



## Sister Gertrude McManus CJ 1929-2017

by Sister Ann Stafford CJ

The following is an adaptation of something written by Robert Louis Stevenson.

‘A person is a success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent people and the love of children; who has filled her niche and accomplished her task; who has left the world better than she found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem or a rescued soul; who has never lacked appreciation of earth’s beauty or failed to express it, who has always looked for the best in others and gave the best she had. Whose life was an inspiration, whose memory is a benediction.’

This could have been written for Sr Gertrude as it is a perfect description of the life she led. The only omission, and it is what really guided her life, was the deep love and relationship she had with her Loving God. Her life was a constant prayer.

Christened Julia McManus but always known by the family as Sheila she was born on the 15 April 1929 into a very loving Dublin family. She was the eighth child – two brothers and five sisters preceded her and two sisters followed. Very sadly her mother died giving birth to Dolly, the tenth child. Her marvellous father, with the help of his eldest daughters, Gertie and Etty nurtured the grieving family. There was always laughter and joy in the McManus household.

They would gather round their father in the evening where stories were told and music was played. One evening, aged about seven, Sheila disappeared and returned with a cup of water. She announced 'Daddy I am going to Baptise you' as she tilted the cup. There was silence and consternation from the rest of the family but her father smiled acknowledging his little evangelising daughter. The tension was broken and all enjoyed the incident. So from an early age Sheila was very aware of the importance of her Catholic Faith. Later Sheila wrote 'We had a wonderful father. I can never find adequate words to describe him!'

On leaving school, she worked in a florist shop which she loved. She often told the story of a shy young man who came in to buy flowers for his girlfriend as he was about to propose.

Her sister Kitty joined the Community at Ascot after the war, leaving her sister Sheila to enjoy her life in Dublin. Four years later Sheila joined her. To begin with this had been a struggle for Sheila as she wrestled with God's invitation to become a religious sister. Once she accepted, Sheila gave herself totally to her Loving God with great cheerfulness and joy. She enjoyed the companionship of other younger religious sisters. Sr Gertrude, her religious name, had a great capacity for friendship. She prayed and worked hard as she faithfully took on the duties which were assigned to her in the kitchen at Ascot, in charge of the dining room at Cambridge and Shaftesbury. Working in the students' dining room she made great friends with the pupils. I quote from a letter received by Gertie in August this year:-

'For many years, since childhood – you have been a constant, cheerful, loving friend. All those years since school days not seeing you but it did not matter, your cards and letters which give me so much love and comfort and to my dear Peter and our girls you are 'Our Nun' who prays for us and sends us loving messages full of interest in everything. You are so blessed and dear, all my life I will remember and, thinking of you, I hope will make me a better person, your kindness and joy in life and seeing the good and cheerfulness.'

This could have been written by any number of our children – as we called them – here her capacity for friendship is beautifully described.

Having left St Mary's Shaftesbury in 1985, Sr Gertrude had a year's sabbatical. Her horizons were widened and she was able to be involved in pastoral work in Kentish Town which she hugely enjoyed, visiting the sick and taking them Holy Communion. Then in 1995 she joined her sister Kitty to take up residence in 16 Cambridge Road, Bishop John Crowley's residence as Bishop of Middlesbrough. Here are Gertie's own words about that time:- 'We lived a family life together with Bishop John who had at that time many responsibilities. We enjoyed many trips together into the Yorkshire countryside and elsewhere. On Bishop John's retirement we returned to our province.' Gertie was in Middlesbrough for twelve very happy years.

Gertie then had a short time in London followed by Cambridge doing pastoral work until she was diagnosed with her illness. She joined the St Joseph's Community in November 2016

where she received loving nursing care until her death. Her great joy was to be with her sister Kitty in Community once again.

We will always be grateful to Gertie for showing us how to live and die well.

Dearest loving Gertie – thank you – there is no doubt you are continuing to love and pray for us as you enjoy the great reward prepared for you since the foundation of the world.