

**March 1**  
**Sister Grace Maher**  
**(b. Marie Maher)**  
**(1896-1959)**

In looking for a phrase to epitomize the life of Sister Grace Maher it can be said that Sister was a true and loyal community woman. What are the interests or loves of this type of Immaculate Heart Sister? They can be adequately expressed in a triptych. The center panel holds Christ, the Head of the mystical body; the panel on the right contains the members of this mystical body and set in the left panel is the work of this body.

Christ was really first in Sister Grace's life. "She knew the answer to the most penetrating and soul-piercing question that can be directed to us, - 'Who are You?' She knew she could not begin to tell anyone anything vital about herself without mentioning God, His Christ and Christ's Mother; her roots were in eternity; her substance was from the creating Hand of Divinity; her dignity, destiny and all real living lay in her corporation in Him to Whom Mary gave birth. For thanks to Him she could look straight in the eyes of God, the omnipotent and say, 'Abba Father.' She was a child of God working out her destiny. That destiny was nothing else than a divine vocation to be to her fellow religious, pupils and loved ones what Mary's first-born Son was to His; a manifestation of God. She lived to praise His glory, to be a revelation of His paternity to her fellow man."

To us her community friends she was this inspiration in many ways - just to mention a few. Sister was an assiduous pray-er; no matter where she was - in the convent, at a meeting or convention nothing could interfere with her prayers. All proceedings must stop until her duties to God were accomplished, and many a time we climbed into the pew beside her and did likewise.

In talking with a Sister, who was one of Sister's postulants, about Sister's spirit of prayer she said she felt it was the impetus to many vocations fostered during Sister Grace's long mission at Redford. Her many talks with the girls always ended with a smiling conclusion, "We'll pray on it." At another time during a talk this Sister told sister Grace that she feared entering the convent because of the loneliness it might entail. Sister Grace admitted that sometimes there was a struggle but ..... "Just keep close to your prayers. Prayer will be the sunshine of your life. Nothing can harm you when you are faithful to your prayers."

The year Sister Grace went to St, Mary of Redford her mother died. The pupils were very much impressed by the way she spoke of it. "Now", she said, "is the time when you really appreciate being a member of a religious community. My Mother is gone but I am not alone in any degree. I have God and my sisters in religion." This statement led to much discussion which brought about some very serious thinking.

A strong obedience and faith were also part of her make-up. Sister Grace was very human, and many times mildly rebelled against certain marching orders but as soon as she became cognizant of the manifestation of God-given authority her complete attitude changed. We never heard another complaint and we always knew a greater virility and vigor would prove her

acceptance of God's will on this point.

Sister's love of Christ's Mother was that of a sincere and devoted child. To all appearances she said her complete rosary daily and many of us can still vividly picture her kneeling in the chapel with her novena rosary book open and reverently fingering her beads. Her last professional bow was made to our Lady in her production of a Lourdes pageant. To honor the centennial of the Blessed Virgin's apparition at Lourdes, Sister Grace put on a very beautiful demonstration at Immaculata. Whether or not Sister had any intimation of her physical condition we do not know but every bit of talent, ingenuity and love went into this production. What a glorious way to close one's career!

As we look for a moment at the right panel of the triptych - the members of the mystical body - we marvel at her great love for people. Her influence on the pupils with whom she came in contact down through the years never seemed to wane. No matter how many years separated their period of contact there was always that personal warmth and friendliness that made a former pupil feel that he or she was the only one on earth that counted.

When we view in retrospect the many mission assignments of Sister Grace, we find that in each place she tarried there are many to whom her name has been an inspiration. St. Mary Academy, Monroe; Hall of the Divine Child; St. Stephen, Port Huron; St. Joseph, Erie; St. Matthew, Flint; St. Mary, Mt Clemens; St. Thomas, Ann Arbor; St. Mary, Redford; Holy Redeemer, Detroit; Immaculata High School, Detroit; all claim their share of years as she journeyed through life. At these schools she influenced her pupils not only in the development of their musical abilities but also instilled in many hearts the desire for a religious vocation.

The same loving community spirit holds for her sister companions on mission. During her last illness she was asked if she missed the Immaculata girls and her work. She replied, "Isn't it strange I haven't once thought regretfully about my work but oh! how I miss the sisters. I follow them in my thoughts from early morning until the last signal and imagine myself with them."

Sister had many friends among the religious orders and lay men engaged in the music profession, because of her activity in the National Catholic Music Association. They had great confidence in her ability as an organizer and all breathed sighs of relief when they knew Sister Grace was at the helm. She held offices in both the State and National Music Organizations for several years and engineered many successful meetings and conventions.

Lastly let's gaze at the left panel - her work in the mystical body. After Sister Grace finished at St. Leo High School, she went to St. Mary Academy, Monroe, to graduate in music -- as the terminology of the day expressed it. Her dramatic soprano voice became synonymous with the name Sister Grace Maher. With her voice and disposition a career in the world could easily have been attained but God had priorities and Sister entered the novitiate. Never have we had a more generous worker. Unbounded energy marked every enterprise she tackled. The work of the moment became the only thing in the world with the result that sometimes the impression of vanity in her work was given. This was far from the truth for Sister was very humble in acknowledging the superiority and perfection of another's accomplishments and the first to extend sincere congratulations.

One can readily picture Sister Grace as a sturdy pioneer - and in truth she was. She was one of the first to blaze the trail in the readoption of Gregorian Chant. When the Archdiocese of Detroit began its serious application of the Motu Proprio of St. Pius X, Sister was stationed at St. Thomas, Ann Arbor. Father Carey, the pastor, offered to send her and a sister companion to Pius X Gregorian Institute at Manhattanville, New York. This liturgical school of music was conducted by Mother Steven, a religious of the Sacred Heart, and a staff of lay men and women. The enthusiasm for the chant was evidenced in the work done on the missions and at Monroe as a result of this trip.

Nothing daunted Sister Grace -- numbers, places, new adventures. During Sister's time at St. Mary of Redford high School mixed chorus came into its own and was accepted as part of the school curriculum. Again, she was in the vanguard and developed many large, efficient groups that took part in state and national contests and festivals. Sister's success encouraged other schools to do likewise and in a very short time our high schools enjoyed great choral prestige.

Sister always gave full-hearted cooperation to every community project, and with what genuine interest she watched the erection of the new St. Mary auditorium which was being built the summer she died. All the details of the planning were a thrill to her. That same summer Sister was in charge of the community summer orchestra. It numbered fifty pieces and at the annual jubilee celebration made a very splendid showing. Reverend Mother Anna Marie was pleased and suggested that the group be kept together, and an attempt made to have rehearsals during the year to prepare for the grand opening of the auditorium the next summer. Acting on Mother's suggestion, Sister spent many, many hours looking over music and mapping out a program. At the end of the summer each member of the orchestra received a portfolio of music, all annotated, to carry back to her respective mission. But God decreed otherwise and before a rehearsal was called Sister Grace had been stricken with her fatal illness.

When a friend of Sister Grace's had very serious doubts concerning her decision to take final vows, Sister said to her, "Where do you want to die, - here, or in the world? Remember, that is why we are here - to prepare to die."

And that was the way Sister lived - preparing to die. When at the peak of her ambitions God asked her to put them all aside and make her final plans for the rising of the curtain of eternity she willingly acquiesced and went at the preparation in the same whole-hearted way she did everything.

She loved life - her community, her loved ones, her work, her friends - gladly would she have accepted a cure, but never once did she express any desire but that of God's Will. The whole-souled acceptance of death when life still held so much was almost a miraculous grace.

Each thing that was important to Sister was taken care of in a calm and heavenly way. Sister's last talk with her brother Steve whom she loved so dearly - her gratitude to him for his kindness will be engraved on his heart until they are reunited. As she met each one of her close friends, she had something personal to say, but to all she kept repeating, "Nothing else matters. Don't let them tell you it's hard to die. I promise to remember you all in Heaven."

One of the grandest things that can be said of a companion is that we are better for having lived with them and many of Sister Grace's associates can truthfully say that they know Christ more intimately for having walked a while with Sister along the road to the eternal rendezvous.

And so, we close asking Mother Mary to take care of Sister Grace and all our former companions who are now in heaven.

"Remember Mary you can't say you can't; for you are His Mother  
And you won't say you won't; for you are our Mother  
So, you will, won't you?"

Sister Marie Clotilde Schrage