passage used on her feast:

Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies
it remains a single grain;
but if it dies,
it yields a rich harvest.

Her story is one of deferred dreams, of being disillusioned, of suffering setbacks and even defeats.

Duchesne means Heart of Oak

What has she taught me? Two very important lessons that are very connected: **the need to pray always** and **not to lose heart**. Both are very connected for if we are praying people we are dependent on God and never lose heart because we know that God wants only our good. I want to illustrate these two lessons with some famous vignettes about Philippine that I hope will show you this amazing woman's **strong and faithful heart**. *Her Heart of Oak*.

Pray always – the Potomatomini Indians of Kansas called her “The Woman Who Prays Always.”

Story of tiny pieces of paper *on her habit*

One of her greatest legacies to us – prayer.
At the end of her life, wrote Madeleine Sophie: “God has favored me here (at St. Charles) with a room that is next to the chapel. I go from one to the other. My greatest happiness is to pray for the missions, for the Society, for you, my loved and venerated Mother, who hold God’s place in my regard...”

Philippine invites all to be people of prayer, to know our absolute dependence on God and who trust on God.

Second Lesson – not to lose heart.

Struggled to enter religious life.

Waiting 11 years to come to this country.

- (1) Journey on Rebecca was enough to make one lose heart – *story in her words*.
- (2) St. Charles, 1818, cold.
- (3) Move to Florissant.
- (4) At 72 years old went to the Native Americans – couldn't learn the language – *story*.
- (5) Last 10 years of life here, mending children's clothes and nursing children in the infirmary. Gloried in having time to pray.

How to not lose heart?

Lived hope. Believing and trusting in the power of God.

Cultivated hope from the Heart of Jesus in prayer.

Throughout her life, Philippine dreamed dreams and kept reaching to make them a reality. Through hardships and deprivation, she kept her dreams alive in her heart.

Pray to be persons who pray always and persons who have magnanimous hearts because we trust in God, who is with us in every circumstance of our lives.

To never lose heart and to pray always are the lessons that Philippine has taught me.

Father Duffy, a Jesuit priest asked the question:
What have we learned from her?

And his answer was:

The value of steadfast purpose,
the success of failure and the
unimportance of our standards
of success; the power of grace
released by deep, divine desires
and simple duty daily done.

This year, Sister Karam was asked to write a reflection for one of the Society's publications and this is the prayer she wrote:

Philippine Duchesne 1818

May our hearts be
as intrepid as hers in crossing boundaries,
as generous as hers in seeking out the needy,
as faithful as hers in planting seeds whose fruit we will not see.

U.S.

2001

Same mission, same Lord, same faith
New Challenges.

Spend time today, this weekend, reflecting on what Philippine is saying to you.

Jan Dunn rscj

Saint Philippine Duchesne,
guide each of us along the road that leads
to peace and to becoming people of conscience and courage.
Help us to know your courage and perseverance;
Help us to value each other and to appreciate the gifts of others,
even those we may not understand.
Teach us to pray with our lives and not only with our voices,
and give us a share of your pioneer spirit, so that we can be
fearless
in fighting for justice and in serving those in need.
We ask all this with confidence, for we believe you are our special
advocate with
God.
Amen.

Gracious God, you raise up from among your people men and women
known
for their lively faith and spirit of generosity.
We recall with gratitude the memory of Rose Philippine Duchesne:
the Indians called the “woman who prays always;”
children loved for her simplicity and faith,
the larger Sacred Heart community honors her for her courage
and missionary
spirit, her dedication and spirit of sacrifice.
Grant us, as we prepare for her feast, the same spirit and a willingness
to
broaden our hearts, to become missionaries in our attitude and
our prayer,
and count us among those who live your message in our world.
We ask this in confidence through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

PHILIPPINE DUCHESNE'S LEGACY

The church canonized Rose Philippine Duchesne a Saint on July 3, 1989, and she was the Religious of the Sacred Heart who brought the Society of the Sacred Heart to the United States in 1818. Our school here in Houston is named after her: Duchesne, which means "Heart of Oak" or steady heart.

Gavan Duffy, one of her biographers, was to ask the question: "what have we learned from her?" One of his answers was: the power of grace released by deep divine desires and simple duty, daily done.

In that answer, I think, Duffy has named two elements of being Sacred Heart, namely, being a spiritual person and doing one's daily duty, we must be in relationship with God, live out of our faith, work with God, walk with God, have influence with God, and we must do our daily duties with zeal and love.

There are many stories about Philippine, some almost myths, but most of her life was like ours, performing routine daily tasks. One of my favorite stories of Philippine illustrates her performing her daily tasks. Often at night when all the students were in bed, Philippine would collect their stockings and darn them. Because she had not learned much English and therefore could not do much teaching, but being quite a seamstress, she did what she could.

As Sacred Heart educators/parents/alumnae, we too are called to do what we can, to use the gifts we have been given. The lesson here is to rely constantly on God's grace as we educate the children, each and every one, who come to us: to listen to them, to communicate with them, to form relationships with them, to find modern ways to "darn their stockings."

Although Philippine did simple duties day in and day out, she was a risk taker and saw many changes in her lifetime. Being forced from her visitation convent, she entered the Society at age 35. She left France at age 49 to come to the new world, and what a change that was! Living in the little pioneer towns of St. Charles and Florissant in the 1800's hardly reached the civilized level of France in that same age.

She opened schools and sadly closed her beloved Florissant. She finally reached her dream of going to teach the Indians at age 72, only to have to leave a year afterwards. Yes, Philippine saw many changes in her life.

Let us pray to emulate Philippine's devotion to daily duty and openness to change.

May our hearts be as intrepid as hers in crossing boundaries,
As generous as hers in carrying out our daily tasks,
As faithful as hers in planting seeds whose fruit we will not see.

Jan Dunn rscj

Quotes from Philippine

Recall

I have not the slightest doubt that Divine Providence, which has guided us to this country through so many dangers and difficulties will complete the work by hidden means, which seem to disguise God's way of helping, but which only make them seem more wonderful to those who follow Him along the paths of His love.

Philippine to her cousin Josephine Perier, Florissant, 1820

How much there is pent up in my soul! The closer I come to it, the more clearly I realize how difficult our work is going to be and how meager are our means for getting started. But God is in it, His will manifest...and I feel my heart expand with hope.

Philippine to Louis Barat, 1818

We may not understand His will for us in time, but in eternity the veil will be drawn and we shall see that He acted only for our happiness.

Philippine to her cousin Josephine Perier, Florissant, 1826

I can assure you that there is great happiness in the midst of all this, and the bond of love is so strong among the five of us who were the first to cross the ocean that never have we cast the least glance of regret on what we left behind. Instead, we have always said, yes, always: "I have carried the Cross and I will go on carrying it." But really it is Our Lord who carries it, for He knows how to make the soul content with little or no consolation and always to find strength in the words: "Thy will be done."

Philippine to the Religious of the Sacred Heart in Paris,
Florissant, 1829

This season of the year [January] always renews in my heart all its deepest and most grateful sentiments towards you and towards God, recalling that famous retreat (1805) during which you admitted me into the dear Society. Deeply attached to Sainte Marie d'en Haut as I was then, I never dreamed that I would one day find myself so far away from you. God, who willed that I should be here, gave me the grace to break the bonds I loved so dearly, and I have reason to marvel at the power of His grace, which makes me so happy and

contented in the separation from all I loved most and without the least success that might make me forget my sacrifices.

Philippine to Madeleine Sophie, Florissant, 1823

When I look into my own soul, I cannot find there any reason for expecting you to remember me. I know full well that I deserve to be forgotten. But when I think about the charity that is the bond of union in our holy Society, I am not surprised at your thoughtfulness, and I beg you to add this kindness: pardon for all my past faults and prayers that I may avoid them in future. Ordinarily God gives one outstanding grace to a soul, and this becomes the source of many others. In my case that signal grace was my return to Sainte Marie after the Revolution and my membership in the blessed Society of the Sacred Heart. And now in His goodness God is opening to me a new career that calls forth all my gratitude and overwhelms me with confusion when I think of it.

Philippine to the Religious of the Sacred Heart at Sainte Marie, 1818

Philippine Duchesne Not-so-trivial Pursuit

1. Dates of birth and death
2. Where was she born?
3. In what state did she minister to the Potowatomi?
4. What RSCJ visited her two days before she died?
5. Where is she buried?
6. To what saint was Philippine especially devoted (hint: brothers)?
7. How much did Philippine's coffin cost?
8. How long did Philippine stay with the Indians?
9. What order did she first join?
10. How many children did the Duchesne family have?
11. What was the name of the boat which carried Philippine to America?
12. How many Network schools are named directly for Philippine?
13. What religious order did Philippine stay with when she arrived in this country? (hint: MG)
14. How many RSCJs accompanied Philippine on the journey to America?
15. In what state did Philippine open the first free school west of the Mississippi?
16. What name did the Indians give Philippine? (English version accepted but an extra point for the Indian version)

17. How old was Philippine when she came to this country?
18. Which Pope beatified Philippine?
19. In what year was Philippine canonized?
20. What was the name of the boarding school which Philippine attended as a child?